

Edible flowers guide

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Which bits are edible and how to use them

Choosing to grow edible flowers means you can enjoy them first outdoors as plants and then again indoors as an ingredient. Picking a handful of fresh petals to sprinkle on a salad takes seconds but transforms it into something 'colourful, summery and special' all in one.

Most edible flowers are picked to use fresh but a few with a floral scent can be captured and preserved as a flavour. Lavender is one that springs to mind for baked goods but more delicate floral notes such as cornflower can be used dried in teas.

The quickest to grow from seed are the hardy annuals as they are sown in spring and the flowers picked the same summer. A recommended top three to start with are: Calendula – Pot Marigold, Helianthus – Sunflower and Tropaeolum – Nasturtium. Between them these three will give you fresh flowers, foliage and seeds as well as options for preserving. All are good garden plants with a wide choice of colours too.



Agastache (Agastache anisata, foeniculum)

Use fresh young leaves just as you would mint: to make a tea or chopped up in sauces or scattered over vegetables. The just-opened flowers can be added to fruit salads or steeped in warm honey and left for a week or so to make an aniseed-flavoured sweetener.



Hollyhock (Alcea rosea)

Dried hollyhock flowers can be used to make an infusion or syrup and as old herbal remedies they were either taken as a gargle to soothe sore throats or swallowed as a cough syrup. Apart from the flowers, no other parts of the hollyhock are eaten.



Cornflower (Centaurea cyanus)

Each head is composed of lots of small florets. It is worth taking the time to pick off and use the individual florets. Use them fresh to bring little flecks of colour to leafy summer salads or dry them as an ingredient of mixed teas where they add floral notes.



Wild Garlic / Ransoms
(*Allium ursinum*)

The young leaves make a spring time treat raw in salads. The later stronger-flavoured leaves are best made into pesto or soup. The flowers add flavour when cooked in savoury biscuits and scones. To prepare, pick off the flowers and chop up the stems of the flower head.



Borage
(*Borago officinalis*)

The flowers make a pretty garnish floating on summer drinks such as Pimms and have a cucumber flavour just like the leaves. The hairy leaves are an off-putting texture in the mouth so use sparingly and shred young leaves if using raw or cook older leaves. Avoid eating the hairy stalks.



Pot Marigold
(*Calendula officinalis*)

The flower petals add colour and flavour, although young leaves are also edible. The petals can be picked and used fresh or dried in a cool oven and ground to a powder. The powder, particularly of the orange pot marigolds, can be used to colour and add spice to cakes, biscuits or rice.



Chamomile
(*Matricaria chamomilla*)

Chamomile tea is a familiar drink for settling stomachs and for its calming properties. It is important to only use the flowers when they are fully open. Use the daisies fresh or freeze them. The flowers can also be dried, but the volatile oils will be lost within a year.



Sunflower
(*Helianthus annuus*)

In autumn when the seeds are dry and mature cut off the flower heads, bring indoors and extract the seeds. Each seed comprises a tough outer shell (hull) protecting the tasty inner kernel. Either chew the seed whole (spit out the shells do not swallow) or shell the seeds before eating the kernels.



Lavender (*Lavandula multifida, stoechas, angustifolia*)

Pick the flowers just as they fully open and use them in baking or in an ice cream. Making lavender sugar is a good way to introduce floral notes to cakes or shortbread without the flavour being too overpowering. The leaves can be used as a herb in the same way as rosemary.

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**Bergamot / Monarda
(Monarda didyma, fistulosa)**

The whole plant has a spicy citrus aroma but it is the young leaves and flowers that are used to flavour salads or sauces. Goes well with poultry, fruit or cream cheeses. You can make a tea with a few fresh or dry leaves and flowers, or alternatively add some to a pot of Indian tea.



**Forget-me-not
(Myosotis sylvatica, arvensis)**

A member of the Borage family, these flowers are also safe to eat although there isn't a strong tradition of using them in this way. They are tiny and so pretty the light blue adds visual interest to salads and they would be perfect delicate cake decorations.



**Marigold (Tagetes patula,
tenuifolia, patula x erecta)**

Both the flowers and leaves are edible with a citrus herby flavour. Use fresh and chopped up in salads or vegetable dishes. The leaves can replace tarragon with fish or chicken. Fresh flowers make neat button-like cake decorations and dried petals add colour to baked goods.



**Nasturtium
(Tropaeolum minus, majus)**

Both leaves and flowers have a tasty peppery cress-like flavour and are popular and easy additions to salads or sandwich fillings. The flowers add jewel-like colour and interest to jugs of summer drinks. Pickled unripe seed pods can be used as an alternative to capers.

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