



Edible Flowers

The ancient Romans cultivated roses, violets, and borage for culinary use. Today, edible flowers are a popular way to add color, texture, scent, and flavor to foods. Following is a list of some edible flowers, their culture, and suggested uses.

Bee balm (*Monarda didyma*)

The uniquely shaped, white, pink, red, or purple flowers add color and interest to flower beds, foods, and beverages. Blooms appear in July and August on plants that are 2 to 4 feet in height. Bee balm thrives in a variety of light and soil conditions, but prefers a sunny location with rich, moist soil. Space plants 2 feet apart because bee balm spreads rapidly. Remove spent flowers to extend the bloom period. Bee balm flowers have a citrus, minty flavor. Use in salads, as garnishes, or more traditionally, to make bee balm tea. Use 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flowers (or 1 tablespoon dried flowers) for 4 cups water, steep for 5 to 10 minutes, strain, and serve.



Borage (*Borago officinalis*)

This 2- to 3-foot-tall annual has blue, star-shaped flowers in midsummer. Sow seeds in spring in a sunny location. The soil should be fertile and well-drained. After germination, thin the seedlings so the plants are 2 feet apart. Borage readily reseeds itself once established. Borage flowers have a crisp, cucumber flavor. Use in salads or as garnishes. Float in drinks or freeze in ice cubes. Use candied flowers to decorate cakes, pastries, and desserts. Borage does not dry well. If eaten in large quantities, borage can have a diuretic effect.



Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)

Also known as pot marigold, this annual produces pale yellow to deep orange flowers atop erect, 18-inch-tall stems. Plants bloom from late spring to midsummer, then decline in hot weather. Sow seeds in early spring in full sun and well-drained soil; repeat in early July for a fall harvest. Thin plants to 12 inches apart. Calendula flowers have a slightly bitter flavor and are valued mostly for their color. Use petals in salads, soups, butter, rice, stews, poultry, or in tea (use same proportions as for bee balm). It is sometimes used



as a saffron substitute. Dry individual petals on paper (petals shouldn't touch each other). Store in a moisture-tight container.

Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*)

Finely-cut foliage and daisy-like flowers are features of this 2- to 3-foot-tall annual. Its sweet, apple fragrance and taste make chamomile popular as a tea. Chamomile grows in full sun to partial shade and prefers a sandy, well-drained soil. It blooms from late spring through late summer. Sow seed in spring. Once established, it will reseed itself. To make chamomile tea, harvest the flowers when the petals begin to droop. Add 1 cup boiling water for each 3 to 4 teaspoons fresh flowers (1 to 2 teaspoons dried flowers). Cover and steep for 3 minutes, strain, and serve. (Individuals who are sensitive to ragweed should use caution when drinking this tea.)



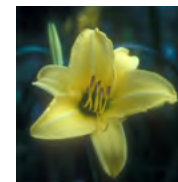
Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)

Lavender-pink flowers appear on this perennial in June. Regular picking encourages repeat blooms. Harvest flowers when they are just beginning to open. Chives grow in full sun to part shade. They prefer a moist, well-drained soil and may attain a height of 18 inches. Chive flowers have a mild onion flavor. Break apart the florets and add to salads, cooked vegetables, casseroles, cheese dishes, eggs, potatoes, or cream cheese. Chive flowers do not dry well.



Daylilies (*Hemerocallis species*)

These easy-to-grow perennials vary in height from 10 to 36 inches. Depending on the cultivar, daylilies bloom from early summer to frost in shades of yellow, orange, red, and pink. Plant in partial to full sun. Daylilies tolerate many soil types but prefer well-drained soils that are high in organic matter. Divide clumps every three to five years.



Daylily blossoms have a sweet flavor, especially the pale yellows and oranges. Use in salads or as garnishes. Float in punch bowls for decoration or stuff with soft cheeses for an appetizer. Dried daylily petals are an important ingredient in Chinese sweet and sour soup.

