

# Edible Flowers

04.24.2017

**Q:** Can you recommend some plants that I can easily grow for their edible flowers?

**A:** Edible flowers can be fun and easy to grow and they are often very ornamental so they can serve double duty. You can use them in the landscape or as cut flower to decorate the table as well as adding them to your plate. Using flowers for culinary purposes was very popular during the Victorian era. Cookbooks from that time contain recipes for salads and soups flavored by many different flowers. Today, serving edible flowers is a popular way to impress your friends and family. For food safety purposes do make sure you know where the flowers have come from. Avoid commercially-grown flowers. These flowers may have been sprayed with pesticides that are carcinogenic.

Here are some easy to grow flowers that are widely recognized as safe to ingest:

**Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*):** use Nasturtiums in salads, sandwiches, omelets and soups. Their brilliant bright-colored blossoms are edible and have a peppery taste similar to watercress. They thrive in full to slightly filtered sun, and grow easily from seed. They may suffer in the heat of summer so are best grown in the spring or fall before or after danger of hard frost.

**Borage (*Borago officinalis*):** the delicate, star-shaped flowers are a clear blue and have a cucumber taste. Borage blossoms can be used to garnish lemonade, sorbet or a gin and tonic and are easily frozen in an ice tray. Borage will self-sow for years. These plants do best in full sun.

**Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*):** Calendula's yellow or orange flowers look lovely tossed onto the top of a salad or decorating a cake. Dried petals can be

stirred into soups, pasta, and rice dishes as a home grown substitute for saffron. Calendulas should be planted in fall or early spring and do best in full sun and are easy to grow from seed.

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*): this fragrant small shrub has flower that brings are used to make wands and sachets. The purple flowers can be used to flavor jams and jellies, stews, or vinegar or used in a tea to calm the nerves. Easy to grow in a dry, well drained, sunny location.

Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*): easy to grow, low maintenance, and drought-tolerant once established. This perennial sparkles in the summer with shaggy heads of tight tubular scarlet, pink or purple blossoms. The flowers can be scattered on salads, used as a garnish, or steeped to make Bee Balm teas. Bee Balm flowers have a citrusy flavor.

Johnny-jump-up (*Viola tricolor*): this flower blooms profusely in the fall and spring with little care in sun or shade and self-sows. It has small yellow, white and purple flowers (thus the name tricolor). Flower shave a slight wintergreen flavor. They make a pretty decoration for salads and desserts or in a punchbowl. A prized edible that can also be candied or frozen in ice cubes.

The best time to harvest flowers is in the morning if possible. Wash them quickly in cool water, shake them out, and dry them on a paper towel. If you won't be eating them right away, store them between damp layers of paper towels in the refrigerator. Flowers are very fragile, and best added to the plate at the very last minute so that they don't wilt. Fresh flowers can lend color and a festive atmosphere to food, but not just any flowers will do. They won't get by on their looks if they have a bitter taste, and you certainly wouldn't want to garnish your

meal with anything toxic. Finally, be sure to explain to children that not all flowers can be eaten, just the special ones, such as those mentioned above.