

EDIBLE FLOWERS

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THERE is nothing more spectacular than garnishing salads, savory or sweet dishes with delicious edible flowers. Most of us are aware that there is a large range of plants with edible flowers, but the various books and magazines seem to list the same flowers – Calendula (*Calendula officinalis* – petals only), Carnation and Dianthus (*Dianthus* spp.), Viola and Pansy (*Viola* spp.), Lavender (*Lavandula* spp. – petals only) and Roses (*Rosa* cultivars – petals only). Coming from cooler climates, these plants often require a little more love or attention in our gardens.

The good news is that there are many hardy plants with edible flowers that thrive in warmer climates. That's to be expected, as we live in the climate zone with the world's greatest biodiversity. You probably already have some in your own garden.

SOME SIMPLE RULES TO FOLLOW:

- Positively identify flowers before eating them. Some look-alikes aren't edible;
- Ensure the plant has been grown organically and hasn't been sprayed or subjected to traffic fumes and dust – this goes for all edibles;
- Pick freshly opened flowers early in the morning when they are cool, plump, crisp and full of flavour and nutrients;
- Gently clean, dry and store in the fridge until needed, avoiding crushing; and
- Be cautious when selecting flowers to eat - many flowers taste bad, some are quite poisonous.

Following are lists of some commonly eaten flowers. Many have been part of the human diet since time immemorial. Some flowers have tasty petals but the lower petals or base of the flower may be bitter or fibrous and are best removed. Some flowers require a light steaming or cooking. I have endeavored to note this below.

Vegetables and herbs

Chives and Garlic Chives
(*Allium schoenoprasum* and *A. tuberosum*)
Borage (*Borago officinalis*)
Pumpkin/Squash/Zucchini (*Cucurbita* spp.)
– great deep fried or stuffed and deep fried
Jerusalem Artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*)
Rosella (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*)
Poor Man's Bean (*Lablab purpureus*)
Loofah (*Luffa* spp.)
Velvet bean (*Mucuna pruriens*)
Green Bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*)
Raddish (*Raphanus sativus*)
Lowland Pitpit (*Saccharum edule*) and Highland Pitpit (*Setaria palmifolia*) – flower buds when enclosed in sheaths popular in PNG/Pacific Islands
Pineapple Sage (*Salvia elegans*)
Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)
Toothache Plant, Para Cress (*Spilanthes acmella*)
Snake Bean (*Vigna unguiculata* ssp. *sesquipedalis*)
Rice Bean (*Vigna umbellata*)
Scented Geraniums (*Pelargonium* spp.)
Native violet (*Viola hederacea* now called *Viola banksii*)



Annuals

Emilia (*Emilia sonchifolia*)
– unopened flowers and shoots
Sunflower (*Helichrysum annuus*) – petals
Sweet Alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*)
– flowers and leaves
Marigolds (*Tagetes erecta*)
Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*)

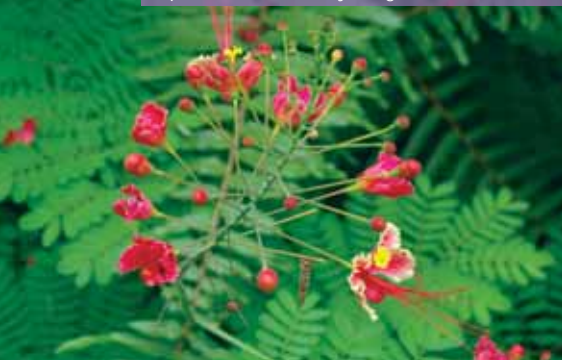
Perennials

Dahlia (*Dahlia* cultivars)
Day lily (*Emerocallis* cultivars)
– in particular the double 'Kwanso'
– petals, also young leaves and shoots
Formosa Lily (*Lilium formosanum*)
– flowers, also bulbs, leaves and stems
Marvel of Peru (*Mirabilis jalapa*)
– colouring produced from flowers,
young leaves
Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis*)
– flowers raw or cooked, also roots,
young shoots and leaves
Tuberose (*Polianthes tuberosa*)
Society Garlic (*Tulbaghia violacea*)
Cape Lily (*Veltheimia bracteata*)
– flowers eaten like spinach



Shrubs

Dwarf Poinciana (*Caesalpinia pulcherrima*) – flowers lightly cooked
Various Citrus (*Citrus* spp.) e.g. Limes, Lemons, Oranges, Mandarins – petals
Gardenia (*Gardenia jasminoides*) – eaten raw and added to dry ingredients (e.g. tea, rice) for fragrance
Hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa sinensis* cultivars), also Red Leaf Hibiscus (*H. acetosella*), Native Hibiscus (*H. heterophyllus*), Coral Hibiscus (*H. schizopetalus*), Cottonwood (*H. tiliaceus*) – buds and petals
Ixora (*Ixora javanica*) – young flowers popular in Thai vegetable soup
Sleeping Hibiscus (*Malvaviscus arboreus*)
Mock Orange (*Murraya paniculata*)
– petals as well as young leaves and fruit



Trees

Chinese Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia purpurea* – autumn flowering) and Indian Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia variegata* – spring flowering)
young flowers and buds used in curries, also young leaves and young pods.
Pudding Pipe tree (*Cassia fistula*) and Thai Cassia (*Cassia siamea*)
– young leaves
Frangipani (*Plumeria rubra*) – flowers popular in omelettes, fried, in salads, as tea
Bombax (*Bombax ceiba*) – fleshy flowers popular for curries
Madre de Cacao (*Gliricidia sepium*)
– flowers cooked in batter
Pachira (*Pachira aquatica* and *P. insignis*)
– flowers, also raw or roasted seeds and young leaves
Rosewood (*Pterocarpus indica*) – flowers, also young leaves
Hummingbird Tree (*Sesbania grandiflora*)
– flower petals, also young leaves
Mahoe (*Thespesia populnea*) – flowers, also young leaves



Climbers

Coral Vine (*Antignon leptopus*) flowers raw or in omelettes, cooked tubers and young leaves
Bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea braziliensis*)
– stewed bracts to colour drinks violet
Moon Flower (*Calonyction album*) – edible fleshy calyx (flower base), young leaves
Blue Butterfly Pea (*Clitoria ternatea*)
– flowers, cooked or raw, and to colour rice blue, also young leaves and pods
Fragrant Telosma (*Telosma cordata*)
– flowers, also young leaves
Jasmine (*Jasminum officinale* and *J. sambac*) – flowers eaten and added to dry ingredients (e.g. tea, rice) for fragrance



Gingers

Many gingers have edible flowers which are very popular in their native lands due to their fleshy nature and fragrant qualities.
Spiral Gingers (*Costus* spp.) – many species, each with distinct citrus flavours – add to salads
Hidden Ginger Lilies (*Curcuma* spp.)
– flower bracts are widely eaten as a vegetable – in particular Thai Tulip (*Curcuma alimatifolia*)
Torch Ginger (*Etlingera elatior*) eaten raw – sold in quantity at Asian markets
White Ginger (*Hedychium coronarium*)
– young flowers and buds steamed



Enjoy adding some flowers to your meals. Not only can they dress up any dish, but they can be a valuable and nutritious additions to the diet. **STG**

Go to www.stgmagazine.com.au for more details of edible flowers of palms, waterlilies, succulents and native edible flowers.

