

The Tastier Side of Gardening

Part One of Five: Edible Flowers

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Every Master Gardener Program, Garden Club, and Botanical Garden volunteer group I have been involved with has loved to eat. With the focus on horticulture and food, I started to accumulate a lot of information over the years which prompted me to organize it so I could share it. The explosion of information on the internet, Food TV channels, The Seed to Table movement, and the shift toward organic gardening has renewed interest in growing edible flowers. Climate change, droughts, and the move to eliminate turf when possible have encouraged homeowners to have landscapes that are multipurpose: Beautiful, Bountiful, and Earth Friendly.

Let's get growing! Perhaps you aren't sure how to get started or maybe you would like to refresh your vegetable gardening knowledge. Please take a moment to check out the IFAS publications pertaining to this topic, at gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu. I would like to stress the importance of soil health which directly impacts considerations for raised beds versus ground level planting, see <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep472>. Refer to the Southwest Florida Vegetable Planting publications as a guide to what/when to plant/harvest to ensure a successful growing experience: Organic Vegetable Gardening in Florida, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs1215>, Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh021>, and South Florida Gardening Calendar <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep452>.

I have always liked to interplant flowers in my vegetable and herb gardens. This is especially important when my garden is visible and not tucked away on the side or rear of my yard. Companion planting has long been a practice to keep pests under control naturally, enhance productivity, conserve resources, and attract beneficial insects. Did you know that garlic repels rose pests, marigolds control root nematodes in melons, and nasturtiums repel cucumber beetles, to note just a few benefits? For more in depth information please refer to Sustainable Agriculture Companion Planting & Botanical Pesticides, attra.ncat.org, and Organic Vegetable Garden Companion Planting, Sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu. Edible flowers fill in when crops are in transition and can impact planting bed placement by creating an aesthetically pleasing landscape.

Before you start grazing in the garden the following guidelines are extremely important:

- DO NOT eat flowers from florists, nurseries, garden centers, or side of road. Know your source!
NO PESTICIDES!! Best to grow your own.
- DO NOT use a non-edible flower as a garnish.
- IDENTIFY the flower first. NOT ALL PARTS OF A PLANT ARE EDIBLE. Check a reliable source such as AMA Handbook of Poisonous & Injurious Plants. Many plants create toxins to deter insects which can affect humans.
- REMOVE stamens and styles, and sometimes sepals. They can affect allergies and taste.
- HARVEST early AM (best flavor) or late PM. When dew has dried, shake and wash in cold water, store in container in refrigerator for up to one week but best if used same day.
- INTRODUCE to diet in small amounts; DO NOT eat if you have allergies, asthma, or hay fever. REMEMBER edible does not mean palatable. What tastes good to me may not hold true for you. Taste is subjective.

I hope you found the topic of Edible Flowers interesting, helpful, and worth trying. Remember to add edible flowers to your garden, and try new flavors and recipes using edible flowers.

Get growing and Bon Appétit!

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