

Edible Flowers Guide

Lancaster County

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Flowers have traditionally been used in many types of cooking. Edible flowers can be used fresh as a garnish or as an integral part of a dish, such as a salad. Some flowers can be stuffed or used in stir-fry dishes. Edible flowers can be candied; frozen in ice cubes and added to beverages; made into jellies and jams; used to make teas or wines; minced and added to cheese spreads, herbal butters, pancakes, crepes, and waffles. Many flowers can be used to make vinegars for cooking, marinades or dressings for salad.

Cautions

Not all flowers are edible. Some may taste bad and some are poisonous. Eat flowers only if you are certain they are edible. Pesticides for use on fruits and vegetables have undergone extensive testing to determine the waiting period between treatment and harvest and potential residuals on food. Pesticides used on flowers and ornamentals have not been evaluated to determine their safety on food crops. Do not eat flowers from florists, nurseries, garden centers, or flowers found on the side of the road. Consume only flowers that you or someone else have grown specifically for that purpose. If you have hay fever, asthma or allergies, it best not to eat flowers since many al-

lergies are due to sensitivity to pollen of specific plants. It's best to introduce flowers into your diet one at a time and in small quantities.

Growing Edible Flowers

Growing edible flowers is essentially the same as growing flowers for ornamental purposes. Most flowers require a well-drained soil. Use a 2 to 3 inch layer of mulch to reduce weeds, conserve soil moisture, maintain uniform soil temperatures and reduce the amount of soil splashed onto the plant during a heavy rain. Irrigate to keep plants actively growing and flowering; most plants will need 1 inch of water per week. If possible, avoid overhead irrigation because moisture on the leaf surface for extended periods of time can increase the chances of disease development. Irrigating with a soaker hose works well.

Chemicals for pest control should be avoided, if possible. Hand pick harmful insects. Beneficial insects, such as lady beetles and praying mantids, can be used to decrease insect populations. Growing different flowers together provides diversity to support a good beneficial insect population and keeps pest problems low. Many gardeners locate their edible flower garden away from other plants to

avoid chemical spray drift. Many edible flowers can be successfully grown in containers.

Harvesting Flowers

Flavor can vary with growing conditions and cultivars. Conduct a taste test before harvesting large amounts of a particular flower. Flowers should be picked in the cool of the day, after the dew has evaporated. For maximum flavor choose flowers at their peak. Avoid flowers that are not fully open or that are past their prime. To maintain maximum freshness, keep flowers cool after harvest. Long-stem flowers should be placed in a container of water. Short-stemmed flowers should be harvested within 3 to 4 hours of use, placed in a plastic bag, and stored in a refrigerator. Damp paper towels placed in the plastic bag will help maintain high humidity. Because pollen can distract from the flavor, it's best to remove the pistils and stamens. Pollen may cause an allergic reaction for some people. Remove the sepals of all flowers except violas, Johnny-jump-ups and pansies. For some flowers only the flower petals are edible. The white base of the petal of many flowers may have a bitter taste and should be removed from flowers.

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Edible Flowers

| COMMON NAME | SCIENTIFIC NAME | FLAVOR | COLOR |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Basil | <i>"Ocimum basilicum"</i> | herbal | white, purple |
| Bee balm | <i>"Monarda didyma"</i> | mint, sweet | many |
| Broccoli | <i>"Brassica officinalis"</i> | spicy | yellow |
| Calendula | <i>"Calendula officinalis"</i> | slightly bitter | yellow, orange |
| Chives | <i>"Allium schoeonoprasum"</i> | onion | lavender |
| Daylily | <i>"Hemerocallis spp."</i> | sweet | many |
| Dianthus | <i>"Dianthus spp."</i> | sweet | many |
| Dill | <i>"Anethum graveolens"</i> | herbal | yellow-green |
| Fennel | <i>"Foeniculum vulgare"</i> | mildly anise | yellow-green |
| Johnny-jump-up | <i>"Viola tricolor"</i> | wintergreen | purple, yellow |
| Lilac | <i>"Syringa vulgaris"</i> | varies | lavender |
| Nasturtium | <i>"Tropaeolum majus"</i> | spicy, peppery | yellow, orange, red |
| Pansy | <i>"Viola x wittrockiana"</i> | sweet, winter green | many |
| Rose | <i>"Rosa spp."</i> | sweet | many |
| Squash | <i>"Curcubita pepo"</i> | squash | yellow |
| Violet | <i>"Viola odorata"</i> | sweet | purple, white |