

Edible Flowers

Fact Sheet No. 7.237

Gardening Series | Flowers

by S.E. Newman and A. Stoven O'Conner*

Edible flowers have been used in the culinary arts for flavor and garnish for hundreds of years. Early reports indicate that the Romans used flowers in cooking, as did the Chinese, Middle Eastern and Indian cultures. During Queen Victoria's reign, edible flowers were popular and they are again popular in North America and Europe.

Many flowers are edible and the flowers of most culinary herbs are safe. However, proper identification is essential because some flowers are poisonous and should not be eaten. (See Table 1.)

Pick flowers early in the day. Use them at their peak for the best flavor. Avoid unopened blossoms (except daylilies) and wilted or faded flowers. They may have a bitter or unappealing flavor. Do not use flowers that have been sprayed with pesticides, which often occur along roadsides, or collect flowers from plants that have been fertilized with untreated manure. Generally avoid purchasing flowers from florists, Garden centers or nurseries. These flowers are not grown for consumption. Table 2 lists many plants that can be added to food for flavor, aroma, color or garnish.

Fresh flowers also can be preserved for later use. Choose flowers with larger petals, such as pansies, and paint the petals with an egg-white wash. Use a soft brush and dehydrated egg whites to avoid food borne illness. These flowers are edible if the dehydrated egg powder has been pasteurized. After painting, dust the petal with super-fine granulated sugar and dry it. Store preserved flowers in an airtight container in a cool, dark place. Avoid dark-colored petals; they turn even darker with this treatment.

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Using Edible Flowers

To avoid stomach upset or to determine if there is an allergic reaction, try a small quantity of the new flowers yourself. Edible petals or entire flowers can be eaten. However, remove stems, anthers and pistils because they may be bitter (Figure 1). Use flowers that are free of insects and diseases.

Many edible flowers are high in vitamin C and/or vitamin A, along with other essential nutrients. Use them as garnishes and in salads. Recipes for flowers may be found in the following areas: baking, sauces, jelly, syrup, vinegars, honey, oil, tea, flower-scented sugars, candied flowers, wine and flavored liquors. Flavored vinegars and oils prepared at home have a limited shelf-life and should be stored in the refrigerator (Kendall and Rausch, 2006). Pick the flowers, gently with running water, rinse and place between damp paper towels. Refrigerate until ready to use. Some varieties may last longer if not washed until they are ready to use. Some flowers may be dried and used as dried herbs.

References

- Kendall, P. and J. Rausch. 2006. CSU Extension Fact Sheet 9.340, *Flavored Vinegars and Oils*. Available at: www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/foodnut/09340.html.
- Knight A.P. *A Guide to Poisonous House and Garden Plants*. Teton New Media. 2006.
- Lampe, Kenneth F. *AMA Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants*, 1985. American Medical Association.

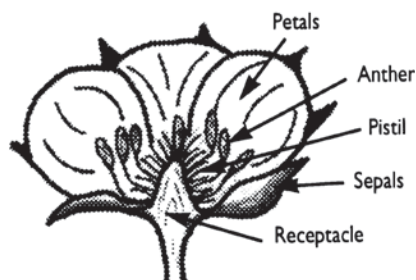
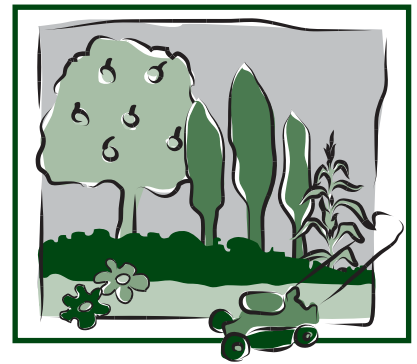


Figure 1: Flower parts.



Quick Facts

- Proper identification of edible flowers is important.
- Use flowers that are grown without pesticides.
- For best flavor, use flowers at their peak.
- Introduce new flowers into the diet slowly to be able to pinpoint allergic reactions.
- Edible flowers also may be preserved in oils or vinegars.

Table 1: Some common house and garden plants with toxic plant parts or toxic flowers (not a complete list, if in doubt, consult a poisonous plant reference).

