

EDIBLE FLOWERS

Make sure you know what flower you are about to eat. Some flowers look very similar to each other. Some flowers are poisonous. Some people may react differently to substances in the flowers than the average person might. Some people have allergies. When in doubt, don't eat them. There are many reputable sources available to help you learn about this subject so you can safely enjoy nature's bounty in the form of edible flowers.

IMPORTANT - Some dos and don'ts!

Following are some simple guidelines to keep in mind before you eat any type of flower:

Eat flowers only when you are positive they are edible. If uncertain, consult a good reference book on edible flowers prior to consumption.

Pick your flowers in the morning when their water content is at its highest.

Just because flowers are served with food does not mean they are edible. It's easy and very attractive to use flowers for garnish on plates or for decoration, but avoid using non-edible flowers this way. Many people believe that anything on the plate can be eaten. They may not know if the flower is edible or not and may be afraid to ask.

If pesticides are necessary, use only those products labeled for use on edible crops.

Do not eat flowers from florists, nurseries or garden centers. In many cases these flowers have been treated with pesticides not labeled for food crops.

Do not eat flowers picked from the side of the road. Once again, possible herbicide use eliminates these flowers as a possibility for use. Remove pistils and stamens from flowers before eating. Eat only the flower petals for most flowers.

Wash all flowers thoroughly before you eat them. Shake each flower to dislodge insects hidden in the petal folds. After having removed the stamen, wash the flowers under a fine jet of water or in a strainer placed in a large bowl of water. Drain and allow to dry on absorbent paper. The flowers will retain their odor and color providing they dry quickly and that they are not exposed to direct sunlight.

Introduce flowers into your diet in small quantities one species at a time. Too much of a good thing may cause problems for your digestive system.

Remove pistils and stamens from flowers before eating. Separate the flower petals from the rest of the flower just prior to use to keep wilting to a minimum. Eat only the flower petals for most flowers.

If you have allergies, introduce edible flowers gradually, as they may aggravate some allergies.

Preserving Edible Flowers:

To preserve flowers, put them on moist paper and place together in a hermetically-sealed container or in plastic wrapping. This way, certain species can be preserved in the refrigerator for some 10 days. If the flowers are limp, they can be revitalized by floating them on icy water for a few moments; don't leave too long or else they will lose some of their flavor.

You can also store the whole flower in a glass of water in the refrigerator overnight.

WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T EAT IT!! CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER TO SEE IF THERE ARE ANY ISSUES FOR YOU.

Sample of some Edible Flowers -

Alliums (leeks, chives, garlic, garlic chives) - Known as the "Flowering Onions." There are approximately four hundred species that includes the familiar onion, garlic, chives, ramps, and shallots. All members of this genus are edible. Their flavors range from mild onions and leeks right through to strong onion and garlic. All parts of the plants are edible. The flowers tend to have a stronger flavor than the leaves and the young developing seed-heads are even stronger. We eat the leaves and flowers mainly in salads. The leaves can also be cooked as a flavoring with other vegetables in soups, etc.

Chive Blossoms - Use whenever a light onion flavor and aroma is desired. Separate the florets and enjoy the mild, onion flavor in a variety of dishes.

Garlic Blossoms - The flowers can be white or pink, and the stems are flat instead of round. The flavor has a garlicky zing that brings out the flavor of your favorite food. Milder than the garlic bulb. Wonderful in salads.



Angelica - Depending on the variety, flower range from pale lavender-blue to deep rose. It has a flavor similar to licorice. Angelica is valued culinary from the seeds and stems, which are candied and used in liqueurs, to the young leaves and shoots, which can be added to a green salad. Because of its celery-like flavor, Angelica has a natural affinity with fish. The leaves have a stronger, clean taste and make a interesting addition to salads. In its native northern Europe, even the mature leaves are used, particularly by the Laplanders, as a natural fish preservative. Many people in the cold Northern regions such as Greenland, Siberia, and Finland consider Angelica a vegetable, and eat the stems raw, sometimes spread with butter. Young leaves can be made into a tea.



Basil - Depending on the type, the flowers are either bright white, pale pink, or a delicate lavender color. The flavor of the flower is milder, but similar to the leaves of the same plant. Basil also has different varieties that have different milder flavors like lemon and mint. Sprinkle them over salad or pasta for a concentrated flavor and a spark of color that gives any dish a fresh, festive look.

