



## Edible Flowers

By Linda Sanford

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Flowers from the garden were used for culinary purposes during the Victorian era. Cookbooks from that time contain recipes for salads and soups flavored by many different flowers. Today, serving edible flowers are a popular way to impress your friends and family.

But first, a safety guideline: never eat commercially-grown flowers. These flowers may have been sprayed with pesticides that are carcinogenic.

Flowers that are widely recognized as safe to ingest include the following:

*Nasturtium (Tropaeolum majus)*: use Nasturtiums in salads, sandwiches, omelets and soups. Their round-shaped leaves and brilliant sunset-colored blossoms are both edible and have a peppery taste similar to watercress. They thrive in full to slightly filtered sun, and grow easily from seed.

*Borago officinalis*: the delicate, star-shaped flowers are a clear blue and have a cucumber taste. Borago blossoms can be used to garnish lemonade, sorbet or a gin and tonic and are easily frozen in an ice tray. Borago will self-sow for years. These plants do best in full sun.

*Calendula (Calendula officinalis)*: Calendula's yellow or orange flowers look lovely tossed onto the top of a salad. Dried petals can be stirred into soups, pasta, and rice dishes as a homegrown substitute for saffron. Calendulas do best in full sun and are easy to grow from seed.

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Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*): this fragrant flower brings to mind tranquility and relaxation. The purple flowers can be used to flavor jams and jellies, stews, or vinegar or used in a tea to calm the nerves. Easy to grow in a dry, sunny location.

Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*): easy to grow, low maintenance, and drought-tolerant once established. This perennial sparkles in the summer with shaggy heads of tight tubular scarlet, pink or purple blossoms. The flowers can be scattered on salads, used as a garnish, or steeped to make Bee Balm teas. Bee Balm flowers have a citrusy flavor.

Johnny-jump-up (*Viola tricolor*): this flower blooms profusely with little care in sun or shade and self-sows. It has small yellow, white and purple flowers (thus the name tricolor). Flowers have a slight wintergreen flavor. They make a pretty decoration for salads and desserts or in a punchbowl. A prized edible that can also be candied or frozen in ice cubes.

The best time to harvest flowers is in the morning if possible. Wash them quickly in cool water, shake them out, and dry them on a paper towel. If you won't be eating them right away, store them between damp layers of paper towels in the refrigerator. Flowers are very fragile, and best added to the plate at the very last minute so that they don't wilt.

Fresh flowers lend color and a festive or romantic atmosphere to food, but not just any flowers will do. They won't get by on their looks if they have a bitter taste, and you certainly wouldn't want to garnish your meal with anything toxic. Finally, be sure to explain to children that not all flowers can be eaten, just the special ones, such as those mentioned above.

Join Master Gardener Eve Keener this Saturday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, for a free public class on Cottage Gardens. These informal gardens are both utilitarian and beautiful, often mixed with herbs, fruit, vegetables, perennials and annuals. Carefully-planned cottage gardens can add charm to small lots or large garden plots. Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at Folsom Lake College El Dorado Center, Classroom A-105, 6699 Campus Drive, in Placerville. (Find a map of campus at <http://ucanr.edu/mgedccottagegarden>.)

Mark your calendar for the upcoming June 10<sup>th</sup> free Master Gardener class at the Cameron Park Community Center: Native Plants for Home Gardens. Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon, 2502 Country Club Drive, Cameron Park.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are at local farmers markets and are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook.