

YEAR ROUND GARDENING

Edible Flowers

By Susan Christine Jones, Colorado Master Gardener

Edible flowers have been part of human culinary history for thousands of years, though their popularity has varied regionally. In the 1980's, chef Alice Waters brought attention to edible flowers in American cuisine through her innovative use of them at restaurant *Chez Panisse*, in Berkeley, California. In addition to being visually dazzling, flowers impart unique flavors as well as nutrients to foods. Most edible flowers contain significant amounts of vitamins A and C in addition to potassium. As in fruits and vegetables, the vivid colors of

flowers denote the presence of phytonutrients, reflecting the composition of compounds they contain.



Many flowers can be eaten, though not all taste good. Flavors vary even among the same type of flower. The rose flower's aromas and colors vary much like its taste. Some are superb in sorbets and ice creams with their delicate, sublime flowery taste, while others are bitter, metallic and quite undesirable for culinary use. Easy to grow nasturtiums are a popular edible flower. These tender annuals come in several colors, but unlike roses, all nasturtium flowers have the same radish and cress like bite; peppery, spicy, and quite unique. Try experimenting to find varieties that suit your own taste.

Take inventory in your garden - you may already have plants with edible blossoms, though you may have to wait until the right time of season to taste them. It is extremely important to positively identify any flowers for consumption by their

scientific name. Carefully evaluate the plants growing environment, and do not consume flowers exposed to pesticides, untreated manure, or other potentially toxic substances. Florist, nursery, and garden center flowers are often grown with chemicals not permitted on food by the FDA. Do not ingest flowers grown along roadsides, as pesticides may have been sprayed and particles from car exhausts have built up. Ensure that you only ingest flowers intended for consumption by growing your own. When tasting new flowers, sample a small amount to be sure you are not allergic. To make sure you properly identify edible flowers and familiarize yourself with common toxic plants consult a trusted reference. For a list of recommended plants with edible flowers and common toxic plants go to:

<http://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden/edible-flowers-7-237/>

After discovering edible flowers already growing in your garden, consider adding new ones. For a long harvesting season, include plants with a variety of bloom times from early spring through fall. Consider trees, shrubs, bulbs, veggies and herbs of both annual and perennial types. A large garden space is not required. A planting box, or small raised bed can support a variety of edible flowers as long as it has good drainage and sunlight. Most plants with edible flowers need at least 6 hours of sun a day. Carefully consider where to plant, as site selection will affect overall health. Many edible flowers are easy to grow, while others require special care in our climate but are worth the extra effort. See the CSU extension website for help with plant selection, proper planting techniques, and soil preparation.

For best taste, harvest flowers early in the day, choosing insect and disease-free blooms. Remove stems, pistils, and anthers, and on roses, remove the bitter white part at the base of the petal. Flowers bruise easily and wilt quickly so consume soon after picking. To store them place between damp paper towels in a covered container in the fridge. Before using, wash gently with running water. Use flowers in both sweet and savory dishes, as a garnish, in salads, butters, beverages, sorbets, ice creams, and baked goods. Preserve them in syrups, liquors, jams, vinegars, and oils. Store oils and vinegars in the refrigerator due to their limited shelf life. Candied flowers make delectable, intriguing decorations for desserts. Relish your own creativity in the kitchen while working with nature's most festive ingredient.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by ask.extension.org. any time day or night. Monday to Thursday from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. you can phone 520-7684 or emailing CSUmq2@elpasoco.com.

For current garden tips visit www.facebook.com/ColoradoMasterGardeners.EPC

For current classes visit elpaso.extension.colostate.edu.

Palate Pleasing Flowers

ANISE HYSSOP *Agastache foeniculum*
APPLE BLOSSOMS *Malus spp.*
ARUGULA *Eruca vesicaria*
BEE BALM *Monarda didyma*
TUBEROUS BEGONIAS *Begonia x tuberhybridia*
BORAGE *Borago officinalis*
BROCCOLI *Brassica spp.*
CALENDULA *Calendula officinalis*
CHIVES *Allium schoenoprasum, A. tuberosum*
CHRYSANTHEMUM *Chrysanthemum x morifolium, C. x grandiflora*
CILANTRO *Coriandrum sativum*
CITRUS BLOSSOMS *Citrus spp.*
DAYLILIES *Hemerocallis spp.*
DIANTHUS *Dianthus spp.*
DILL *Anethum graveolens*
ENGLISH DAISY *Bellis perennis*
FENNEL *Foeniculum vulgare*
HONEYSUCKLE *Lonicera japonica*
LAVENDER *Lavandula augustifolia*
LILAC *Syringa vulgaris*
MUSTARD *Brassica juncea, B. spp.*
NASTURTIUMS *Tropaeolum majus*
PINEAPPLE GUAVA *Feijoa sellowiana*
PLUM *Prunus Spp.*
RADISHES *Raphanus sativas*
ROSEMARY *Rosmarinus officinalis*
ROSES *Rosa spp.*
RUNNER BEANS *Phaseolus coccineus*
SAGE *Salvia officinalis, S. elegans*
SQUASH BLOSSOMS *Curcubita spp.*
SOCIETY GARLIC *Tulbaghia violacea*
STRAWBERRIES *Fragaria x ananassa*
THYME *Thymus spp.*
TULIPS *Tulipa spp.*
VIOLAS, PANSIES, JOHNNY JUMP-UPS *Viola x wittrockiana*
VIOLETS *Viola odorata*