

# *Ingredient of the Month* CALENDULA



Calendula refers to multiple different species of edible flower in the Asteraceae family. Depending on the variety, calendula comes in shades of yellow, orange, white and pink. The most common varieties are golden, hence their association with summer sunshine. If the flowers are harvested, the plant blooms from May until first frost.

Calendula is known by many other names including pot marigold, common marigold, or Scotch marigolds. This plant is often confused with the French or African marigolds which are actually members of the Tagetes family and are inedible. To easily tell the difference, take a look at the petals. Calendula petal is straight,

long and ovular. There are single and double petal varieties. A marigold petal typically looks similar to a rectangle with rounded corners. The flower's shape is slightly spherical with a yellow, fuzzy center that seemingly blooms with the petals.

One of its nicknames "Mary's Gold," refers to the flower's use in early Catholic events. Romans, Greeks, Aztecs, Mayans, and Hindus all used calendula in many ancient rituals and ceremonies. In medieval Europe calendula was widely available and was known as "poor man's saffron" as it was used to color and spice various foods including soup, cheese and butter.

## *Calendula and Health*

Calendula species have been used traditionally as culinary and medicinal herbs. Nicholas Culpepper, a 17th century botanist, herbalist and astrologist, mentioned using calendula juice mixed with vinegar as a rinse for the skin and scalp and that a tea of the flowers comforts the heart. Calendula plants have been known to cause allergic reactions in people who are sensitive to ragweed, chrysanthemum, and other members of the Asteraceae/Compositae family. It should not be ingested during pregnancy.

**TOPICAL** Calendula petals hold anti-inflammatory, antifungal, and antiseptic properties. Calendula oil is utilized to heal bruises, skin irritations, bed sores, and burns. It is a common ingredient in soaps, toners, hair products, sun creams, and lip balms.

**INTERNAL** Ingesting calendula in a tea or tincture has traditionally been used as a remedy for fevers and abdominal pains. Its estrogenic action helps to balance hormones and may relieve menstrual and menopausal symptoms.

## Types and Varieties

**CALENDULA OFFICINALIS (POT MARIGOLD):** This is the most widely known species of calendula. The flowers are present in clusters of yellow flowers. Popular herbal and cosmetic products named 'calendula' nearly always derive from this species. There are many varieties including Touch of Red, Flashback, Pacific Beauty, Tangerine Cream and Sherbet Frizz.

**OTHER SPECIES:** Other species of calendula include: *Calendula palaestina* (Palestine marigold), *Calendula maritima* (Sea Marigold) and *Calendula arvensis* (Field Marigold).

## Storing Calendula

To dry calendula flowers, harvest opened flowers and arrange them in a single layer on drying racks. Store the racks in a warm, dry, dark place with good air circulation. This may take up to 2 weeks depending on the location. Once the flowers are dry, pull the edible petals away from the green septals and center cone. Transfer them to a dark container with a lid.

Never use plastic, tin, or aluminum to store herbs and spices.

## Culinary Uses

- To prepare calendula for eating, the petals are plucked from the medicinal-tasting green flower base. The petals can be eaten raw, dried, or cooked.
- Fresh calendula petals are sweetly citrus but earthy. Once dried, the petals are highly floral and perfumed with undertones of vanilla.
- In many recipes, calendula can be used as an inexpensive replacement for saffron.
- Try calendula petals in salads, salsas, frittatas, syrups, teas, and vinaigrettes.

## Interesting Facts

- Calendula are a cousin to daisies, echinacea, and sunflowers.
- Calendula grow nicely in a vegetable garden. Good companion plants are cucumbers, tomatoes, peas, carrots and asparagus.
- In ancient Rome, calendula was associated with joy, and was shared between friends to cultivate in their gardens to spread happiness.
- Calendula was once used as a source of dye for fabrics. By using different mordants, a variety of yellows, oranges and browns could be obtained.

