

THE HERB COTTAGE
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Following are some simple guidelines to keep in mind before you eat any type of flower:

Eat flowers only when you are positive they are edible. If uncertain, consult a good reference book on edible flowers prior to consumption.

Just because flowers are served with food does not mean they are edible. It's easy and very attractive to use flowers for garnish on plates or for decoration, but avoid using non-edible flowers this way. Many people believe that anything on the plate can be eaten. They may not know if the flower is edible or not and may be afraid to ask.

If pesticides are necessary, use only those products labeled for use on edible crops.

Do not eat flowers from florists, nurseries or garden centers. In many cases these flowers have been treated with pesticides not labeled for food crops.

Do not eat flowers picked from the side of the road. Once again, possible herbicide use eliminates these flowers as a possibility for use. Remove pistils and stamens from flowers before eating. Eat only the flower petals for most flowers.

Introduce flowers into your diet in small quantities one species at a time. Too much of a good thing may cause problems for your digestive system.

If you have allergies, introduce edible flowers gradually, as they may aggravate some allergies.

Most herb flowers have a taste that's similar to the leaf, but spicier.

The concept of using fresh edible flowers in cooking is not new. After falling out of favor for many years, cooking and garnishing with flowers is back in vogue once again. Flower cookery has been traced back to Roman times and was especially popular in the Victorian era.

Today, many restaurant chefs and innovative home cooks garnish their entrees with flower blossoms for a touch of elegance.

FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF SOME EASILY OBTAINABLE FLOWERS FOR EATING:

Alliums (leeks, chives, garlic, garlic chives) - Known as the "Flowering Onions." There are approximately four hundred species that includes the familiar onion, garlic, chives, ramps, and shallots. All members of this genus are edible. Their flavors range from mild onions and leeks right through to strong onion and garlic. All parts of the plants are edible. The flowers tend to have a stronger flavor than the leaves and the young developing seed-heads are even stronger. You can eat the leaves and flowers, as in salads. The leaves can also be cooked as a flavoring with other vegetables in soups, etc.

Chive Blossoms - Use whenever a light onion flavor and aroma is desired. Separate the florets and enjoy the mild, onion flavor in a variety of dishes.

Garlic Blossoms - The flowers can be white or pink, and the stems are flat instead of round. The flavor has a garlicky zing that brings out the flavor of your favorite food. Milder than the garlic bulb. Wonderful in salads.

Angelica - Depending on the variety, flower range from pale lavender-blue to deep rose. It has a flavor similar to licorice. Angelica is valued culinarily from the seeds and stems, which are candied and used in liqueurs, to the young leaves and shoots, which can be added to a green salad. Because of its celery-like flavor, Angelica has a natural affinity with fish. The root lends an interesting juniper-like flavor to breads. Often the leaves are minced and used as a part of a court bouillon to season poaching liquid. The leaves have a stronger, clean taste and make an interesting addition to salads. In its native northern Europe, even the mature leaves are used, particularly by the Laplanders, as a natural fish preservative. Many people in the cold Northern regions such as Greenland, Siberia, and Finland consider Angelica a vegetable, and eat the stems raw, sometimes spread with butter. Young leaves can be made into a tea.

Anise Hyssop - Both flowers and leaves have a delicate anise or licorice flavor. Some people say the flavor reminds them of root beer. The blossoms make attractive plate garnishes and are often used in Chinese-style dishes

Apple Blossoms - Apple Blossoms have a delicate floral flavor and aroma. They are a nice accompaniment to fruit dishes and can easily be candied to use as a garnish. Eat in moderation; may contain cyanide precursors.

Arugula - Also called garden rocket, roquette, rocket-salad, Oruga, Rocketsalad, rocket-gentle; Rauenkohl (German); rouquelle (French); rucola (Italian). An Italian green usually appreciated raw in salads or on sandwiches. The flowers are small, white with dark centers and can be used in the salad for a light piquant flavor. The flowers taste very similar to the leaves and range in color from white to yellowish with dark purple veins. Arugula resembles radish leaves in both appearance and taste. Leaves are compound and have a spicy, peppery flavor that starts mild in

Aquatic Plants - Cattails and Lotus Leaves

Banana Blossoms -

Basil - Depending on the type, the flowers are either bright white, pale pink or delicate lavender. The flavor of the flower is milder, but similar to the leaves of the same plant. Basil also has different varieties that have different milder flavors like lemon and mint. Sprinkle them over salad or pasta for a concentrated flavor and a spark of color that gives any dish a fresh, festive look.

