

Complete Guide to Growing and Using Edible Flowers

- Tips for Growing Edible Flowers and Herbs
- Easy-to-Grow Edible Flowers
- Growing Edible Flowers and Herbs in the Same Pot
- Edible Flowers You Can Grow Indoors
- Mistakes New Gardeners Make When Growing Edible Flowers and Herbs
- Different Ways to Use Edible Flowers
- Drying Edible Flowers and Herbs
- Cooking with Edible Flowers and Herbs
- Making Your Own Seasoning Combinations from Edible Flowers and Herbs
- Safety Precautions When Using Edible Flowers

Tips for Growing Edible Flowers and Herbs

Growing your own edible flowers and herbs may seem like a strange idea at first, but the truth is you will never get any fresher produce than from your own garden.

The produce in supermarkets in the US travels an average of 800 miles, and most of it is heavily laden with pesticides. Starting your own organic garden can mean saving money and better health if you follow a few simple tips.

Herbs

Herbs can be grown on your window sill, or outdoors in a large garden. The important thing to decide before you start is what you wish to plant. Think about the herbs and spices you use regularly and then determine if they would do well in the available space you have. Typical herbs for a starter garden might include oregano, basil, mint, sage, rosemary, and so on.

Depending on how much you use fresh, you might end up with leftover herbs for drying. In this case, you can dry them in an oven at a low temperature.

Cool and store in an air-tight container and use as needed. The heating process will remove some of the vitamin content, but you can still get plenty of healthy phytochemicals (plant-based nutrients) from the dried.

When using fresh herbs versus dry, dry will usually be three times stronger, so use sparingly. Store in a cool, dry place to help lengthen their shelf life.

Edible Flowers

Take the time to taste edible flowers so you will discover which flavors you prefer. Then start to think about how to incorporate them into recipes. Some will be sweet, others spicy and pungent. Another thing to consider is planting for different seasons, so you have a steady supply all year round.

Some flowers will actually be able to stand up to the cold weather.

Check which ones flower the most often, to give you a steady supply of produce. Think about colors as well. The flowers can be used for contrasting color in salads, for example, or elegant garnishes for a range of dishes, drinks and desserts.

They can be frozen in water to make ice cubes to add to clear drinks. Certain varieties can be candied and eaten as is, or added to desserts for decoration. Knowing what you will use them for can help you choose the right flowers and colors.

Going Organic

One of the best things about growing your own produce is the rich flavor, with no worries about harmful pesticides. There are natural ways to repel insects without dumping a chemical factory on your food.

Get Your Soil Analyzed

If you have a garden, bring a soil sample to your local nursery or garden center to get it analyzed. Once you know what type of soil you have, you can discuss your best options with the experts there.

Sun versus Shade

Some plants thrive in bright sunshine, while others need a bit more shade. If you are planning a window ledge garden or a window box, check the direction the window is facing to see how much sun the plants can expect.

In your garden, check the movement of the sun and plant the ones that love sun in the brightest parts of your garden.

Drainage of Soil

All plants need water, but some need it more than others. If there are any areas where puddles tend to form, these are not well-drained. In terms of container gardens, planting them in layers with drainage pebbles, for example, can stop your herbs and plant from getting soggy and moldy. If they go moldy, they will not be edible.

Growing edible flowers and herbs can make boring recipes exciting, and will inspire you to think of new ones too. Just follow these tips to be sure of success in your harvest.

Easy-to-Grow Edible Flowers

Edible flowers have been used for centuries, both raw and cooked. Edible flowers may seem like a strange idea at first, but they are packed with plant nutrients known as phytochemicals, plus a range of vitamins and minerals.

Best of all, you don't always need a large garden to grow your own edible flowers. Some can be grown in container gardens, window ledges and window boxes.

It's a case of starting out with good seeds and soil, following instructions about watering, and using natural pest control methods as needed.

Here are some flowers which are perfect for beginners wanting to grow them and add them to recipes. When buying the seeds, always check for the Latin name to make sure you are getting an edible variety and not a potentially dangerous cousin.

Borage (*Borago officinalis*)

These star-shaped flowers come in pink, violet and blue, and taste slightly of cucumbers. Borage is popular in savory dishes like soups and stews. You can also freeze the flowers in water to make ice cubes to add to summertime drinks for some extra refreshment. It is an excellent dried herb to always keep on hand. It can be grown in any degree of sunlight, and pretty much any soil.