Scientific name	Common names	Scientific name	Common names
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow, milfoil	<i>Lantana camara</i>	Lantana, red sage, shrub verbena
<i>Anconitum</i> spp.	Monkshood	<i>Lathyrus</i> spp.	Sweet pea (seeds)
<i>Clematis</i> spp.	Clematis, virgin's bower	<i>Lobelia</i> spp.	Cardinal flower
<i>Colchicum</i> spp.	Crocus	<i>Narcissus</i> spp.	Daffodil, jonquil
<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	Lily of the Valley	<i>Nerium oleander</i>	Oleander
<i>Daphne mezereum</i>	Daphne	<i>Nicotiana</i> spp.	Flowering tobacco
<i>Datura</i> spp.	Jimson weed	<i>Papaver somniferum</i>	Opium poppy, common poppy
<i>Delphinium</i> spp.	Larkspur	<i>Phoradendron</i> spp.	Mistletoe
<i>Dicentra Formosa</i>	Bleeding heart	<i>Physalis</i> spp.	Chinese or Japanese lantern
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Foxglove, digitalis	<i>Rhododendron</i> spp.	Azaleas, rhododendrons, rose bay
<i>Euphorbia</i> spp. ¹	Euphorbia	<i>Ricinus communis</i>	Castor bean, African coffee tree
<i>Hippeastum</i> spp.	Amaryllis	<i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i>	Calla lily
<i>Hyacinthus</i> spp.	Hyacinth	<i>Zigadenus</i> sup.	Death camas, alkaligrass, wild onion
<i>Jasminum</i> spp.	Jasmine		

¹*Poinsettias* are not considered poisonous, but they are not edible. If eaten, all plant parts may cause varying degrees of mouth irritation, and vomiting, but not death. The cultivated rubber tree *Hevea brasiliensis*, *Manioc* or cassava (*Manihot*), and Castor bean (*Ricinus*) are close relatives, which are poisonous. With its close genetic ties to the rubber tree, which is where natural latex is derived, those who are sensitive may also be sensitive to the latex from *poinsettias*.

Table 2: Recommended plants with edible flowers.

Plant name	Type ¹	Flower color	Bloom	Taste	Fragrance	Comments and hints
<i>Abelmoschus esculentus</i> Okra, gumbo, gombo	A	Yellow, red	Mid-July to August	Mild, sweet and slightly mucilaginous	–	Full sun, hot weather; prefers clay to clay loam.
<i>Agastache foeniculum</i> Anise hyssop	P	Lavender	July to frost	Strong anise, sweet, licorice	–	May die back to the ground; readily resows; full sun to light shade; well-drained soil.
<i>Alcea rosea</i> Hollyhock	P	Various	July to frost	Little, slightly bitter	–	Best as a garnish or container for dip. Full sun to light shade.
<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i> Chive	P	Lavender, red to purple	May to June	Onion, strong	Onion	Separate florets to serve. Forms clumps; part shade to full sun; indoors.
<i>Allium tuberosum</i> Garlic chive	P	White	August to frost	Onion, strong	Onion	Separate florets to serve. Partial shade to full sun; also indoors.
<i>Anethum graveolens</i> Dill	A	Yellow	June to frost	Stronger than leaves	Dill	Resows readily, tolerates poor soil but prefers well-drained soil; full sun.
<i>Anthemis nobilis</i> English chamomile	P	White petals; yellow center	Late June to frost	Sweet apple flavor	–	Ragweed sufferers may be allergic to chamomile; drink no more than one cup of tea per day. Prefers moist, well-drained soil; full sun to part shade.
<i>Anthriscus cerefolium</i> Chervil	A	White	May to June	Parsley-like, hint of citrus, tarragon	–	Start in cold frame.
<i>Begonia x tuberhybrida</i> Tuberous begonia	TP	White, pink, yellow, red, orange and combinations	July to August	Citrus	–	Grow indoors or out; dig tubers each fall, just after frost and store; prefers
<i>Bellis perennis</i> English daisy	P	White to purple petals	April to September	Mild to bitter	–	Use as garnish or in salads. Thrives in cold weather; prefers full sun, moist soil.
<i>Borago officinalis</i> Borage	A	Blue, purple to lavender	June to July	Cucumber	–	Use as garnish; may be candied. Full sun; light, poor, dry soil. Attracts bees.
<i>Brassica</i> spp. Broccoli, cauliflower	B (grown as A)	Buds: blue-green; yellow flower, white buds in cauliflower	June to August	Broccoli	–	Vegetable. Prefers full sun; rich, well-drained soil. Sow indoors six weeks prior to transplant.
<i>Brassica</i> spp. Mustard	A	Yellow	April to May	Mustard, hot	–	Salad garnish. Watch for allergies.