Bee Balm - Also called Wild Bergamot, Wild Oswego Tea, Horsemint, Monarda. Wild bee balm tastes like oregano and mint. The taste of bee balm is reminiscent of citrus with soft mingling of lemon and orange. The red flowers have a minty flavor. Any place you use oregano, you can use bee balm blossoms. The leaves and flower petals can also be used in both fruit and regular salads. The leaves taste like the main ingredient in Earl Gray Tea and can be used as a substitute.

Borage - Has lovely cornflower blue star-shaped flowers. Blossoms have a cool, cucumber taste. Wonderful in punches, lemonade, gin and tonics, sorbets, chilled soups, cheese tortas, and dips.

Broccoli Florets - The top portion of broccoli is actually flower buds. Given time each will burst into a bright yellow flower, which is why they are called florets. Small yellow flowers have a mild spiciness (mild broccoli flavor), and are delicious in salads or in a stir-fry or steamer.

Burnet - The taste usually is likened to that of cucumbers, and burnet can be used interchangeably with borage.

Calendula - Also called Marigolds. A wonderful edible flower. Flavors range from spicy to bitter, tangy to peppery. Their sharp taste resembles saffron (also known as Poor Man's Saffron). Has pretty petals in golden-orange hues. Sprinkle them on soups, pasta or rice dishes, herb butters, and salads. Petals add a yellow tint to soups, spreads, and scrambled eggs.

Carnations - Steep in wine, candy, or use as cake decoration. To use the surprisingly sweet petals in desserts, cut them away from the bitter white base of the flower. Dianthus are the miniature member of the carnation family with light clove-like or nutmeg scent. Petals add color to salads or aspics. Carnation petals are one of secret ingredients that has been used to make Chartreuse, a French liqueur, since the 17th century.

Chamomile - The flowers are small and daisy-like and have a sweet, apple-like flavor.

Chervil - Chervil flowers are delicate white flowers with an anise flavor. Chervil's flavor is lost very easily, either by drying the herb, or too much heat. That is why it should be added at the end of cooking or sprinkled on in its fresh, raw state

Chicory - Earthy flavor, eat either the petals or the buds. Chicory has a pleasant, mild-bitter taste that has been compared to endive.

Chrysanthemums - Tangy, slightly bitter, ranging in colors from red, white, yellow and orange. They range in taste from faint peppery to mild cauliflower. They should be blanched first and then scatter the petals on a salad. The leaves can also be used to flavor vinegar. Always remove the bitter flower base and use petals only. Young leaves and stems of the Crown Daisy, also known as Chop Suey Greens or Shingiku in Japan, are widely used in oriental stir-fries and as salad seasoning.

Cilantro/Cilantro - Like the leaves and seeds, the flowers have a strong herbal flavor. Use leaves and flowers raw as the flavor fades quickly when cooked. Sprinkle to taste on salads, bean dishes, and cold vegetable dishes.

Citrus blossoms (orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit, kumquat) - Use highly scented waxy petals sparingly. Distilled orange flower water is characteristic of Middle Eastern pastries and beverages. Citrus flavor and lemony.

Clover - Sweet, anise-like, licorice.

Cornflower - Also called Bachelor's button. They have a slightly sweet to spicy, clove-like flavor. Bloom is a natural food dye. More commonly used as garnish.

Dandelions - Member of Daisy family. Flowers are sweetest when picked young, and just before eating. They have a sweet, honey-like flavor. Mature flowers are bitter. Good raw or steamed. Also made into wine. Young leaves taste good steamed, or tossed in salads. When serving a rice dish use dandelion petals like confetti over the rice.

Daylilies - Slightly sweet with a mild vegetable flavor, like sweet lettuce or melon. Their flavor is a combination of asparagus and zucchini. Some people think that different colored blossoms have different flavors. To use the surprisingly sweet petals in desserts, cut them away from the bitter white base of the flower. Also great to stuff like squash blossoms. Flowers look beautiful on composed salad platters or crowning a frosted cake. Sprinkle the large petals in a spring salad. In the spring, gather shoots two or three inches tall and use as a substitute for asparagus. NOTE: Many Lilies contain alkaloids and are NOT edible. Day Lillies may act as a laxative.

Dill - Tangy; like leaves but stronger. Use yellow dill flowers as you would the herb itself - to season hot or cold soups, seafood, dressings or dips. Seeds used in pickling and baking.