Chrysanthemums (*Chrysanthemum morifolium*, or *Chrysanthemum x grandiflorum*)

Mums taste the way they smell, slightly spicy and pungent. Use sparingly in salads, stir fries and rice dishes; a little usually goes a long way. Mums need lots of sunlight and do well in most soils as long as they are well-drained.

Daylilies

These flowers taste sweet and floral. They are best harvested when the buds are just about to open. They are used in Asian cuisine, salads and desserts. They thrive in the sun in moist soil which is well-drained.

Geraniums (*Pelargonium*)

These can vary considerably in taste, from spicy nutmeg or ginger to citrus or peppermint. The lemon and peppermint-tasting varieties work well in ice cream, sorbet, and ice cubes. Freeze the flowers and then use the cubes to liven up your pitchers or punch bowls. Geraniums like light and well-drained soil.

Lavender (Lavandula)

Lavender has many uses around the home, including as parts of recipes. English lavender varieties (Lavender angustifolia) have the best flavor for recipes, which range from sweet to savory.

Lavender water, candy, sauces and dressings all have a light citrus taste with an underlying tang of rosemary and sage. Remove all the flowers from the stalk when cooking. These plants love sunlight and need well-drained soil.

Nasturtium

Nasturtium is the most popular of all edible flowers, and has been used for centuries as a component of salads and as an ingredient similar in taste to watercress.

You can eat both the leaves and flowers. They come in a wide range of colors, so work well as a contrasting color in salads and as a garnish. This plant thrives well in both sun and light shade.

Pansies

Pansies come in a range of colors and generally taste similar to grapes. The flowers are used for garnish, salads and cake decoration. Pansies will grow well in anything except direct sunlight. The moisture levels will vary by the type of pansy, so read the seed packet carefully.

Pinks

Pinks have a delicate flavor with touch of cloves. They are popular as an addition to hot tea and cider. The flowers are also used as an attractive garnish for creamy soups, fruit salad, and cookie platters.

Pinks need a lot of sunlight and a very rich soil in order to thrive. There are different species of pinks, so be sure to read the seed packet carefully.

Growing Edible Flowers and Herbs in the Same Pot

Growing flowers and herbs in the same pot, also referred to as container gardening, can be a fun and interesting hobby with a huge benefit for your health and wallet: delicious and nutritious ingredients for your favorite recipes. You can explore new recipes as well, once you have a steady supply of flowers and herbs.

The real question is how best to grow them. You can line everything up in little pots on your ledge or window box, or you can plant in combination.

1. Planting in Combination

Planting in combination can create attractive displays. And if you choose plants that go well together, they will make the most of the soil by not competing for the same minerals.

Planting flowers and herbs together for a particular use also means you have everything in one place when you want to create a recipe. I

t also helps with harvesting, so you make the most of what you've planted by regularly going around your containers in rotation to snip the top portions of the plants to use them fresh, or to dry for later use.

When planting in combination, there are several important elements to consider if your plants are to live in harmony together and thrive.

The Right Container

Some plants will do well in small pots, others will start to crowd themselves and any other flowers or herbs they have been planted with. Follow all instructions on the seed packets.

The Right Soil

Some herbs can grow well in any soil, while others need a richer soil. In general, good-quality potting soil should be ideal for most plants, but again, check the seed packet for specific instructions.

The Right Moisture and Drainage

Some plants are thirstier than others and prefer wet soil. Others need a drier soil with good draining. This can be a delicate balancing act. Remember, if the herbs and flowers are too wet, they can develop mildew and will be unusable.

The Right Light

Some plants require direct sunlight, and plenty of it. Others thrive in shade, and some also love cool, dark places. Combine ones that have a similar light requirement, and of course, be sure you place your container in the right place in your home or garden so they can thrive.

2. Useful Combinations

The following combinations will help you create tasty recipes.

Bouquet Garni Herb Garden

Bouquet garni is used to flavor soups and stews. It is a combination of herbs wrapped in cloth and tied with a ribbon. You discard it before eating. You can grow all the herbs you need in a 20-inch pot (or larger if you wish).

Plant rosemary, thyme, sage, and small bay laurel. Harvest as needed and dry for future use if you wish.