Impatiens (*Impatiens walleriana*)

These long-blooming annuals have glossy foliage and are available in a variety of flower colors, including bicolors. Flowers may be single or double. Impatiens grow best in moist, well-drained soil in partial shade. The flowers have a sweet flavor and can be used as a garnish, in salads, or floated in drinks.



Common lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*)

This widely planted shrub grows to 15 feet in height and puts on a colorful, fragrant display in early spring. Lilacs perform best in well-drained soils in full sun. Remove spent flower heads to encourage heavy bloom the following spring. Some lilacs have a perfumed, floral taste that lends itself to many uses. Try it with vanilla yogurt or candied as a cake or pie decoration.



Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*)

This 12-inch-tall annual has richly colored red, orange, or yellow flowers from midsummer until the first frost. The leaves have a distinctive round shape. Sow seed ½ inch deep in early spring. Plants produce the most flowers in full sun. Avoid fertilization. Plants in highly fertile soils produce lush foliage but few flowers. Nasturtium flowers have a peppery, zesty taste that can substitute for mustard in sandwiches. Add to salads or cure in vinegar. They make an attractive garnish on a plate or add color when petals are added to butter.



Roses (*Rosa species*)

Flower size, fragrance, and flavor vary among the many rose species and cultivars. Generally the flowers of the older types, such as rugosa roses, are the most flavorful. Roses need full sun and a rich, well-drained soil. They usually require regular watering, fertilizing, and pruning. Roses have a perfumed taste. Pick off the petals and remove the whitish, bitter base. Add to salads or make jelly.



Violets (*Viola species*)

Johnny-jump-ups (*Viola tricolor*)

Pansies (*Viola x wittrockiana*)

These three low-growing violas grow in sun or shade in fertile, moist, well-drained soil. They bloom best in cool weather. Violets are hardy perennials that can be divided and moved around the garden. Johnny-jump-ups and pansies are annuals. They are typically purchased as transplants in garden centers and planted in the



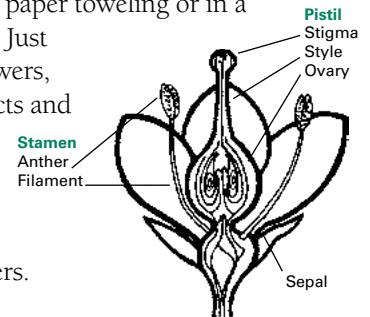
garden in early spring. Johnny-jump-ups often reseed. Violas have a sweet, wintergreen or perfumed flavor. Use petals to color butter. Float flowers in punch, use in fruit salads, or candy for decorating cakes and pies.

African violet flowers are not edible. African violets belong to the genus *Saintpaulia* and are not true violets.

Other edible flowers include redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), chicory (*Cichorium intybus*), squash/pumpkin (*Cucurbita* spp.), pinks (*Dianthus* spp.), lavender (*Lavandula* spp.), basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), scented geranium (*Pelargonium* spp.), radish (*Raphanus sativus*), sage (*Salvia officinalis*), signet marigold (*Tagetes tenuifolia*), and linden (*Tilia* spp.).

Reminders

- Do not use flowers exposed to pesticides or those growing by the roadside. Also, be cautious if you have hay fever, asthma, or allergies.
- Harvest flowers in the morning after the dew has evaporated. Choose flowers at their peak for best flavor. Put long-stemmed flowers in water and keep in a cool place. Use short-stemmed blossoms within a few hours of harvest or store between layers of damp paper toweling or in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Just before using, gently wash flowers, checking thoroughly for insects and soil.
- Remove the stamens and pistils from the flowers. Also remove the green, leaf-like sepals at the base of the flowers.



To dry edible flowers

Some flowers dry well, while others lose their flavor. Check by drying a small sample before drying an entire crop. Gather flowers in early morning before the sun shines on them. Hang upside down by the stems in a dark, well-ventilated area. (Flowers without stems can be dried on a fine screen.) Once dry, label and store in an air-tight container in a cool, dark place.

For more information

Horticultural information is available from your local Iowa State University Extension office and from these websites.

<http://store.extension.iastate.edu/>
www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu
www.reimangardens.iastate.edu

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