(Continued)

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Plant name	Type ¹	Flower color	Bloom	Taste	Fragrance	Comments and hints
<i>Calendula officinalis</i> Calendula, pot marigold	A	Yellow, gold/orange	June to August	Tangy and peppery	–	Ornamental. Dries well. Prefers cool weather; rich loam; direct sow.
<i>Calendula officinalis</i> Calendula, pot marigold	A	Yellow, gold/orange	June to August	Tangy and peppery	–	Ornamental. Dries well. Prefers cool weather; rich loam; direct sow.
<i>Carthamus tinctorius</i> Safflower, American safflower, saffron	A	Yellow to deep red	August	Bitter flavor	–	May impart yellow color to cooked foods. Full sun; light, dry, well-drained soil; start indoors and transplant.
<i>Centaurea cyanus</i>	A	White, pink, blue	May to frost	Mild	–	Annual; petals are edible; the calyx is bitter
<i>Cercis canadensis</i> Redbud	P	Pink	April	Beanlike to tart apple	–	Native tree to U.S. ; may be marginal in Colorado. Full sun to part shade; sandy loam; difficult to transplant.
<i>Chrysanthemum coronarium</i> Garden chrysanthemum, shungiku	P	Yellow to white	August to October	Mild	–	Ornamental. Full sun; rich, moist, well-drained soil.
<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i> Oxeye daisy	P	White/yellow center	April to August	Mild	–	Use as garnish or in salad. Full sun; rich, moist, well-drained soil, invasive.
<i>Cichorium intybus</i> Chicory	P	Blue to lavender	July to frost	Pleasant, mild-bitter similar to endive	–	Considered a weed. Grows in most soils; sun to shade; invasive.
<i>Citrus limon</i> Lemon	P	White	Varies with variety	Citrus, slightly bitter	Sweet	Subtropical tree but may be grown indoors.
<i>Citrus sinensis</i> Orange	P	White	Varies	Citrus, sweet/strong	Perfume, sweet	Subtropical tree but may be grown indoors.
<i>Coriandrum sativum</i> Coriander	A	White	June to frost	Like leaf but milder	Fragrant	Herb. Sow continuously for several harvests; sun; rich, well-drained soil.
<i>Cucurbita</i> spp. Squash or pumpkin	A	Orange, yellow	July to August	Mild, raw squash	Slightly floral	Vegetable. Enrich soil with compost; prefers full sun.
<i>Cynara scolymus</i> Artichoke	A	Immature head: green	Fall	Artichoke	–	Prefers rich soil, abundant moisture; propagate from division for annual harvest.
<i>Dendranthema x grandiflorum</i> Chrysanthemum	P	Red, yellow, pink, orange, purple, white	August to October	Varieties differ, strong to bitter	Pungent	Ornamental. Full sun; rich, moist, well-drained soil.
<i>Dianthus</i> spp. Dianthus or pinks	P	Pink, white and red	June to August	Spicy, cloves	Some varieties are spicier	Ornamental. Tolerates wide range of soils; full sun.
<i>Eruca vesicaria</i> Rocket, arugula	A	White	May to frost	Nutty, smoky, less piquant than leaves	–	Salad green. Sow continuously for harvest; full sun to light shade; well-drained soil.
<i>Feijoa sellowiana</i> Pineapple guava	P	White to deep pink	Grow indoors	Floral flavor; papaya or exotic melon	–	Grow indoors in a greenhouse. Rich, well-drained soil; full sun-light shade.
<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> Fennel	P	Pale yellow	July to August	Licorice, milder than leaves, sweet	–	Tolerates wide range of soils; part shade to full sun.
<i>Galium odoratum</i> Sweet woodruff	P	White	May	Sweet, grassy, vanilla	Vanilla	Herb or ground cover. May be invasive; prefers shade. Can have a blood thinning effect if eaten in large quantities. It is considered liver toxic. Best as a garnish or container for dips or spreads.
<i>Gladiolus</i> spp. Gladiolus	TP	Various except true blue	6-8 weeks after planting	Mediocre	–	Best as a garnish or container for dips or spreads.
<i>Hemerocallis fulva</i> Daylily	P	Tawny orange	June to July	Cooked, combination of asparagus/zucchini	–	All parts are edible. Full to part shade; easy to grow. May Lilies contain alkaloids and are NOT edible. Day Lilies may act as a diuretic or laxative; eat in moderation.
<i>Hibiscus rosa-sinensis</i> Hibiscus, China rose, Rose-of-China	P	Orange, red or purplish red	Late summer	Citrus/cranberry flavor	–	Subtropical tree but may be grown indoors. Used in many tea flavorings.