Ice Cream Herb Garden

You can make your own delicious ice creams and sorbets using edible flowers and herbs. In a 20-inch or larger pot, plant anise hyssop, lemon verbena and rose geranium. For sorbets, try mint, thyme and lemon verbena.

Note that mint will take up as much room as you give it, so plant it in a smaller pot first and then transfer to the container.

Mexican Herb Garden

If you love Mexican food, this container garden will keep you supplied with all the essentials. Get a 20-inch pot and plant cilantro, oregano and thyme. You can also add parsley, either curly or flat-leaf, which has a stronger taste.

Lemonade Garden

There's nothing more refreshing than homemade lemonade. Enhance its taste and appearance with herbs. In a 20-inch pot, plant lemon balm, lemon mint, and lemon basil.

Pizza Garden

This outdoor container garden is sure to be family favorite. Get a 22-inch or larger pot and place it close to a wall or a trellis. Add bush tomato plants, which will eventually start to grow upwards on the trellis. Add oregano and basil, for all the makings of your own homemade sauce for pizza and pasta.

Check <https://www.almanac.com/content/companion-planting-herbs> for useful herbs and combinations.

Edible Flowers You Can Grow Indoors

There are a number of edible flowers you can grow indoors. Why grow them? The answer is that they add color and flavor to many dishes. They can also be used as a garnish for soups, salads, and desserts. Some can even be part of a healthy diet, possessing a range of vitamins and nutrients.

Before you get started, however, it is important to know which flowers are edible and which are not. And if you have pets, be aware that what is fine for us to eat can actually kill a pet, so keep this in mind when choosing your plants.

Calendula

Calendula has yellow, orange or gold flowers and a peppery taste. It is often used to color rice dishes instead of saffron. It is safe for dogs but not cats.

Chives

Chives have white, lavender or purple flowers, and a strong onion taste. They are most often used to top baked potatoes, along with some sour cream. They can also be used in soups. They are mildly toxic to pets.

Chrysanthemums (Chrysanthemum morifolium)

Mums taste the way they smell, slightly spicy and pungent. They come in a wide range of colors. Use sparingly in salads, stir fries and rice dishes; a little usually goes a long way. They need lots of sunlight, and do well in most soils as long as they are well-drained. They are highly toxic to dogs and cats, though, so avoid if you have pets.

Hibiscus

Hibiscus comes in lush purple, pink and blueish blooms, and is a great source of vitamin C. It is a common ingredient in many different varieties of herbal tea due to its anti-inflammatory properties. It has been used for centuries as medicine as well.

Look for the species Hibiscus sabdariffa to make tea, syrup and jam. It is highly toxic for pets.

Nasturtiums

These tasty flowers come in a range of vivid colors and taste similar to watercress. They are often used as a substitute for watercress in sandwiches, salads and as garnish. You can eat both the leaves and flowers; both are rich in Vitamin C. They are easy to grow in well-drained soil near a sunny window. They can be toxic to pets.

Pansies

Pansies come in a range of colors and generally taste similar to grapes. The flowers are used for garnish, salads and cake decoration. Pansies will grow well in anything except direct sunlight. The moisture levels will vary by the type of pansy, so read the seed packet carefully. They are mildly toxic to pets.

Pinks

Pinks have a delicate flavor with touch of cloves. They are popular as an addition to hot tea and cider. The flowers are also used as an attractive garnish for creamy soups, fruit salad, and cookie platters.

Pinks need a lot of sunlight and a very rich soil in order to thrive. There are different species of pinks, so be sure to read the seed packet carefully. They are mildly toxic to pets.

Violets

Violets (*Viola odorata*) have a lovely color and a delicate floral taste. They have been used for centuries to enhance drinks and desserts. The blossoms can also be candied and preserved.

They are perfect for a sunny window sill garden. These plants don't want a lot of heat; a temperate place near a sunny window will do. They are considered non-toxic for pets.

Mistakes New Gardeners Make When Growing Edible Flowers and Herbs

Many new gardeners get so excited at the prospect of growing their own edible flowers and herbs that they leap before they look. This can cost a lot of time, money and frustration. Here are some tips on common mistakes newbie gardeners make, and how to avoid them.

1. Not Planning Ahead

There are thousands of things to plant. Your starting point should be simple, with one or two things you know you are going to use regularly. If those go well, you can start expanding your garden.

