

EDIBLE FLOWERS

By Master Gardeners Ellie Samuel and Ellen Scarr

It's finally spring and time to plan your spring/summer garden! Why not add some edible flowers this year? Many Sonoma County gardeners enjoy planting edible flowers, not only because they are a tasty addition to a variety of dishes, but also for their valuable contribution to the health of the garden. Edible flowers attract beneficial insects to pollinate the garden and provide an ecological balance against harmful pests. They are also colorful, fragrant, and beautiful to look at!



Annual edible flowers grow quickly and can be started from seed or transplants; most will prefer a sunny location. They can be planted in a large floral grouping or interplanted with vegetables and herbs, helping to shade out weeds and preserve moisture. Common edible flowers include carnations, violas, lilacs, roses, lavender, marigolds and nasturtiums. Herbs such as rosemary,

basil, thyme and sage can also be allowed to flower.

It is important to be familiar with the flower and certain that it is safe to eat, as not all flowers are edible. You will also want to avoid flowers that have been sprayed with pesticides; it is safest to grow your own flowers organically. Harvest your edible flowers in the morning when they are freshest. Since they do not keep particularly well, it is best to use them the day they are picked. Once harvested, rinse them with cool water and dry gently. They can be placed in a jar of water for a short time until you are ready to use them. Some sturdier blooms can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours before use.

Most gardeners grow edible flowers for their petals, which add both taste and color. Violas, which include pansies and



Johnny Jump-Ups, are mild with a sweet scent, and enhance both savory and sweet dishes. Viola flowers are a beautiful garnish to desserts when candied using egg whites and superfine sugar. Marigolds add bright color as well as a spicy, saffron-like taste to soups and compound butters. Carnations add a nutmeg-like scent to desserts. Nasturtiums, with their bright yellow, orange and red blossoms, are easy to grow and add a spicy bite to salads and vinaigrettes; the peppery leaves are also edible and can be used like lettuce. And herb flowers can be added to vinegar to enhance a salad.



No article on edible flowers would be complete without mentioning the beautiful squash blossom. These large yellow blooms, found on both summer and winter squash plants, are delicious stuffed with cheese and baked, or battered and fried. The flowers can also be used as filling for quesadillas or a topping for pizzas. The petals can be cut into chiffonade to garnish a salad or soup.

Just be careful when harvesting....bees love to hide inside the flowers!

Adding edible flowers to your garden not only diversifies and benefits your garden, but can also provide you with a variety of flavorful additions to your favorite culinary dishes. Why not try some in your garden this year? Once you do, you may never be without them again!