(Continued)

Table 2: Recommended plants with edible flowers.

Plant name	Type ¹	Flower color	Bloom	Taste	Fragrance	Comments and hints
<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i> Rose-of-Sharon	P	Red, white, purple, violet	July to August	Mild, nutty	–	Shrub. Prefers well-drained soil; full sun to part shade; deadhead to keep blooming.
<i>Hyssopus officinalis</i> Hyssop	P	Blue, pink, white	July to October	Bitter; similar to tonic	–	Used to flavor chartreuse, a liqueur; strong flavor. Prefers part shade and well-drained soil.
<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i> Lavender	P	Lavender, purple pink, white	June to ear- ly August	Highly perfumed	Floral	Taste may be very strong depending on the plant.
<i>Levisticum officinale</i> Lovage	B	Yellow, white	August	Mild celery	–	Herb.
<i>Malus</i> spp. Apple or crabapple	P	White to pink	May	Slightly floral to sour	Sweet floral	Petals may be candied. Seeds are poisonous. Specimen tree, prefers full sun, fertile soil.
<i>Melissa officinalis</i> Lemon balm	P	Creamy white	July to August	Lemony, sweet	Lemon	Herb. May be invasive.
<i>Mentha</i> spp. Mint	P	Lavender, pink to white	July to Sep- tember	Minty; milder than leaves	Fresh, minty	Herb. May be invasive; tolerates a wide range of soils; prefers part shade.
<i>Monarda didyma</i> Bergamot, bee balm, Oswego tea	P	Red, pink, white, laven- der	July to August	Tea-like, more aro- matic than leaves	Sweet, perfumed	Attracts hummingbirds and butterflies; part shade to full sun; prefers moist, rich soil. Powdery mildew when grown in part shade.
<i>Muscari atlanticum</i> , <i>M. botryoides</i> , Grape hyacinth	P	Pink, blue	April to May	Grapey, slightly sour with bitter aftertaste	Grapey	Bulb.
<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> Basil	A	White to pale pink	July to frost	Milder than leaves, spicy	–	Sow continuously for several harvests; well-drained rich soil; full sun.
<i>Origanum majorana</i> Marjoram	TP	Pale pink	June to August	Spicy, sweet	–	Herb. Prefers full sun and dry, alkaline, well-drained soil.
<i>Origanum</i> spp. Oregano	P	White	June to August	Spicy, pungent-like leaves	–	Herb. Prefers full sun and dry, alkaline, well-drained soil.
<i>Pelargonium</i> spp. Scented geranium	TP	White, red, pink, purple	Varies	Like variety se- lected, e.g., rose, lemon; varies	Mild	Ornamental. Prefers full sun; light, dry well-drained soil.
<i>Phaseolus coccineus</i> Scarlet runner bean	TP	Bright orange to scarlet	July to August	Raw bean but milder	–	Vegetable. Flower crunchy; use in salad.
<i>Pisum sativum</i> Garden pea	A	White, tinged pink	May to June	Raw peas	–	Vegetable. Prefers full sun; sandy, well-drained soil.
<i>Poterium sanguisorba</i> Burnet	P	Red	July to August	Cucumber	–	Salad herb. May be invasive; tolerates wide range of soil; sun or part shade.
<i>Prunus</i> spp. Plum	P	Pink to white	April to May	Mild, like flower	Sweet	Petals candy well. Pits of mature fruit are poisonous.
<i>Raphanus sativus</i> Radish	A	White, pink, yellow	One month after plant- ing	Spicy	–	Prefers full sun; well-drained, sandy soil but will grow in almost any soil.
<i>Rosa</i> spp. Rose	P	White, pink, yellow, red, orange	May to June, Sep- tember	Highly perfumed; sweet to bitter	Rose	Ornamental. Remove sour petal base. Full sun; rich, well-drained soil.
<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> Rosemary	TP	Pale blue, dark blue, pink, whit	Depends on cultivar	Mild rosemary	Delicate	Herb. Do not cook flower. Tolerates full sun to part shade; well-drained, evenly moist soil.
<i>Salvia elegans</i> Pineapple sage	TP	Scarlet	September	Pineapple/sage overtones	–	Herb. Prefers full sun; light, well-drained soil; may be invasive.
<i>Salvia officinalis</i> Garden sage	P	Blue, purple, white, pink	May to July	Flowery sage, slightly musky	–	Herb. Full sun to light shade; sandy, well-drained soil; may be invasive.
<i>Satureja hortensis</i> Summer savory	A	Pink	July to August	Mildly peppery, spicy	–	Herb. Prefers full sun; light, sandy soil.
<i>Satureja montana</i> Winter savory	P	Pale blue to	July to August	Mildly peppery, spicy	–	Herb. Prefers full sun; light, sandy soil.
<i>Syringa vulgaris</i> Lilac	P	White, pink, purple, lilac	April to May	Perfume, slightly	Lilac	Candies well. Prefers well-drained, alkaline soil; sun to part shade.
<i>Tagetes erecta</i> African marigold	A	White, gold, yellow, red	May to September	Variable; some cultivars are strong and bitter	Strong, pungent	Ornamental. Prefers full sun; well-drained soil.