Elderberry - The blossoms are a creamy color and have a sweet scent and sweet taste. When harvesting elderberry flowers, do not wash them as that removes much of the fragrance and flavor. Instead check them carefully for insects. The fruit is used to make wine. CAUTION: All other parts of this plant are poisonous! Do not even eat the stems of the flowers!

English Daisy - The flowers have a mildly bitter taste and are most commonly used for their looks than their flavor. The petals are used as a garnish and in salads.

Fennel - Lovely, star-burst yellow flowers have a mild anise flavor. Use with desserts or cold soups, or as a garnish with entrees.

Fuchsia - Blooms have no distinct flavor. Explosive colors and graceful shape make it ideal as garnish.

Gardenia - Intensely fragrant light cream-colored blossom used for decorative purposes. In the Far East, dried gardenia blossoms impart fragrance to jasmine tea.

Garden Sorrel - Sorrel flowers are tart, lemon tasting. So use like a lemon: on pizza, a salad topping, in sauces, over cucumber salads.

Geranium -

Gladiolas - Flowers (anthers removed) have a nondescript flavor (taste vaguely like lettuce) but make lovely receptacles for sweet or savory spreads or mousses. Toss individual petals in salads.

Hibiscus - Cranberry-like flavor with citrus overtones. Use slightly acidic petals sparingly in salads or as garnish.

Hollyhock - Very bland tasting flavor.

Honeysuckle - Sweet honey flavor. Berries are highly poisonous - Do not eat them!

Hyacinth - The bulb of this plant is edible and was a particular favorite of the Nez Perce Indians. It was eaten either raw or cooked and has a sweet, nutlike flavor.

Jasmine - The flowers are intensely fragrant and are traditionally used for scenting tea.

Johnny-Jump-Ups - Lovely yellow, white and purple blooms have a mild wintergreen flavor and can be used in salads, to decorate cakes, or served with soft cheese. They are also a great addition to drinks, soups, desserts or salads.

Lavender - Sweet, floral flavor, with lemon and citrus notes. Flowers look beautiful and taste good too in a glass of champagne, with chocolate cake, or as a garnish for sorbets or ice creams. Lavender lends itself to savory dishes also, from hearty stews to wine-reduced sauces. Diminutive blooms add a mysterious scent to custards, flans or sorbets. NOTE: Do not consume lavender oil unless you absolutely know that it has not be sprayed and is culinary safe.

Lemon Verbena - Tiny cream-colored citrus-scented blossoms. Leaves and flowers steeped as an herb tea, and used to flavor custards and flans.

Lilac - The flavor of lilacs varies from plant to plant. Very perfumy, slightly bitter. Has a distinct lemony taste with floral, pungent overtones. Great in salads.

Linden - Small flowers, white to yellow was are delightfully fragrant and have a honeylike flavor.

Marjoram - Flowers are a milder version of plant's leaf. Use as you would the herb.

Mint - The flavor of the flowers is minty, with different overtones depending on the variety. Mint flowers and leaves are great in Middle Eastern dishes.

Mustard - Young leaves can be steamed, used as a herb, eaten raw, or cooked like spinach. NOTE: Some people are highly allergic to mustard. Start with a small amount.

Nasturtiums - Come in varieties ranging from trailing to upright and in brilliant sunset colors with peppery flavors. Nasturtiums rank among most common edible flowers. Blossoms have a sweet, spicy flavor similar to watercress. Stuff whole flowers with savory mousse. Leaves add peppery tang to salads. Pickled seed pods are less expensive substitute for capers. Use entire flowers to garnish platters, salads, cheese tortas, open-faced sandwiches, and savory appetizers.

Okra - Also known as Ochro, Okoro, Quingombo, Quingumbo, Ladies Fingers and Gumbo. It has hibiscus-like flowers and seed pods that, when picked tender, produce a delicious vegetable dish when stewed or fried. When cooked it resembles asparagus yet it may be left raw and served in a cold salad. The ripe seeds have been used as a substitute for coffee; the seed can be dried and powdered for storage and future use.

Oregano - Milder version of plant's leaf. Use as you would the herb.

Pansy - Pansies have a slightly sweet green or grassy flavor. If you eat only the petals, the flavor is extremely mild, but if you eat the whole flower, there is a winter, green overtone. Use them as garnishes, in fruit salads, green salad, desserts or in soups.

Pea Blossoms - NOTE: Flowering ornamental sweet peas are poisonous. Edible garden peas bloom mostly in white, but may have other pale coloring. The blossoms are slightly sweet and crunchy and they taste like peas. The shoots and vine tendrils are edible, with a delicate, pea-like flavor. Here again, remember that harvesting blooms will diminish your pea harvest, so you may want to plant extra.

