

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

"Calendula: a Flower of Many Uses"

Calendula, named the 2008 Herb of the Year by the International Herb Association, has been a favorite plant since the Middle Ages. Noted for its beauty, its healing properties, and its usefulness in the cooking pot, it was evidently well known to Shakespeare who wrote of "Perdita's Marigold, that goes to bed with the sun, and with him rises, weeping." The quotation is perhaps a reference to the flower's long bloom season. Therefore, it is usually in bloom for all the festivals of the Virgin Mary.

A native of Southern Europe around the Mediterranean Sea, this annual enjoys full sun and is easy to grow from seed or transplants in any well-drained soil. It is actually a cool-season plant that grows over the winter, and blooms from spring into fall. *

The scientific name of this member of the Sunflower family (Asteraceae), is *Calendula officinalis*. The genus name originated from the Latin *calendae* which means "first day of the month." Some say Calendula received this name because it blooms throughout the year in many regions. The specific epithet "*officinalis*" is a reference to the medicinal uses of a plant. Calendula has proven particularly effective in healing numerous skin problems: wounds, burns, insect bites, eczema, skin ulcers, and rashes.

The plant's common names are English marigold, pot marigold, and potherb. This colorful flower was (and still is) used as a potherb; in other words, it is a vegetable to be used in the cooking pot. Only the young leaves are tender and edible and can be used in soups, stews, and salads to add color, flavor, and promote health. It is also an effective companion plant to tomato plants as a deterrent to the tomato hornworm. When planted throughout the garden, it discourages the presence of other garden pests as well.

Calendula reseeds easily. At the end of the growing season, leave some of the flowers on the plant to form seed heads. Scatter the dried seeds wherever you would like to see these colorful flowers appear in the spring.

*A Gardening Note: In hot climates like ours, sow seed in late summer to early fall for bloom in fall or early next spring. Calendulas do not appreciate our hot Texas summers. Either plant them where they have partial shade in the afternoon or cut back the plants when extremely hot weather arrives and mulch lightly. If they live through the summer heat, they will recover and bloom again in the fall.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact
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