

Though dozens of edible flowers are available to grow in the Northwoods, I've found the following fifteen to be the most dependable in our short growing season and tough winters. In some cases, these plants will also enhance your other flower and vegetable choices, since they attract pollinators.

Here, then, is my Top 15 List, divided according to "seasonal" appearance:

LATE SPRING:

tulips
lilacs*
dandelion
pansy/johnny-jump-up
violets

EARLY SUMMER

roses*
daylily
spiderwort
calendula
dianthus

LATE SUMMER

sunflowers
bee balm*
hollyhock
borage*
centaurea*

*particularly attractive to bees and other pollinators; most of these are blue flowers, the color pollinators prefer.

All of the fifteen are "perennial" in the sense that they will dependably return year after year. A couple are actually annuals whose seed will winter over and start new plants. (Sunflowers, calendula). Borage, calendula, johnny-jump-ups and bee balm will return, but not in exactly the same place. They "wander", that is, their seeds spill a little away from the parent plant, or their roots spread, sending them in slightly new locations. And if you wonder how sunflowers came to be located dozens of feet away from their original location, blame the enterprising squirrel or chipmunk who "moved" the seed for you!

OTHERS: most are annuals

lavender, English daisy, nasturtium, vegetable blossoms (peas, beans, squash), herb flowers (chives, dill, basil, pineapple sage), mints (like licorice mint), tuberous begonias.

While some vegetable blossoms are indeed edible, remember that eating them is a trade-off. If you would prefer to eat winter squash in winter, don't eat all the blossoms in summer! The same goes for any apple blossoms—you can eat the blossom now, or the apple later.

And one last thought: Several plants have both edible leaves and flowers. They are: lavender, nasturtium, most herbs, mints, dandelion and borage. Oddly enough, while borage leaves are edible, they're too prickly to eat fresh, in my opinion. I leave them be.