(Continued)

Table 2: Recommended plants with edible flowers.

Plant name	Type ¹	Flower color	Bloom	Taste	Fragrance	Comments and hints
<i>Tagetes tenuifolia</i> Signet marigold	A	White, gold, yellow, red	May to September	Citrus; milder than <i>T. erecta</i>	–	Ornamental. Prefers full sun; well-drained soil but tolerates many soils.
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> Dandelion	P	Yellow	May to June; fall	Bitter	–	Eat cooked only. Cool weather; full sun; tolerates wide range of soils.
<i>Thymus</i> spp. Thyme	P	Pink, purple, white	July to August	Milder than leaves	–	Herb. Most creeping thymes have little flavor.
<i>Trifolium pratense</i> Red clover	P	Pink, lilac	June to September	Hay	Hay	Scatter florets on salad. Tolerates most soils; self sows.
<i>Tropaeolum majus</i> Nasturtium	A	Varies	July to August	Watercress, peppery	–	Container or in salads. Grow in full sun and well-drained soil.
<i>Tulbaghia violacea</i> Society garlic	A or TP	Lilac	Spring	Onion flavor	–	Best in full sun; tolerates part shade; prefers rich, moist, well-drained soil.
<i>Viola odorata</i> Violet	P	Violet, pink, white	April to May	Sweet	Sweet	Ornamental. Candies well. Sun to part shade; moist, well-drained soil.
<i>Viola x wittrockiana</i> <i>Viola tricolor</i> Pansy or Johnny Jump-Up	A	Violet, white, pink, yellow, multi-colored	May to July	Stronger than violets	–	Ornamental. Prefers cool weather; moist, rich, loamy soil but tolerates many soils.
<i>Yucca filamentosa</i> Yucca	P	Creamy white with purple tinge	July	Hint of artichoke, slightly bitter	–	Ornamental. Full sun; well-drained, sandy soil.

¹A = annual; B = biennial; P = perennial; TP = tender perennial