2. Not Testing Your Soil

If you are going to be planting outdoors in a garden, as opposed to a container garden, take a sample of your soil to a local nursery or garden center to be tested. In this way you can determine which plants will work best in your garden.

3. Not Reading the Instructions

Read your seed packets carefully, and be sure to keep them in a handy place to refer back to in reference to the care of your precious plants.

4. Too Much or Too Little Sun

Check the instructions on the packets. Some plants thrive in direct sunlight, while others need shade. Take time to observe your garden at different times of the day to see which are the sunniest spots. If you are going to have a window box or kitchen window sill garden, make sure it is sunny enough for the items you wish to plant.

5. Over- or Underwatering

Follow the instructions on how the plants should be watered. Too much can be as bad as too little. And if your plants get mildew, they will be unusable.

6. Not Using the Right Potting Soil Combinations

A lot of people just stick dirt in a pot and assume that things will grow. However, there are different qualities of potting soil that can really help your plants thrive.

In addition, you may need to add other items to the pot (such as for drainage) so your plants don't get all soggy.

7. Packing Plants in Too Tightly

Plants need enough room to grow. And some plants, like mint, will hog the space, taking up as much of the space as it can. In this case, put your mint in a separate pot and replant as needed. It is a great natural insect repellent.

8. Using Pesticides

This is the last thing you want to use on your home-grown edible flowers and herbs. One of the great things about growing your own is that they will be organic, free from harmful pesticides.

The farmers of yore discovered various ways to naturally repel insects through combination planting. Adding these herbs to your container gardens can help keep them pest-free. Basil, mint, rosemary and sage are four good examples of versatile herbs that can repel invaders.

9. Not Fertilizing

Your harvests will usually improve if you use a good fertilizer. One all-natural solution is liquid seaweed. You can also use compost from your organic waste from your kitchen, such as coffee grounds or used tea leaves.

Add water to make a compost tea, and pour onto the soil directly - not onto the plant or leaves. The dregs of your cups of black tea (that is, without milk), black coffee and herbal tea are also a delight for plants. Just be sure not to overwater.

10. Not Harvesting Enough

Newcomers get timid and worry they might be harvesting too much. In fact, taking from the top couple of inches of the plant can really make it grow and thrive.

Otherwise, you will end up with tall, skinny plants with barely any leaves. Regular harvesting signals to the plant to keep growing and not go dormant at the end of a season.

Avoid these newbie mistakes and you will be proud of your regular supply of edible flowers and herbs.

Different Ways to Use Edible Flowers

Edible flowers work great in a range of recipes, from soups and stews to salads. But their vivid colors and pretty appearance can also help you create a whole new level of interest and flavor as you produce more exotic-looking dishes, or use the flowers as vibrant garnishes. Here are a few ideas for using your edible flowers.

Ice Cubes

Place a flower or two in each compartment of an ice cube tray. Add water and freeze. Add to clear drinks. Also uses fresh flowers as garnish. Depending on what flowers you choose, they can add a lemony tang, taste of cucumber, and more.

Popsicles

Add flowers to your popsicle containers, fill with liquid, add the stick and freeze. You can have a colorful array of sunny-looking popsicles laden with flowers and interesting tastes, such as lemon mint or lavender.

Lollipops

You can make your own lollipops with sugar syrup and sticks. Try to find one perfect flower per pop. You can then arrange them on a stand and dazzle people with the colors.

Candied Petals

Candied violets have been used for centuries, both as a sweet treat and as an elegant way to decorate cakes. Create a box of your own to pass around when guests come, or give as gifts.

Jellies/Turkish Delight

Clear gelatin and some sugar can be the foundation of vividly-colored jellied candies. You can also add rosewater and rose petals if you like, to make your own Turkish delight. Make a tray of it, chill well, and cut into small squares. Toss the squares in some powdered sugar to stop them sticking together.

Cake Decorations

Fresh or dried edible flowers can dress up any cake. You can also use candied flowers. Some people use buttercream frosting and place the flowers around the top and sides of the cake.

Other cooks use fondant icing, a soft sugar paste that you roll out until it is large enough to cover the cake you wish to frost. Consider scattering flowers and petals onto the fondant as you give it a last roll out before you place it on top of the cake.

