

CALENDULA OFFICINALIS

(*Calendula officinalis* is a plant in the genus *Calendula* of the family Asteraceae)

By Yvonne Dinish

Calendula has been cultivated in gardens at least since the 1100's. Its flowers have been used to decorate Hindu temples; color food, cosmetics, and fabrics in ancient Greece; and garnish dishes in ancient Rome. Although *Calendula* is commonly known as "pot marigold", it is not to be confused with the common garden marigold of the genus *Tagetes*; and *Calendula* flowers are edible. The flowers grow in single or multiple rows of petals in a sunny yellow or bright orange – sometimes in a blended combination of the two colors. It flowers profusely from first bloom through frost.

In medieval England, *Calendula* petals were dried by the barrelful, then churned into syrups and conserves, added to winter stews, and baked into bread. In the early to mid- part of the twentieth century, the petals were used to color "margarine" to give it the look of butter. [Some of us may remember when our parents or grandparents bought the pale colored block of "margarine" that came with a packet of deep yellow powder to be used to color it to imitate the color of butter.] In the



1860's during the Civil War, calendula was used by field doctors to staunch bleeding. In modern times, calendula is mostly used in cosmetics, lotions, and dried to be consumed as tea. Its use in cosmetics reflects its early use as a skin tonic. [Although, it is still a favorite among Homeopaths for wound healing.]

Calendula is cultivated in gardens worldwide in all regions because it is adaptable to various growing conditions. It is easily grown from seed – which can be sown directly in the soil. After about six weeks of growth, it begins flowering and continues to do so until just after the first frost. It thrives in any average garden soil with good drainage in full sun. Although in the South, it may thrive better in dappled shade to survive extreme heat and humidity. *Calendula* adapts well to containers and go crazy wild with blooms, dropping seeds throughout the growing season. You will notice seedlings popping up around the plant constantly as the flowers go to and drop seed. The blooms can be harvested continuously throughout the season.

RESOURCES:

1. *THE BOOK OF HERBAL WISDOM*, by Matthew Wood
2. *GUIDE TO MEDICINAL HERBS*, a National Geographic publication
3. *THE PLANT FINDER*, Tony Rodd and Geoff Bryant, senior consultants