



Grow Some Edible Flowers

by Kaelin Smith, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Flowers look and smell fantastic, but did you know that they taste great too? Incorporating flowers into culinary dishes has recently gained popularity, but the concept of consuming flowers dates back thousands of years to our earliest ancestors. Though humans no longer need to forage, flowers are still a common ingredient in the foods and beverages we enjoy today. Dried flowers, such as chamomile, are made into herbal teas and rose water is a popular flavoring used in baking. Other ways of using flowers in food include petals being added into salads, sauces, baked goods and even wine.

Squash blossoms are a well known and widely available edible flower. Most squash varieties produce flowers that taste like a milder version of the vegetable. A popular way to enjoy squash blossoms is fried and filled with ricotta or breadcrumbs. They can also be added to stir-fries or used to garnish other dishes. Squash blossoms can be found in the produce section of many grocery stores from May to October.

Nasturtiums are another popular choice amongst edible flowers. These low-growing annuals are available in many different colors, ranging from yellow to scarlet. Blooms taste similar to watercress and the foliage has a distinct peppery flavor as well. Vibrant petals can be used as a garnish or made into a salad dressing by steeping petals in white wine vinegar.

Consider cooking with Calendula if you are looking to add color to your meals in addition to a peppery taste. Its orange-yellow petals can be incorporated into rice, pasta or soups to create vibrant entrees. Calendula is also called “poor man’s saffron”. When sauteed in oil, the flowers release a flavor that is similar to saffron. Fresh petals taste spicy and can add a tangy flavor to salads and stir-fries.

Dandelions are a familiar flower that are more commonly known as a weed than an edible ingredient. Their yellow flower petals have a sweet, peppery flavor and make a great addition to salads. For best results, pick young blossoms or buds in early spring, as the plant becomes more bitter tasting as the summer progresses.

There are a few considerations to keep in mind when picking flowers for consumption. It is imperative that you do not eat a flower you cannot identify. Not all flowers are edible, despite how pretty they look. A quick web search will provide you with lists of flowers that can be safely eaten. Individuals with pollen allergies should be careful when consuming flowers and should incorporate them into their diet slowly. Only consume flowers that you know are chemical free. Flowers from nursery plants may be sprayed with pesticides or fertilizers that can be harmful when ingested. When foraging for flowers, avoid chemically treated lawns and areas near roads. Ideally, flowers meant for consumption should be grown from seed to avoid any chance of chemical contamination. In the case where growing from seed is not possible, some grocery stores carry edible flowers in their produce sections.

Once you have picked your flowers, you must prepare them. It is important to gently rinse flowers with cold water and then allow them time to air dry on a paper towel. Petals are safe for consumption, but sepals, along with the pistils and stamen, must be removed. Flowers look and taste their best when they are used shortly after harvest. If storing flowers for use at a later time, place them in a plastic container lined with damp paper towels to prevent the flowers from wilting.

This summer, consider experimenting in the kitchen with flowers! There are endless possibilities as to what you can create with the wide variety of edible flowers there are. Most flowers are easy-to-grow and will not only beautify your yard, but also add a unique flavor and visual interest to your favorite meals.

For information on growing edible flowers or on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.