Use edible flowers as charming cupcake toppers. You can also make frosting from the flowers, such as rose.

Cookie

Make your usual sugar cookie dough. Roll it out, cut into cookies, and roll a fresh flower into the top of each cookie. Use a variety of blossoms and you will be able to create a stunning-looking cookie platter.

Garnish for Serving Platters

Garnish can really make your platters stand out, such as cheese and fruit or dessert platters.

Cocktails

Some liquors can be enhanced with flowers, such as adding them to a bottle of vodka. You can also create various syrups out of edible flowers to add color, flavor and consistency to cocktails and mocktails (you can use seltzer instead of alcohol in most cases).

Teas

Some edible flowers and botanicals like hibiscus and rose hip are actually the basis for most commercial herbal teas on the market, so you can have fun experimenting with different blends. The most basic herbal tea can be made with fresh or dried chamomile flowers. It is pretty, and good for the digestion.

Yogurt Parfaits

Layer the flowers with layers of yogurt, and perhaps some granola or nuts, for a light, refreshing dessert or breakfast.

Use these and your own ideas to brighten up your dishes with edible flowers.

Drying Edible Flowers and Herbs

Edible flowers and some herbs can be delicate, but learning how to dry them properly can ensure you make the most of each harvest.

Some people swear by a commercial food dehydrator, but if you don't want to go to the expense, there are simple ways to dry your flowers and herbs.

Know What Is Safe to Eat

Safety first. Take the time to research what is safe to eat, and what it can be used for. In some cases, you can use the flowers, in others the leaves. Sometimes with herbs, you might be able to use the entire plant. There are many websites online with free information.

If you tend to have seasonal allergies, you might wish to avoid eating flowers. Most people should avoid eating the pollen, in order to avoid allergic reactions and to improve the taste of the flowers.

Good edible options include roses, mums, nasturtium, lavender and pansy.

Know What You Like

Edible flowers and herbs are very much a personal taste and preference. Think about the kind of herbs you use in your cooking these days, and how handy it might be to grow your own. As for flowers, check the descriptions of common edible flowers in relation to taste, whether they are sweet or savory, and so on. Then you can start planning your growing, harvesting and drying.

Choose Flowers and Herbs That Dry Well

Not all edible flowers and herbs dry well, so choose ones you know will be hardy enough to survive the process, and ones you use regularly.

Hang Them Upside Down

Hanging the flowers and herbs upside down on a rack in a cool, dry place will help preserve them. They should be completely dry when you start; that is, with no dew on them. You can tie them into loose bunches with some cotton thread and hang them by the thread from hooks.

They will usually take four to seven days to dry completely.

Once they are dried, you can remove flowers, leaves and so on from the stems and harvest the edible parts of the plant. For flowers, cut them in half and clean out any pollen or other inedible parts.

Store your harvest in cool, dry containers. Be sure to label each one so you don't get any surprises when you use them in cooking.

Using Your Own Oven

Set your oven to 140 degrees F. Line some cookie sheets with paper towels. Lay the herbs in a single row on the towels. Heat for about 30 minutes, then check on them and turn them over. Heat through for another 20 to 30 minutes, but do not allow them to burn, or else all their nutrients and their taste will be gone.

Trim the edible parts and store in a cool, dry place.

Keep Things Dry

No matter which method you use, be sure the flowers and herbs are completely dry before storing them. Otherwise, they will develop mildew and become useless.

Recipes

There are many recipes that call for dried herbs, so have fun experimenting. As for edible flowers, you will need to do some research, but you should be able to find a range of soups, stews, sauces, salads and desserts. Dried herbs are three times stronger in taste than fresh, so use sparingly.

Cooking with Edible Flowers and Herbs

Cooking with edible flowers and herbs can be a wonderful new way to add flavor and interest to your favorite recipes, and to branch out to try new recipes.

A World of Flavor

There are many edible plants with wonderful tastes and visual appeal. Taking the time to research what is edible and which recipes it can be used in will not only add variety to your meals, but also phytonutrients (plant nutrients), vitamins and minerals.

In terms of herbs, just take a look at any spice rack in a supermarket, and chances are you will see both old favorites, like oregano and basil, with new, intriguing herbs like borage and cilantro. Most herbs can be grown at home in containers or in the garden. They will be cheaper than store bought, and delightful-tasting when used fresh.

