



BEST OF BOTH WORLDS!

Beauty for the eye, flavor for the table

Making time for the things we enjoy most is important in a world so jam-packed with activities and responsibilities. For some, that might be gardening.

Watering and weeding, watching the little babies blossom into mature plants can be so enjoyable. With limited time and resources, sometimes we feel like we have to choose between growing flowers for aesthetics or produce for eating. Edible flowers can give growers the best of both worlds.

Nasturtium

Nasturtiums are a delightful versatile annual (complete their growing cycle in one season) for any landscape setting. They can be planted in window boxes, planters, raised beds, or straight into the ground, and some varieties are even climbers. They are a wonderful cross-over plant for the grower purely interested in garden aesthetics and the grower interested only in growing plants for consumption.

Nasturtium flowers tend to be yellow, orange, or red, and have green, circular leaves. They enjoy full sun (at least 6-8 hours), yet can tolerate part shade, especially if the shade is giving them a reprieve from hot sun. Some varieties have flowers

that set above the circular foliage, but other varieties are more prone to bury their flowers under the foliage; however, the flowers and leaves respond well to deadheading and leaves can be trimmed to ensure the flowers are more visible.

These plants can handle lower quality soils; in fact, if the soil is too rich, the plants tend to produce more rich, green foliage and fewer blooms. Nasturtium seeds are big and easy to

handle, which makes direct seeding in the ground a breeze and actually what they prefer. The biggest concern is keeping the plants well-watered throughout the season due to their shallow root systems.

Nasturtiums can be used in salads, pastas, or stir-fries with vegetables. The flowers can even be stuffed with herb spread. Nasturtiums seeds can also be ground, dried, and used as a pepper substitute, to flavor cooking oil, or as an interesting addition to custom meat rubs.

Flowers, flower buds, leaves, and stems of nasturtiums should be harvested in the morning. Taste deteriorates as the day wears on. Like many edible plants, the same is true for young leaves opposed to old; the quality deteriorates as the plant ages. The harvested parts should be gently washed and dried and then consumed as soon as possible if eating fresh. The flower is stronger in flavor than the leaves, which tend to be milder.

Nasturtiums provide a beautiful burst of color to the garden and to the salad bowl as well as giving many recipes a delicious kick. Because they are easy to grow and care for, they present both gardener and chef with infinite possibilities.



Dandelions

Most people are familiar with dandelions as a pesky lawn and garden nuisance, but they are also edible flowers. Before harvesting flowers, know what has been applied to them, especially dandelions.

Dandelions are more likely to have been treated with pesticides due to their status as common lawn weeds, or fertilizers because of their location within turf lawns.

Dandelions have three consumable parts: leaves, flowers, and roots. Leaves can be used in tossed salads. Although the leaves can make up the entire salad, its best to mix them with other greens. Dandelion leaves alone can be quite bitter, and like the nasturtiums, younger is better. The greens can be sautéed to help eliminate some of the bitter taste. Sautéed greens can be eaten alone or added to other dishes like pasta for a more complete entre.

Since dandelions tend to bloom all at once, the heads can be popped off, washed, and frozen to be used later. Heads can be dropped in a flour, egg, and milk batter and fried as dandelion fritters. Petals off the heads are more often used in baking recipes. Interested in giving dandelions a taste test? Give the dandelion cookie recipe at the right a try.

Marigold

Not all marigolds are edible, so it's important to know the difference. Generally, the taller species have large heads and are not edible. The smaller, signet marigold flowers are edible and have small heads and lacey foliage. Tags and labels at greenhouses should indicate the

species. If unsure, err on the side of caution and do not eat them. Like other marigold species, they are relatively disease resistant and don't seem to be sought after by deer or rabbits.

Signet marigolds make wonderful edge plants because of their stature and more delicate-looking foliage. There are many varieties with colors ranging from orange to yellow, to rust, or a combination of the three. Their pleasant light lemon-verbena scent is released when brushed-up against or disturbed by people walking along the garden edge.

Flower taste can vary from a light citrus to more spicy tarragon-like taste. The whole flowers or just the petals can be used. In addition to taste, sprinkling the petals on a dish can add a bit of a citrusy aroma.

The three flowers listed here are just a sampling of edible flowers available to grow and harvest in our Wyoming climate; there are many more to choose from. This list is from the University of Minnesota Extension <https://extension.umn.edu/flowers/edible-flowers>. Just keep in mind the importance of proper identification and that just because a flower doesn't make you sick (edible), doesn't mean it's delicious to eat. Also those with pollen allergies should be cautious.

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We're reminded of a popular movie "Please Don't Eat the Daisies." We'll ask **Abby Perry**, a University of Wyoming Extension educator and an editor of this magazine, if daisies are on her list of edibles. You can contact her at (307) 328-2642 or ajacks12@uwyo.edu.

Dandelion Flower Cookies

½ c. coconut oil

½ c. honey

2 eggs

2 tsp. vanilla extract

½ c. dandelion flower petals

1 c. unbleached, unbromated flour or gluten-free flour mix

1 c. dry oatmeal

Preheat oven to 375. Mix coconut oil and honey and then beat in the 2 eggs and vanilla. Remove the yellow flower parts from the green parts (compost the green waste). Stir in the flour, oatmeal, and dandelion flowers. Drop the batter by tablespoonfuls onto an oiled cookie sheet. Bake for 10-15 minutes. Cool and enjoy!

