

## **Nasturtiums, Pansies and More!**



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From spring through fall nasturtiums and pansies not only deliver bright splashes of color to your landscape, but also can brighten your dinner table and change a simple green salad into a dramatic, colorful work of art.

Nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*) grow well in the numerous microclimates of the North Olympic Peninsula. They usually are deer resistant.

Colors range from pale yellow to bold oranges and reds. Trailing nasturtiums, which grow 3- to 4-feet in length, look beautiful cascading over a terrace or down a hillside. Mounding varieties, which reach 8- to 24-inches in height, are dramatic as a border or background planting.

Nasturtiums prefer to be grown in full sun in loose, well-drained soil; they need periodic watering during the warmest weather.

Fertilizing promotes vegetative growth and fewer flowers; so “be nasty to your nasturtiums,” as the old gardeners’ maxim instructs, and don’t fertilize them.

Both the flowers and leaves of the nasturtium can be eaten. Their leaves add a sharp peppery zest, while flowers and flower buds have a milder taste. Flowering from July well into the fall, nasturtiums produce more prolifically when old flowers are removed. So pick away; the more you use, the more they produce!

Nasturtiums are self-seeding annuals that will return the following year.

Pansies (*Viola x wittrockiana*) are one of the earliest spring-flowering annuals. They are cool-weather plants that can produce into the fall in the moderate temperatures of the North Olympic Peninsula. They may be deer resistant, depending on what food is available, but rabbits love them!

The pansy is a compact plant typically under 8- to 10-inches tall. To some, the shape of the flower resembles a “monkey face.” Single colors and color combinations are nearly limitless.

Pansies prefer partial sun and highly-composted, well-drained soil. Plants that have at least five hours of sun each day will produce more flowers than shaded plants. Water weekly and avoid overhead sprinkling.

Pansy flowers can be used in salads and range from a very mild sweet to tart taste.

Flowers have been used in salads for centuries; in The Fruit, Herbs and Vegetables of Italy (written in 1614) Giacomo Castelvetro describes salads made with rosemary flowers, sweet violets, the flowers and tender leaves of borage, mint, lemon balm, tarragon, garden cress, and young shoots of fennel.

In addition to nasturtiums and pansies, the following flowers can adorn not only your yard but also your salad bowl:

- Garden chive (*Allium schoenoprasum*) has pink flowers that add a mild onion flavor.
- Garlic chive (*Allium tuberosum*) has white flowers that provide a mild garlic flavor.
- Borage (*Borago officinalis*) has starry blue flowers that add a light cucumber flavor.
- Squash (*Cucurbita pepo* species such as zucchini) have bright showy blossoms with a delicate nectar-like flavor that can be added to salads or dipped in batter and flash-fried.
- Calendula petals (*Calendula officinalis*) add a mild flavor and stunningly bright color.
- Day lily petals (*Hemerocallis* sp.) add a mild, slightly sweet flavor and multiple colors.

So be adventurous; consider adding these time-tested salad fixings to your garden.

### **When using flowers in your salads:**

1. Know what you are eating and how it has been grown; some flowers are poisonous.
2. Flowers for the table must be grown just like other vegetables.
3. Do not eat a flower that has been treated with chemicals or pesticides. Most flowers grown commercially for the floral industry have been treated with chemicals and should not be used in food.
4. Do not use flowers found along the roadside.
5. The pollen of composite flowers (that is, daisy-like flowers) is allergenic and may cause reactions in some individuals. Use only the petals of composite flowers.
6. People who suffer from asthma, ragweed, hay fever and other similar allergies may have extreme reactions when eating any flowers.