

## Calendula, 2008 Herb of the Year

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The Herb Society of America has selected Calendula, also known as Pot Marigold, as its herb for the year 2008. The name comes from the Latin *kalendae* and refers to the fact that it bloomed at the beginning of each month.

Most folks in Texas think of this flowering plant as a fall bedding plant and it is usually found on nursery benches alongside the pansies and snapdragons.

Calendula is hardy to about 25 degrees and will survive throughout the year, although it's happier during cooler weather. The plant has hairy, lance shaped leaves and flat, daisy-like yellow or orange flowers. The cheery flowers are edible and may be used as a substitute for saffron in rice, soup and stew or added to cheese, butter, custard and salads for color. (Be sure to discard the bitter calyx) As a dye plant, it yields a yellow color to fabric.

Calendula has a long history of use as a minor medicinal plant used to treat a wide range of afflictions including fever, headaches, toothaches, stomachaches, irritated eyes, scorpion bites and as a general tonic. European settlers brought calendula with them when they migrated to the US and it found use during the Civil War as an aid to stop bleeding and promote healing of wounds.

Today, it is commonly used in tinctures & ointments for cuts, sores, burns and bruises. Its medicinal properties contain antiviral, antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. You can even add calendula petals to your bath water and to hair rinses. A study is underway to determine calendula's ability to inhibit weed growth, a wonderful prospect if it proves to be true!

In the garden, Calendula likes average, well-drained soil and full to part sun. Plant in mass as a low border or in containers either singly or combined with other low flowering annual or perennial plants. Calendula is easy to grow; feed regularly and -head spent blooms to promote flowering. Fungal diseases occasionally attack the leaves- water at the base of the plant and avoid over-watering or allowing the plant to stand in water. Aphids, slugs and snails may also attack but are easily controlled by an insecticidal soap.

For traditional orange & yellow blooms there are varieties such as Bon Bon, compact, 12" tall. For varieties with a high resin content for medicinal use, look for Alpha (orange) and Resina (yellow). Calypso is a dwarf variety that grows to 8" tall and produces large, double blooms. Flashback has flowers in shades of orange, peach, apricot, yellow and cream with burgundy/maroon undersides and longer stems suitable for cut flowers. Déjà Vu is a frilly variety with colors that include pink, orange, yellow, cream and burnt orange with contrasting dark lower petals and flower tips.

Look for Calendula plants to celebrate Herb of the Year or start your own from seed. Although Calendula is commonly thought of as a cool-weather plant, it has gone year-round for several Central-Texas gardeners and it should last well in areas where the weather is a little cooler. Some afternoon shade will also keep the flowers going through the summer months. Calendula flowers keep their color when dried, so they are also a good addition to potpourris, wreaths and dried arrangements.