

NEU/HSA Teaching Herb Garden: Edible Flowers and Plants

Introduction: Many of the foods that we eat such, as broccoli, are actually flowers. Here is a list of unusual edible flowers and plants that can add variety and whimsy to your dinner plate. As a cautionary note, be aware that not all flowers, plants or herbs are edible, and some can be even highly toxic. On first glance some plants may look similar and can be misidentified. Make sure you have properly identified a plant before consuming it! Individual reactions to plants and flowers vary. Use caution when introducing edible flowers and plants into your diet. Add one at a time and use small quantities at first until you are sure that you do not have an adverse reaction to them. Do not use flowers or plants from nurseries or florists unless they are certified organic, because they may have been sprayed with pesticides or treated with preparations not intended for food consumption. Be wary when harvesting from the "wild" or people's lawns as plants may also have been sprayed with pesticides or herbicides. Enjoy!

Common Name	Botanical Name	Facts and Uses
Amaranth	<i>Amaranthus retroflexus</i>	Annual, native to Central America, naturalized here. Use young leaves in salads and soups, stir-fries. Seeds can be used whole or ground into meal.
Anise Hyssop	<i>Agastache foeniculum</i>	Young leaves and flower petals have anise flavor. Use in savory dishes, chicken marinade, salads, cold drinks, baked goods. Dried flowers and leaves are a good tea ingredient.
Arugula	<i>Eruca vesicaria</i>	Upright, mustard-like annual; readily re-seeds self. Use young leaves in salads, more mature leaves can be sautéed with onions in stir-fries, soups. Flowers add a tangy taste to salads, sandwiches, etc.
Bee Balm	<i>Monarda didyma</i> <i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Red flowers are considered the tastiest; all monarda flowers have a fairly strong spicy, minty taste. Add to salads, sprinkle over mild cooked fish, use in fruit salad, use in teas and jellies. Dried leaves and flowers are a good tea ingredient.
Borage	<i>Borago officinalis</i>	Native to Europe and Africa. An annual that reseeds itself. Flowers and leaves have mild cucumber flavor. Harvest young leaves and flowers. Use in salads, to garnish cream soups. Candy flowers to decorate cakes. Pregnant and lactating women should avoid.
Calendula	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>	Annual; likes rich, fast draining soils. Reseeds readily. Used back to Roman days as a substitute for saffron. Petals have a tangy, bitter taste. Separate petals from head and use in salads, rice dishes, herb butters, herbal vinegars or as a garnish. Dried flowers can be added to teas.
Chives	<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>	Perennial. Blooms in Spring. Both grass-like leaves and globular lavender flowers are edible and have mild onion flavor. Use in salads, mixed in soft cheese, garnish soups and other dishes. Use the blossoms in herbal vinegars.
Clove Pink	<i>Dianthus caryophyllus</i>	Single or semi-double flowers have a clove-like scent. Use petals in decorating desserts and to steep in wine. This is the forerunner of our modern carnation.
Creeping Thyme	<i>Thymus praecox</i>	Perennial. Native to Mediterranean. Hardy to Zone 5. Flowers can be used to garnish soups, salads, sauces, incorporated into soft cheeses and butter. Infuse flowers in honey. Use dried leaves in teas.
Dahlia	<i>Dahlia spp</i>	Annual. Petals add flavor, color and interest to dishes.
Dandelions	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	Naturalized throughout US. Leaves are high in vitamins A, C and B-complex, iron. Leaves are best if used in early spring when they are tender. Use in salads, stir-fries, soups, sauté and serve as greens. Use flower petals in salads and as garnish. Flowers used to make wine. Roots can be used in stir-fries and soups, or dried and ground and used as a coffee substitute.
Day Lilies	<i>Hemerocallis spp.</i>	Found throughout US. In Chinese cooking, dried day lilies are called Golden Needles and used in Moo Shu and in hot and sour soup. Buds can be sautéed and taste somewhat like asparagus or green beans. Remove stamens and pistil of flower and stuff with bread crumbs or cheese and sauté or dip in batter and deep fry. Or chop and add to soups, salads. Sweet flowers can be made into a sorbet. Tubers can be eaten raw or cooked and used like potatoes. Some people have difficulty digesting day lilies so use caution when first trying them."
Evening Primrose	<i>Oenothera biennis</i>	Biennial. Flowers, roots and seeds are edible. Flowers open in the evening and have a light, lemony scent. Stir-fry flowers or use in salads. Harvest roots from late fall of first year to early spring to use in stews, soups, stir-fries.