Bee Balm - Also called Wild Bergamot, Wild Oswego Tea, Horsemint, Monarda. Wild bee balm tastes like oregano and mint. The taste of bee balm is reminiscent of citrus with soft mingling of lemon and orange. The red flowers have a minty flavor. Any place you use oregano, you can use bee balm blossoms. The leaves and flower petals can also be used in both fruit and regular salads. The leaves taste like the main ingredient in Earl Gray Tea and can be used as a substitute.



Borage - Has lovely cornflower blue star-shaped flowers. Blossoms have a cool, cucumber taste. Wonderful in punches, lemonade, gin and tonics, sorbets, chilled soups, cheese tortas, and dips.

Broccoli Florets - The top portion of broccoli is actually flower buds. Given time each will burst into a bright yellow flower, which is why they are called florets. Small yellow flowers have a mild spiciness (mild broccoli flavor), and are delicious in salads or in a stir-fry or steamer.

Calendula - Also called Marigolds. A wonderful edible flower. Flavors range from spicy to bitter, tangy to peppery. Their sharp taste resembles saffron (also known as Poor Man's Saffron). Has pretty petals in golden-orange hues. Sprinkle them on soups, pasta or rice dishes, herb butters, and salads. Petals add a yellow tint to soups, spreads, and scrambled eggs.

Carnations - Steep in wine, candy, or use as cake decoration. To use the surprisingly sweet petals in desserts, cut them away from the bitter white base of the flower. Dianthus are the miniature member of the carnation family with light clove-like or nutmeg scent. Petals add color to salads or aspics. Carnation petals are one of secret ingredients that has been used to make Chartreuse, a French liqueur, since the 17th century.

Chamomile - The flowers are small and daisy-like and have a sweet, apple-like flavor. **NOTE:** Drink chamomile tea in moderation as it contains thuaone; Note: ragweed sufferers may be allergic to chamomile

Chicory - Earthy flavor, eat either the petals or the buds. Chicory has a pleasant, mild-bitter taste that has been compared to endive. The buds can be pickled.

Chrysanthemums - Tangy, slightly bitter, ranging in colors from red, white, yellow and orange. They range in taste from faint peppery to mild cauliflower. They should be blanched first and then scatter the petals on a salad. The leaves can also be used to flavor vinegar. Always remove the bitter flower base and use petals only. Young leaves and stems of the Crown Daisy, also known as Chop Suey Greens or Shingiku in Japan, are widely used in oriental stir-fries and as salad seasoning.

Clover - Sweet, anise-like, licorice.

Cornflower - Also called Bachelor's button. They have a slightly sweet to spicy, clove-like flavor. Bloom is a natural food dye. More commonly used as garnish.

Dandelions - Member of Daisy family. Flowers are sweetest when picked young, and just before eating. They have a sweet, honey-like flavor. Mature flowers are bitter. Dandelion buds are tastier than the flowers: best to pick these when they are very close to the ground, tightly bunched in the center, and about the size of a small gumball. Good raw or steamed. Also, made into wine. Can dip in batter and fry. Young leaves taste good steamed, or tossed in salads. When serving a rice dish use dandelion petals like confetti over the rice.

Day Lilies - Slightly sweet with a mild vegetable flavor, like sweet lettuce or melon. Their flavor is a combination of asparagus and zucchini. Chewable consistency. Some people think that different colored blossoms have different flavors. To use the surprisingly sweet petals in desserts, cut them away from the bitter white base of the flower. Also, great to stuff like squash blossoms. Flowers look beautiful on composed salad platters or crowning a frosted cake. Sprinkle the large petals in a spring salad. In the spring, gather shoots two or three inches tall and use as a substitute for asparagus. **NOTE:** Many Lilies contain alkaloids and are **NOT** edible. Day Lilies may act as a diuretic or laxative; eat in moderation



Elderberry - The blossoms are a creamy color and have a sweet scent and sweet taste. When harvesting elderberry flowers, do not wash them as that removes much of the fragrance and flavor. Instead check them carefully for insects. The fruit is used to make wine. The flowers, leaves, berries, bark and roots have all been used in traditional folk medicine for centuries. **NOTE:** All other parts of this plant, except the berries, are mildly toxic! They contain a bitter alkaloid and glycoside that may change into cyanide. The cooked ripe berries of the edible elders are harmless. Eating uncooked berries may cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Gladiolus - Flowers (anthers removed) have a nondescript flavor (taste vaguely like lettuce) but make lovely receptacles for sweet or savory spreads or mousses. Toss individual petals in salads.