You can also dry your harvested herbs, which will be a lot less expensive than commercial brands. Best of all, your own herbs will be organic and pesticide-free.

Traditional Recipes

Our ancestors wasted nothing. They started as hunter-gatherers, and through a process of elimination, discovered which flowers and herbs could be eaten.

This knowledge got passed down through the centuries, and eventually made it into the earliest cookbooks. Many of these are free online, so you can discover popular dishes from the Middle Ages, or how Shakespeare would have dined.

A World of Recipes

There is also a world of cuisines to explore, each with their own herb combinations. Italian food, Indian, Thai, Chinese... learning about the herbs and spices used can help you add variety to your weekly meals, without expensive restaurants or takeaway.

Soups and Stews

Soups and stews are an excellent way to cook for two reasons. The first is that everything goes into one pot to simmer, for easy cooking and clean-up. The second is that everything is cooked together, so no nutrition is lost.

Soups and stews tend to also be very hearty and filling. They are ideal during chilly weather. Chances are you won't overeat either, because the food will be so flavorful and satisfying.

The herbs you use will depend on the main ingredients in the soup. For lamb, seasonings like sage, rosemary and thyme will enhance the food. Just add a range of vegetables such as peas and carrots, and some wedges of potato for a complete meal.

Sauces

One of the most popular sauces is Italian tomato sauce to pour over pasta. You can make your own in minutes with some fresh tomatoes that have been cored and quartered, and some oregano, basil and a dash of olive oil. Some people lightly sauté the herbs in the olive oil to release more of the flavor.

Other sauces can liven up chicken, fish and beef. It is all a question of learning which herbs you prefer, which can be a fun journey of exploration.

Garnishes and Decoration

Edible flowers and herbs have also been used for centuries to make food more attractive, in addition to adding flavor if the items used are intended to be eaten.

You can add flowers to ice cubes to add beauty and flavor to a pitcher of drinks, or a platter of cheese. Your salads can take on new and vibrant colors with the help of nasturtiums and other edible flowers.

Desserts

Edible flowers and some herbs were also the foundation of the desserts our ancestors loved. Rose petals and rose water were highly prized and used in many different recipes.

Violets and other flowers were candied and eaten as is, or used to decorate cakes and puddings. Jellies were also very popular, and were both tasty and nutritious.

Making Your Own Seasoning Combinations from Edible Flowers and Herbs

Making your own seasoning combinations from edible flowers and herbs can be a fun journey of exploration. Here are some tips for making your project a success.

Plant What You Will Really Use

There are thousands of herbs and flowers to choose from. The best way to begin is with what you know you will really use. Look over your recipes and your spice rack. Which seasonings do you use most often? And how tasty would they be if eaten fresh, not dried? How much money could you save growing your own?

Where Will You Plant?

If you have a garden, great. If not, consider a window box, or a container garden on your window sill in your kitchen or other warm place that gets regular sunshine.

How Much Space Do You Have?

You can grow herbs and flowers easily in a container. But some plants thrive when you give them space, like thyme and mint. "Pat" them lightly with your foot as you go past and you will be amazed at how lush your thyme will grow.

It is a great all-purpose savory herb that you can use in beef, lamb and chicken dishes. A classic combination of seasonings is parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme.

In French cookery, the classic combination is rosemary, thyme, sage and small bay laurel. These herbs are combined into what is known as a bouquet garni, a small bag of herb tied with string or ribbon. One or two are added to soups and stews to enhance the flavor while cooking, and removed before eating.

Consider Your Climate

If you live in a place which is generally warm all year and you will be planting outside in the garden, you will have different options than people who live in more moderate climates. For example, cumin is a cornerstone of both Mexican and Indian cookery.

However, it will only thrive in a temperature of 85 degrees F and above, with good sunlight continuously for four months of the year.

If you are able to grow it, the cumin seeds can be used in savory dishes such as Indian dry potatoes with cumin, sesame and black mustard seeds.

Place the seeds in a frying pan with a small amount of canola oil and heat until they start to pop. Add cooked sliced potato and fry on both side until the potatoes are browned and fragrant and serve hot as it, or with a curry dish.

For Mexican food, combine cumin and coriander and add to beans, soups and even salsa.