Garden Thyme	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	Leaves and flowers are used in soups, stews, in baked or sautéed vegetables, stuffings, vinegars, marinades, etc. Infuse flowers in honey and use in tea or on toast. Use dried leaves in teas.
Hollyhock	<i>Alcea spp.</i>	Flowers are bland. Petals and cooked flower buds can be used in salads to add a dash of color.
Labrador Violets	<i>Viola labradorica</i>	Use flowers in salads, May wine, herbal vinegars and candied as a garnish to decorate desserts. As with other violets, leaves are high in vitamins A and C, and fiber. They're a good addition to salads and soups.
Ladies Mantle	<i>Alchemilla vulgaris</i>	Leaves are used as an ingredient of Easter ledger pudding.
Lamb's Quarters	<i>Chenopodium album</i>	Use in salads or cook like spinach. Grind seeds into flour.
Lavender	<i>Lavendula angustifolia spp.</i>	Flowers can be steeped for making jellies, to flavor sorbets, vinegars, lemonade. Lavender sugar can be used in baking cookies. The flowers can be crystallized to decorate desserts. Leaves are used in marinades and for flavoring stews. Caution: use in small quantities as flavor can be overpowering. Also ingesting large quantities can be toxic.
Signet Gem Marigolds	<i>Tagetes tenuifolia</i> "Lemon Gem" and "Tangerine Gem"	Easily grown annual, fun for kids. Use sparingly in salads and as garnishes. The Gem varieties have a citrus flavor.
Nasturtiums	<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>	Flowers, leaves and seed pods are all edible. Has a tangy, peppery flavor. Use in salads, herbal butters, as garnish. The seeds can be pickled and used like capers. The flowers, steeped in white wine vinegar make beautiful orangey vinegar.
Ox-eye Daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i>	It is the traditional "he loves me, he loves me not" flower. The young leaves or unopened buds have a peppery taste and can be used in salads. Do not confuse with daisy fleabane which is poisonous.
Peppermint	<i>Mentha piperita</i>	Perennial. Use flowers in green or fruit salads. Use to flavor and garnish cold drinks. Dried flowers and leaves can be used in teas.
Pineapple Mint	<i>Mentha suaveolens</i>	Same as above.
Pinks	<i>Dianthus spp</i>	Use petals in decorating desserts and to steep in wine, add color to salads, decorate baked goods.
Greater or Broad leaf Plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>	Use only young leaves in salads; older leaves are too tough and stringy. Dried seeds can be eaten whole or ground into flour.
Narrow Leaf Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Same as above.
Queen Anne's Lace	<i>Daucus carota</i>	Biennial. Roots smell and taste like carrots. High in vitamins and fiber. Add roots to stews and stir-fries. Strip florets off of head and use in salads. Young leaves can be added to salads, stir-fries, and soups. Caution! Make sure has carrot-like smell and slightly hairy stems before using. Can be confused with Poison Hemlock and Water Hemlock which is highly toxic.
Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Located throughout the US. Flower petals can be batter fried or used in salads.
Roses	<i>Rosa rugosa</i> 'Frau Dagmar Hartopp'	Most species and varieties can be used. Petals can be candied and used as decoration or garnish on desserts. Also can use petals to make jellies, jams, rose water and vinegar. Rose hips have a high concentration of vitamin C and can be made into jelly, jams, toppings, or dried and made into tea.
Snap Dragon	<i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	While they are edible, the flowers can have a bland to bitter taste.
Sweet Woodruff	<i>Asperula odorata</i>	Flowers used in making May wine. Caution: Do not eat in large amounts. Can be toxic.
Wood Sorrel	<i>Oxalis stricta</i>	Leaves and flowers have a tart, lemony taste. Add leaves and flowers to salads. Caution: High in oxalic acid which can interfere with the absorption of calcium if used in large amounts.

Chart researched and compiled by Riekie Sluder and Iris Weaver for the New England Unit, Inc. of The Herb Society of America. September 2007