Jasmine - The flowers are intensely fragrant and are traditionally used for scenting tea.

Johnny-Jump-Ups - Lovely yellow, white and purple blooms have a mild wintergreen flavor and can be used in salads, to decorate cakes, or served with soft cheese. They are also a great addition to drinks, soups, desserts or salads.



Lavender - Sweet, floral flavor, with lemon and citrus notes. Flowers look beautiful and taste good too in a glass of champagne, with chocolate cake, or as a garnish for sorbets or ice creams. Lavender lends itself to savory dishes also, from hearty stews to wine-reduced sauces. Diminutive blooms add a mysterious scent to custards, flans or sorbets. **NOTE:** Do not consume lavender oil unless you absolutely know that it has not been sprayed and is culinary safe.

Lemon Verbena - Tiny cream-colored citrus-scented blossoms. Leaves and flowers steeped as an herb tea, and used to flavor custards and flans.



Lilac - The flavor of lilacs varies from plant to plant. Very perfume-y, slightly bitter. Has a distinct lemony taste with floral, pungent overtones. Great in salads.

Nasturtiums - Come in varieties ranging from trailing to upright and in brilliant sunset colors with peppery flavors. Nasturtiums rank among most common edible flowers. Blossoms have a sweet, spicy flavor similar to watercress. Stuff whole flowers with savory mousse. Leaves add peppery tang to salads. Pickled seed pods are less expensive substitute for capers. Use entire flowers to garnish platters, salads, cheese tortas, open-faced sandwiches, and savory appetizers.

Pansy - Pansies have a slightly sweet green or grassy flavor. If you eat only the petals, the flavor is extremely mild, but if you eat the whole flower, there is a winter, green overtone. Use them as garnishes, in fruit salads, green salad, desserts or in soups.

Peony - In China the fallen petals are parboiled and sweetened as a tea-time delicacy. Peony water was used for drinking in the middle ages. Add peony petals to your summer salad or try floating in punches and lemonades.

Queen Anne's Lace - Also known as Wild Carrot and Bishop's Lace. It is the original carrot, from which modern cultivars were developed, and it is edible with a light carrot flavor. The flowers are small and white, and bloom in a lacy, flat-topped cluster. Great in salads.

NOTE: The problem is, it is closely related to, and looks almost exactly like another wild plant, Wild or Poison Hemlock, which often grows profusely in similar habitats, and is said to be the most poisonous plant native to the United States. The best way to differentiate between the two plants is to remember that Queen Anne's Lace has a hairy stem, while the stems of Wild Hemlock are smooth and hairless and hollow with purple spots.

Roses - Flavors depend on type, color, and soil conditions. Flavor reminiscent of strawberries and green apples. Sweet, with subtle undertones ranging from fruit to mint to spice. All roses are edible, with the flavor being more pronounced in the darker varieties. In miniature varieties can garnish ice cream and desserts, or larger petals can be sprinkled on desserts or salads. Freeze them in ice cubes

and float them in punches also. Petals used in syrups, jellies, perfumed butters and sweet spreads.

NOTE: Be sure to remove the bitter white portion of the petals

Scented Geraniums - The flower flavor generally corresponds to the variety. For example, a lemon-scented geranium would have lemon-scented flowers. They come in fragrances from citrus and spice to fruits and flowers, and usually in colors of pinks and pastels. Sprinkle them over desserts and in refreshing drinks or freeze in ice cubes. **NOTE:** Citronelle variety may not be edible.

Squash Blossoms - Squash and pumpkin blossoms are edible and taste mildly of raw squash. Prepare the blossoms by washing and trimming the stems and remove the stamens.

Sunflower - The flower is best eaten in the bud stage when it tastes similar to artichokes. Once the flower opens, the petals may be used like chrysanthemums, the flavor is distinctly bittersweet. The unopened flower buds can also be steamed like artichokes.



Violets - Sweet, perfumed flavor. Related flowers, Johnny jump-ups or violas, and pansies now come in colorful purples and yellows to apricot and pastel hues. I like to eat the tender leaves and flowers in salads. I also use the flowers to beautifully embellish desserts and iced drinks. Freeze them in punches to delight children and adults alike. All of these flowers make pretty adornments for frosted cakes, sorbets, or any other desserts, and they may be crystallized as well. Heart-shaped leaves are edible, and tasty when cooked like spinach.

Yucca Petals - The white Yucca flower is crunchy with a mildly sweet taste (a hint of artichoke). In the spring, they can be used in salads and as a garnish.