Italian Cooking Made Easy

The Mediterranean diet is considered to be one of the healthiest in the world. It includes small portions of about 60 different foods every day, including vegetables, fruit, and high-quality protein such as cheese and fish. You can choose dishes from Greece, Italy, the south of France, and North Africa.

By far the most familiar is Italian cooking. Mastering its seasonings will help you create healthy, flavorful meals your whole family will love.

Oregano is one of the key herbs (and it is also used a lot in Mexican cookery). Growing your own is fun and tasty.

Basil is another popular herb. It is a natural insect repellent as well, making it ideal for any organic herb or flower garden. Basil is the main ingredient in the green Italian sauce pesto, made with basil, olive oil, garlic, and ground pine nuts (expensive but delicious).

You can make a large batch of pesto and then freeze it into portions. You can then pour it on pasta, or use as a mayo substitute on sandwiches such as chicken or turkey.

Italian seasoning, which you will see pre-mixed in supermarkets, is a combination of oregano, basil, marjoram, rosemary, thyme and garlic. Some people use commercial garlic powder, but it usually has a strange taste and smell compared to fresh.

Therefore, you can combine all of the herbs into a clean, dry container and store in a cool place, then just add fresh minced garlic when you add your homemade Italian seasoning.

Try some of these combinations and discover what a difference fresh herbs and edible flowers can make to a dish.

Safety Precautions When Using Edible Flowers

Growing your own edible flowers can be a fun and interesting hobby that will add wonderful tastes, colors and nutrients to your diet. However, they are not for everyone. Starting slowly is the safest way to decide whether they are right for you.

Health Issues

Those who have seasonal allergies might react to eating edible flowers, so they should exercise caution. Watch out for trouble breathing or a swollen tongue. In terms of preparation, in most cases the pollen from the flowers should be removed, to reduce allergens and improve the flavor overall.

Know Which Are Edible

Some flowers look and smell gorgeous, but are poisonous. Others might not look too appetizing, but are great to add to recipes. A good book on edible flowers can get you started. So too can buying small amounts of dried flowers.

In this way, you can explore what each tastes like. Then you can decide if you would like to grow and harvest them yourself by setting up a container garden indoors, or flower garden outdoors.

With so many to choose from, it will take some time to find your favorites, but it can be a fun and tasty journey of exploration.

Slowly Add Them to Recipes

As with most plants, edible flowers can have various digestive effects - including a laxative one. Gas and upset stomach can also occur when trying new foods. Eat small amounts first to see how well the flowers agree with you. You might like to keep a food journal to note your results.

Avoid Pesticides

The best thing about growing your own edible flowers is that you can go organic. Certain flowers and herbs serve as natural insect repellents, such as mint and rosemary, so you can keep bugs at bay.

Be Careful with Composting

Compost is organic matter from food, such as orange rinds, tea leaves and so on, that are used to fertilize plants. Always put your compost on the soil, never on the leaves or flowers of your plants.

Get a Detailed Book

A detailed book of edible plants should have a photo, the English name, the Latin name, and basic details about the care of the plant.

Use sticky notes to help you identify the plants you have tried that you like the taste of, and be sure to bring the book with you to your local nursery or garden center when you visit to buy seeds or plants.

Above all, check which parts of the plant can be eaten, and how they should be prepared. For some, it might be the flowers only; for others, the leaves as well.

Be Sure You Get the Species Right

Some edible flowers are part of a larger family of related plants, some of which might be poisonous. When buying seeds or plants, use the exact Latin name of the species listed in the book you are using.

Keep the Seed Packets and/or Plant Tags

Be sure to keep these items so you have instructions on care and feeding readily at hand.

Label or Tag Everything

The last thing you want is to get confused and ruin a recipe because you have put in the wrong flowers.

Choose the Right Fertilizer

When growing these plants, you are going to be prolonging the harvest and keeping the flowers active for longer than they would be in nature (when they turn to seed and then never flower again until the following year).

There are lots of fertilizers available, but aim for an all-natural one like liquid seaweed or cocoa mulch to keep the nutrition levels in the soil high throughout your growing period.

Test Your Soil

If you have a garden, take a sample to your local garden center to have it tested. In this way, you can be sure you are making the right choices of plants and will get healthy blooms that will not get mildewed and become inedible.

Follow these precautions to get the most out of your harvest.