



Edible Flowers

Quick Facts...

- Proper identification of edible flowers is important.
- Use flowers that are grown without pesticides.
- For best flavor, use flowers at their peak.
- Introduce new flowers into the diet slowly to be able to pinpoint allergic reactions.
- Edible flowers also may be preserved in oils or vinegars.

Edible flowers have been used in the culinary arts for flavor and garnish for hundreds of years. Early reports indicate that the Romans used flowers in cooking, as did the Chinese, Middle Eastern and Indian cultures. During Queen Victoria's reign, edible flowers were popular and they are again popular in North America and Europe.

Many flowers are edible. However, proper identification is essential because some flowers are poisonous and should not be eaten. (See List 1.)

Pick flowers early in the day. Use them at their peak for the best flavor. Avoid unopened blossoms (except daylilies) and wilted or faded flowers. They may have a bitter or unappealing flavor. Do not use flowers that have been sprayed with pesticides, and generally avoid purchasing flowers from florists, Garden centers or nurseries. These flowers are not grown for consumption. List 2 lists many plants that can be added to food for flavor, aroma, color or garnish.

Fresh flowers also can be preserved for later use. Choose flowers with larger petals, such as pansies, and paint the petals with an egg-white wash. Use a soft brush and dehydrated egg whites to avoid food poisoning. These flowers are edible if the dehydrated egg powder is pasteurized. After painting, dust the petal with super-fine granulated sugar and dry it. Store preserved flowers in an airtight container in a cool, dark place. Avoid dark-colored petals; they turn dark.

Using Edible Flowers

To avoid stomach upset or to determine if there is an allergic reaction, introduce yourself slowly to new flowers. Edible petals or entire flowers can be eaten. However, remove stems, anthers and pistils because they may be bitter (Figure 1). Use flowers that are free of Insects and diseases.

Many edible flowers are high in vitamin C and/or vitamin A, along with other essential nutrients. Use them as garnishes and in salads.

Recipes for flowers may be found in the following areas: baking, sauces, jelly, syrup, vinegars, honey, oil, tea, flower-scented sugars, candied flowers, wine and flavored liquors. Pick the flowers, rinse and place between damp paper towels. Refrigerate until ready to use. Some varieties may last longer if not washed until they are ready to use. Some flowers may be dried and used like dried herbs.

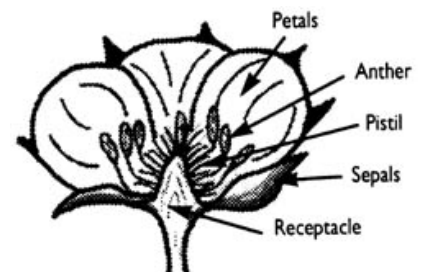


Figure 1: Flower parts.

List 1: Some common Garden plants with toxic flowers (not a complete list)

Clematis spp. Clematis, virgin's bower
Colchicum spp. Crocus
Daphne mezereum Daphne
Digitalis purpurea Foxglove, digitalis
Hippeastum spp. Amaryllis
Lobelia spp. Cardinal flower
Nicotiana spp. Flowering tobacco
Phoradendron spp. Mistletoe
Rhododendron spp. Azaleas, rhododendrons
Ricinus communis Castor bean, African coffee tree
Zantedeschia aethiopica Calla lily
Zigadenus spp. Death camas, alkaligrass, wild onion

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| African marigold | Variable; some are strong and bitter |
| Anise hyssop | Strong anise, sweet, licorice |
| Apple or crabapple | Slightly floral to sour |
| Artichoke | Artichoke |
| Basil | Milder than leaves, spicy |
| Bergamot, bee balm | Tea-like, more aromatic than leaves |
| Borage | Cucumber |
| Broccoli, cauliflower | Broccoli |
| Burnet | Cucumber |
| Calendula, pot marigold | Tangy and peppery |
| Chervil | Parsley-like, hint of citrus, tarragon |
| Chicory | Pleasant, mild-bitter similar to endive |
| Chive | Onion, strong |
| Chrysanthemum | Varieties differ, strong to bitter |
| Coriander | Like leaf but milder |
| Dandelion | Bitter |
| Daylily | Cooked, combo of asparagus/zucchini |
| Dianthus or pinks | Spicy, cloves |
| Dill | Stronger than leaves |
| English chamomile | Sweet apple flavor |
| English daisy | Mild to bitter |
| Fennel | Licorice, milder than leaves, sweet |
| Garden pea | Raw peas |
| Garden sage | Flowery sage, slightly musky |
| Garland chrysanthemum | Mild |
| Garlic chive | Onion, strong |
| Gladiolus | Mediocre |
| Grape hyacinth | Grapey, slightly sour with bitter aftertaste. |
| Hibiscus, Rose-of-China | Citrus/cranberry flavor |
| Hollyhock | Little, slightly bitter |
| Hyssop | Bitter; similar to tonic |
| Lavender | Highly perfumed |
| Lemon | Citrus, slightly bitter |
| Lemon balm | Lemony, sweet |
| Lilac | Perfume, slightly bitter |
| Lovage | Mild celery |
| Marjoram | Spicy, sweet |
| Mint | Minty; milder than leaves |
| Mustard | Mustard, hot |
| Nasturtium | Watercress, peppery |

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Okra, gumbo, gombo | Mild, sweet and slightly mucilaginous |
| Orange | Citrus, sweet/strong |
| Oregano | Spicy, pungent-like leaves |
| Oxeye daisy | Mild |
| Pansy or Johnny Jump-Up | Stronger than violets |
| Pineapple guava | Floral flavor; papaya or exotic melon |
| Pineapple sage | Pineapple/sage overtones |
| Plum | Mild, like flower nectar |
| Radish | Spicy |
| Red clover | Hay |
| Redbud | Beanlike to tart apple |
| Rocket, arugula | Nutty, smoky, less piquant than leaves |
| Rose | Highly perfumed; sweet to bitter |
| Rosemary | Mild rosemary |
| Rose-of-Sharon | Mild, nutty |
| Safflower, American | Bitter flavor |
| Scarlet runner bean | Raw bean but milder |
| Scented geranium | Like variety selected, varies |
| Signet marigold | Citrus; milder than <i>T. erecta</i> |
| Society garlic | Onion flavor |
| Squash or pumpkin | Mild, raw squash |
| Summer savory | Mildly peppery, spicy |
| Sweet woodruff | Sweet, grassy, vanilla |
| Thyme | Milder than leaves |
| Tuberous begonia | Citrus |
| Tulip | Slightly sweet or bitter; little flavor |
| Violet | Sweet |
| Winter savory | Mildly peppery, spicy |
| Yucca | Hint of artichoke, slightly bitter |