Petunia - Petunia flowers have a mild flowery taste and can be used as a garnish.

Pineapple Guava - The flavor is sweet and tropical, somewhat like a freshly picked ripe papaya or exotic melon still warm from the sun.

Primrose - Colorful with a sweet, but bland taste.

Queen Anne's Lace - Flavor is lightly carrot like. Great in salads.

Radish Flowers - Depending on the variety, flowers may be pink, white or yellow, and will have a distinctive, spicy bite (has a radish flavor). Best used in salads.

Rosemary - Milder version of leaf. Fresh or dried herb and blossoms enhance flavor of Mediterranean dishes. Use with meats, seafoods, sorbets or dressings .

Roses - Flavors depend on type, color, and soil conditions. Flavor reminiscent of strawberries and green apples. Sweet, with subtle undertones ranging from fruit to mint to spice. All roses are edible, with the flavor being more pronounced in the darker varieties. In miniature varieties can garnish ice cream and desserts, or larger petals can be sprinkled on desserts or salads. Freeze them in ice cubes and float them in punches also. Petals used in syrups, jellies, perfumed butters and sweet spreads.

Safflower - Its dried flowers, Mexican saffron, are used as a food colorant in place of the more aromatic and expensive Spanish saffron.

Sage - The flowers are violet-blue, pink or white up to 1 3/8 inches long, small, tubelike, clustered together in whorls along the stem tops. Flowers have a subtler sage taste than the leaves and can be used in salads and as a garnish. Flowers are a delicious companion to many foods including beans, corn dishes, sauteed or stuffed mushrooms, or pesto sauce.

Savory - The flavor of the flowers is somewhat hot and peppery.

Scarlet Runner Beans - Bean pods toughen as they age, so make use of young pods as well as flowers. **Please note: Sweet Pea flowers are not edible.**

Scented Geraniums - The flower flavor generally corresponds to the variety. For example, a lemon-scented geranium would have lemon-scented flowers. They come in fragrances from citrus and spice to fruits and flowers, and usually in colors of pinks and pastels. Sprinkle them over desserts and in refreshing drinks or freeze in ice cubes. NOTE: Citronelle variety may not be edible.

Snap Dragon - Delicate garden variety can be bland to bitter. Flavors depend on type, color, and soil conditions.

Squash Blossoms - Squash and pumpkin blossoms are edible and taste mildly of raw squash. Prepare the blossoms by washing and trimming the stems and remove the stamens.

Sunflower - The flower is best eaten in the bud stage when it tastes similar to artichokes. Once the flower opens, the petals may be used like chrysanthemums, the flavor is distinctly bittersweet. The unopened flower buds can also be steamed like artichokes.

Sweet Woodruff - The flower flavor is sweet and grassy with a hint of nutty, vanilla flavor.

Thyme - Milder version of leaf. Use sprigs as garnish or remove flowers and sprinkle over soups, etc. (anywhere the herb might be used.)

Tuberous Begonia - **NOTE:** Only Hybrids are edible. The petals of the tuberous begonias are edible. Their bright colors and sour, fruity taste bring flavor and beauty to any summer salad. Begonia blossoms have a delicious citrusy sour taste and a juicy crunch. The petals are used as a garnish and in salads. Stems, also, can be used in place of rhubarb. The flowers and stems

contain oxalic acid and should not be consumed by individuals suffering from gout, kidney stones, or rheumatism.

Tulip Petals - Flavor varies from tulip to tulip, but generally the petals taste like sweet lettuce, fresh baby peas, or a cucumber-like texture and flavor. NOTE: Some people have had strong allergic reactions to them. If touching them causes a rash, numbness etc. Don't eat them! Don't eat the bulbs ever.

Violets - Sweet, perfumed flavor. Related flowers, Johnny jump-ups or violas, and pansies now come in colorful purples and yellows to apricot and pastel hues. I like to eat the tender leaves and flowers in salads. I also use the flowers to beautifully embellish desserts and iced drinks. Freeze them in punches to delight children and adults alike. All of these flowers make pretty adornments for frosted cakes, sorbets, or any other desserts, and they may be crystallized as well. heartshaped leaves are edible, and tasty when cooked like spinach.

Yucca Petals - The white Yucca flower is crunchy with a mildly sweet taste (a hint of artichoke). In the spring, they can be used in salads and as a garnish.