

# 42 FLOWERS YOU CAN EAT!

Excerpted from the book [True Food: Eight Simple Steps to a Healthier You](#) (National Geographic, 2009) By Annie B. Bond, Melissa Breyer, and Wendy Gordon



The culinary use of flowers dates back thousands of years to the Chinese, Greek and Romans. Many cultures use flowers in their traditional cooking – think of squash blossoms in Italian food and rose petals in Indian food. Adding flowers to your food can be a nice way to add color, flavor, and a little whimsy. They make a salad look beautiful and exotic, and candied flowers can be used in decorating to make cakes look elegant and professional. Some flowers taste spicy, and some herbaceous, while others are floral and fragrant. I make rose honey every year that is amazingly good in tea. The range of possibilities is pretty surprising.

It's not uncommon to see flower petals used in salads, teas, and as garnish for desserts, but they inspire creative uses as well – roll spicy ones (like chive blossoms) into handmade pasta dough, incorporate floral petals into homemade ice cream, pickle flower buds (like nasturtium) to

make ersatz capers, use them to make a simple floral syrup for use in lemonade or cocktails. (See a recipe for [Dandelion Syrup](#) here.) I once stuffed gladiolus following a recipe for stuffed squash blossoms – a little out-there, I know, but they were great. So many possibilities ...

## Eating Flowers Safely

**So, as lovely as eating flowers can be, it can also be a little ... deadly! Not to scare you off or anything. Follow these tips for eating flowers safely.**

- **Eat only those flowers you're certain are consumable – if you are uncertain, consult a reference book on edible flowers and plants.**
- **Eat flowers you have grown yourself, or that you know are safely (organically) grown for consumption. Flowers from the florist or nursery have almost always been treated with pesticide and/or highly toxic chemicals. This is especially true of imported roses and other blooms.**
- **Do not eat roadside flowers or those picked in public parks. Both may have been treated with pesticide or herbicide, and roadside flowers may be polluted by car exhaust.**
- **Eat just the petals and remove pistils and stamens before eating.**
- **If you suffer from allergies, introduce edible flowers gradually, as they may exacerbate allergies.**
- **To keep flowers fresh, place them on moist paper towels and refrigerate in an airtight container. Some will last up to 10 days this way. Ice water can revitalize limp flowers.**

## List of Common Edible Flowers:

### **Allium**

All blossoms from the allium family (leeks, chives, garlic, garlic chives) are edible and flavorful! Flavors run the gamut from delicate leek to robust garlic. Every part of these plants is edible.

### **Angelica**

Depending on the variety, flowers range from pale lavender-blue to deep rose and have a licorice-like flavor.

**Anise Hyssop**

Both flowers and leaves have a subtle anise or licorice flavor.

**Arugula**

Blossoms are small with dark centers and with a peppery flavor much like the leaves. They range in color from white to yellow with dark purple streaks.

**Bachelor's Button**

Grassy in flavor, the petals are edible but avoid the bitter calyx.

**Basil**

Blossoms come in a variety of colors, from white to pink to lavender; flavor is similar to the leaves, but milder.

**Bee Balm**

The red flowers have a minty flavor.

**Borage**

Blossoms are a lovely blue hue and taste like cucumber!

**Calendula / Marigold**

A great flower for eating, calendula blossoms are peppery, tangy, and spicy – and their vibrant golden color adds dash to any dish.

**Carnations/Dianthus**

Petals are sweet, once trimmed away from the base. The blossoms taste like their sweet, perfumed aroma.

**Chamomile**

Small and daisylike, the flowers have a sweet flavor and are often used in tea. Ragweed sufferers may be allergic to chamomile.

**Chervil**

Delicate blossoms and flavor, which is anise-tinged.

**Chicory**

Mildly bitter earthiness of chicory is evident in the petals and buds, which can be pickled.

**Chrysanthemum**

A little bitter, mums come in a rainbow of colors and a range of flavors ranging from peppery to pungent. Use only the petals.

**Cilantro**

Like the leaves, people either love the blossoms or hate them. The flowers share the grassy flavor of the herb. Use them fresh as they lose their charm when heated.

**Citrus (orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit, kumquat)**

Citrus blossoms are sweet and highly-scented. Use frugally or they will over-perfume a dish.

**Clover**

Flowers are sweet with a hint of licorice.

**Dandelion**

Read a whole post about dandelions here: [Eating and Harvesting Dandelions](#). (I am nuts about dandelions.)

**Dill**

Yellow dill flowers taste much like the herb's leaves.

**English Daisy**

These aren't the best-tasting petals – they are somewhat bitter, but they look great!

**Fennel**

Yellow fennel flowers are eye candy with a subtle licorice flavor, much like the herb itself.

**Fuchsia**

Tangy fuchsia flowers make a beautiful garnish.

**Gladiolus**

Who knew? Although gladioli are bland, they can be stuffed, or their petals removed for an interesting salad garnish.

**Hibiscus**

Famously used in hibiscus tea, the vibrant cranberry flavor is tart and can be used sparingly.

**Hollyhock**

Bland and vegetal in flavor, hollyhock blossoms make a showy, edible garnish.

**Impatiens**

Flowers don't have much flavor – best as a pretty garnish or for candying.

**Jasmine**

These super-fragrant blooms are used in tea; you can also use them in sweet dishes, but sparingly.

**Johnny-Jump-Up**

Adorable and delicious, the flowers have a subtle mint flavor great for salads, pastas, fruit dishes, and drinks.

**Lavender**

Sweet, spicy, and perfumed, the flowers are a great addition to both savory and sweet dishes.

**Lemon Verbena**

The diminutive off-white blossoms are redolent of lemon – and great for teas and desserts.

**Lilac**

The blooms are pungent, but the floral citrusy aroma translates to its flavor, as well.

**Mint**

The flowers are – surprise – minty! Their intensity varies among varieties.

**Nasturtium**

One of the most popular edible flowers, nasturtium blossoms are brilliantly colored with a sweet, floral flavor bursting with a spicy pepper finish. When the flowers go to seed, the seed pod is a marvel of sweet and spicy. You can stuff flowers, add leaves to salads, pickle buds like capers, and garnish to your heart's content.

**Oregano**

The flowers are a pretty, subtle version of the leaf.

**Pansy**

The petals are somewhat nondescript, but if you eat the whole flower you get more taste.

**Radish**

Varying in color, radish flowers have a distinctive, peppery bite.

**Rose**

Remove the white, bitter base and the remaining petals have a strongly perfumed flavor perfect for floating in drinks or scattering across desserts, and for a variety of jams. All roses are edible, with flavor more pronounced in darker varieties. Hint: The stronger their scent, the more pronounced their flavor.

**Rosemary**

Flowers taste like a milder version of the herb; nice used as a garnish on dishes that incorporate rosemary.

**Sage**

Blossoms have a subtle flavor similar to the leaves.

**Squash and Pumpkin**

Blossoms from both are wonderful vehicles for stuffing, each having a slight squash flavor. Remove stamens before using.

**Sunflower**

Petals can be eaten, the bud steamed like an artichoke.

**Violets**

Another famous edible flower, violets are floral, sweet, and beautiful as garnishes. Use the flowers in salads and to garnish desserts and drinks.

For more on edible flowers: [How to Make Candied Flowers](#), [Edible Lilac](#), [Eating Violets](#).