

How can I integrate edible flowers into my garden?
Ellen, Paso Robles

By Jutta Thoerner Master Gardener

The easiest way to enjoy edible flowers is to inventory the existing plants in your landscape. Here are examples of plants, whose flowers can be consumed, that you might have around your home: day-lilies, tuberous begonias, bee balm, calendula, marigold, chrysanthemums, English daisy, honeysuckle, lilacs, nasturtiums, pinks, safflower, scented geraniums, violas, pansies, and violets. If you grow herbs, all their flowers can be eaten, including lavender, borage, and sages. In your vegetable patch or orchard, you might find any of these flowers: apple blossoms, arugula, broccoli, chives, society garlic, citrus blooms, pineapple guava, radishes, strawberries, and squash blossoms. So the next time your radishes flower or your broccoli bolts, snip their blooms and use in salads or stir fries.

All roses are edible and their pedals have been used for centuries in infusions or oils. It is important to remember that not all flowers can be consumed, a lesson that children need to learn early on to prevent accidents with poisonous plants. If you can't identify a plant, contact the helpline in any of the MG offices or bring it to a trusted nursery. Be mindful not to consume any plants that have been sprayed with fertilizers or pesticides, including insecticides and herbicides. If you visit a friend's garden, inquire about their practices first before reaching for a flower.

Many of the plants mentioned will fit into the existing landscape with ease. They can be started from seed, planted as a bulb or you can buy transplants for a quick start. Annuals are fast growing and many like calendulas, violets and nasturtiums have few pest problems and require no extra fertilizer. Perennials need space to grow and, once established, are content with water, weeding and dead-heading flowers. As with all plants, knowledge of your soil, weather, water needs and a keen eye for pests, disease, nutrient problems is helpful to best enjoy your edible flowers.