

Edible Flower Ideas

This collection of edible flowers concentrates on easy-to-grow varieties that can mix right in your vegetable beds if desired and will bloom the first year from seed. Some will be tasty and to eat, while others will be garnish—taste and see. The flowers of cooking herbs like dill, rosemary, thyme, cilantro, fennel, or chive are good in food, and many herbal tea plants like the mints, anise hyssop, the clovers, and lemon balm have beautiful flowers. To learn about other edible flowers, check your library or Booklet 18 in our catalog.

Planting

Calendula, cornflower, and heartsease (johnny-jump-up) can be planted in early spring, and again in fall, at the same time as peas and lettuce. Plant a few every 2 weeks or so for continuous bloom. Borage, nasturtium, and hollyhocks should be planted in mid-spring, when danger of frost is past. Scarlet runner and marigold need warmer soil, and can go in with your main summer vegetables, or get a start indoors.

Places to plant are limitless: containers on the patio keep them where you can use and enjoy them often. Vegetable beds give flowers ideal conditions for quick, strong growth and keep kitchen plants together. The edges or corners of beds are ideal for sprawling flowers like nasturtiums, heartsease, and borage. Flowerbeds or permanent plantings can make a good home, especially for hollyhocks, because they generally live two to five years and are a large plant (3 feet across and up to 8 feet tall). Don't plant seeds among permanent plants—start them in flats or pots and put them in the garden after they are big enough not to get lost. I have seen heartsease and nasturtiums thriving in old pots and pans, old boots, windowboxes, and under shrubs—anywhere they can have rich soil and enough moisture. Scarlet runner beans and hollyhocks are large plants and can be a focal point...Runner beans and sunflowers could make an edible “house” for kids.

In the Kitchen

General Tips Cornflowers, marigolds, and calendulas have brightly-colored petals emerging from a round green base. They make long-lasting garnishes whole, but for eating, it is often best to grab the petals and pull them out of the green base, then sprinkle them on your food for a bright confetti effect...Marigolds vary in flavor—some will be unpalatable, so nibble yours to see. They are all non-toxic, so use them on cheese trays, cake décor, or other garnish...heartsease can be cut back by half its length when bloom starts to slacken; you can chop and eat the whole plant. Given a bit of compost and water, it will bloom heavily again... Remember to wash and pat dry your flowers.

Salads Borage flowers have the taste of cucumber and are classic in salads (the stems are fuzzy--trim them off)...Heartsease is bite-sized with has a nice taste and texture...scarlet runner flowers are gorgeous in salad, and you can include the young growing tips of the vines...Hollyhocks can be torn up in salad, used for garnish, stuffed with a light salad mixture like tabouli, ricotta, hummus, etc, or used as a pretty container for salad condiments, like croutons, green peas, cheese, herbs, nuts, etc. Nasturtiums add lots of color to salads, and those who like the peppery leaves can add them too...Enliven rice potato, and pasta salads with bean blossoms, borage, and nasturtiums... Include bean blossoms, nasturtiums, and hollyhocks on veggie, dip, or cheese trays...Infuse borage, nasturtium, chive, in vinegar for salad dressing and gifts...sprinkle petals on dips.

Cooked Dishes Scatter petals on pasta, plain rice, or steamed vegetables just before serving...Calendula is a time-honored ingredient in soups, both for the beautiful gold color it gives the broth, and its health benefits. You can dry the petals easily for winter use by pulling them free and spreading them in an airy place...Add scarlet runner flowers and growing tips or almost-open nasturtium flowers and buds to a stir-fry ...Cook heartsease or calendula right in with steamed or braised greens or other vegetables... Squash or zucchini blossoms are often stuffed and fried or baked... mustard, kale, cabbage, arugula, or radish flowers may be added to soups and vegetables or salads—they are quite sweet...Nasturtiums are a particularly good match with potatoes—add blooms, buds, or leaves to a potato salad, potato soup, or mashed potatoes.

Nasturtium cakes

Wash and cube **2 lbs potatoes**. Boil in salted water until done. Drain well.

Finely chop: **1 Tbsp chives**, **1 Tbsp shallots** or onions, **1tsp fresh dill** leaves and flowers, **1 clove garlic**, **1/3 cup nasturtium** flowers, baby leaves, etc...

Mash the potatoes with 2 Tbsp olive oil, one egg (or 2Tbsp tofu) a pinch of salt, pepper to taste, and all the above ingredients. When cool, form into little 3'' patties. If not dry enough to hold its shape, coat with breadcrumbs or a bit of flour.

Heat some oil in a heavy frying pan (medium heat). Put 1 clove garlic in the oil while it heats, and remove when gold. Put in the patties, and fry until crisp and golden. Garnish with **sour cream**, sea salt, nasturtiums, and cornflowers. Serve with a salad of mixed greens, borage flowers, cucumber, and walnuts. Or serve with applesauce. Or both.

Drinks Small flower can be frozen into an ice cube for elegant and cool summer drinks... Borage flowers look and taste cool in drinks... Mix 2c sugar with 2 cup water, 5 hollyhock flowers and 1 tsp lavender flowers or ½ cup rose petals. Bring to a boil, then strain and use to sweeten lemonade or other drinks...Hollyhock, runner bean or calendula add color and body to hot teas...Hollyhock tea with honey is an old cure for sore throats.

Desserts All of the flowers look lovely on cake, cheesecake, shortcake, fruit...Bake brownies in round pan, frost with stiff whipped cream, and decorate with sprays of flowers and leaves for a very quick, elegant torte... Make gelatin dessert with unflavored gelatin and lemon or apple juice. Pour a mold half full, and chill till hardened. Then pour in the rest of the gelatin, **lukewarm**, and arrange flowers in it. Chill. If you'll be unmolding the gelatin, remember to have your flowers upside-down... Calendula makes custards and ice creams golden...Dab frosting and a single heartsease on a cookie...or try

Candied Flower Jewels

For borage, heartsease, rose petals, violets, pansies, scarlet runner, hollyhock, mint leaves, and other flowers that are edible, newly-opened, and not too thick.

Stir 2 cups sugar and **1 1/3 cup water** together in a saucepan until the sugar has dissolved. Bring to a boil and cook until it reaches the soft ball stage (when you drop a small amount of the mixture from a spoon into a cup of cold water, it makes a little soft ball and sinks to the bottom of the cup). Turn the heat to its lowest setting and add about 12 flowers or rose petals to the syrup. Stir gently for 20 seconds, then lift them out and place on non-stick parchment or waxed paper, gently separating the flowers. Repeat. Dry in a warm airy place. They can be stored in an airtight jar for 2 or 3 months.

