

Calendula Flowers Offer Wellness Benefits

With its bright blooms, calendula brings more than cheerful color to the garden. Also known as pot marigold, this easy-to-grow flower has long been valued by home herbalists for teas, tinctures and topical remedies.

Calendula comes in an array of cultivars, with flowers ranging from yellow and gold to orange. It thrives in cool weather and readily self-sows from its seed heads. Because it blooms prolifically for months, even a small plot can yield plenty of flowers to harvest. Remove spent blooms to encourage continued flowering, but leave some flowers to mature and produce seeds if you want the plants to self-sow.

To grow your own, sow calendula seeds indoors 6 weeks before the last frost date, covered with 1/4 to 1/2 in. of soil. Starter fertilizer can encourage root growth as the plants establish. Once hardened, the seedlings can be transplanted to individual pots or spaced 12 in. apart. The flowers do best in full sun; partial sun results in fewer blooms overall. Regular applications of organic fertilizer will help once the plant starts producing buds.

Harvesting calendula can leave your hands sticky. The resin comes from the bracts around the flower heads and indicates the plant contains the compounds that home herbalists seek. If soap and water don't remove it, rub your hands with a little olive oil, then wash again.

After harvest, you can dry calendula flowers in a single layer in a well-ventilated area. Because the flowers are dense, expect them to take a couple of weeks to dry through the middle. Regular turning will speed this process.

This sunny flower offers many health benefits. Calendula reportedly helps protect against *E. coli* and staph by stimulating white blood cells. When taken internally, calendula remedies can support digestion. However, these benefits occur only when the resinous constituents are extracted into teas or tinctures, which requires a few extra preparation steps compared with other herbs.

To make tea, first grind the calendula flower heads and green bracts into a powder. Simmer one teaspoon of the powder in 10 oz of water for 10 min, then turn off the heat and let the plant material steep for 40 min. The resulting tea will taste bitter but pairs well with other flavors.

Calendula tinctures offer a more effective way to work with the plant because the resinous constituents are soluble in alcohol. Commercial calendula tinctures are usually made with high-alcohol concentrations, but you can make one with 100-proof vodka.

Start by chopping dried flowers into fine pieces and placing them in a sanitized glass jar. Cover with your tincturing alcohol, ensuring the plant material is covered by an

extra inch of alcohol. Next, secure the lid and set it in a cool, dark place for 4 to 6 weeks. Consider shaking it every few days. After the time has elapsed, strain the plant material from the alcohol. The tincture is ready to use. A standard adult dose is one dropperful, two to three times a day.

For topical remedies, chop calendula flowers and bracts into small pieces, then place them in a sanitized glass jar with enough carrier oil to cover the plant material by a full inch. Raw, organic sunflower seed oil works well, as do almond or olive oils. Avoid mineral oil, a petroleum product.

Secure the lid and place the jar in a cool, dark place for 4 to 6 weeks. Next, place the jar in the bottom of a slow cooker with a couple of inches of water. Turn the heat to low and let the jar sit in the water for a day, taking care not to let it get hot enough to cook the plant material. This should coax out the last of the plant resins. Remove the jar once it's cool to the touch, strain out the plant material, and use as desired. If you prefer a stronger oil, add a second batch of calendula to the same oil and reinfuse for another 4 to 6 weeks.

The result works well for wound care in a variety of forms, including an oil, compress, liniment, herbal wash and hydrosol. Calendula compresses can also help with sore nipples from nursing.

When growing calendula for medicinal



Calendula's vivid blooms are prized by home herbalists for use in teas, tinctures and topical preparations.

use, choose cultivars with a high concentration of resinous constituents. Popular varieties include *Calendula officinalis*, which has resinous constituents and distinctive bright, cheerful orange flowers. If medicinal benefits are a lower priority, dried calendula flowers can add summer cheer to tea blends, especially during the fall and winter.

Despite its nickname, calendula and marigold are not the same species and shouldn't be used interchangeably in medicine. Calendula is in the daisy family, so it may trigger an allergic reaction in anyone sensitive to dandelions or chrysanthemums.

Still, calendula remains among the top-recommended herbs for home apothecaries despite sourcing challenges. Growing your own ensures a steady supply of potent plant material.



Piotter handcrafts buffalo-themed designs from colorful Wyoming car and truck license plates.

License Plate Artist Makes Buffalo-Themed Artwork

Rob Piotter's 20-year hobby of collecting colorful Wyoming license plates evolved into creating one-of-a-kind custom artwork shaped like an iconic American buffalo. He began designing after being inspired by a bucking horse sculpture made from license plates by Conner Baldacci, a Gillette, Wyo., artist. Before starting his first design, he contacted Baldacci to share his plans. Baldacci wished him good luck with his creative work.

Piotter's designs are colorful and creative, cut from Wyoming plates in red, brown, black, white, blue, green and other colors. His patriotic red, white and blue buffalo design for America's 250th anniversary uses centennial plates from all 23 Wyoming counties.

Piotter says finding all the centennial plates was almost as difficult as creating the completed artwork. He found some at estate sales, swap meets and garage sales. The Johnson County plate was the hardest to find, and he bought it from a New York collector who had listed it on eBay for \$25. Producing the patriotic design took him about a month.

To build his designs, Piotter traces the enlarged outline of a buffalo onto a masonry board. He cuts each plate with a tin snip into creative shapes that form the buffalo's body,

legs, head and tail. Tiny rivets hold the plates in place.

Piotter has sold his patriotic designs to several customers and has also created custom designs, including a ranch, a farm brand, and a special emblem.

"Every design I've done tells a special story," Piotter says.

He's created artwork commemorating the 2017 solar eclipse, custom plates featuring the Buffalo Bills' symbols and colors, and even a special commissioned Darth Vader design.

Piotter has collected plates from Wyoming and other states for 20 years. Many are displayed at the Rialto Soda Fountain, the iconic Casper business he and his wife own. Originally opened in 1922 as a cigar store, it became a soda fountain and cigar store in 1925. The Piotters reopened it as a throwback soda fountain in 2018. Now, its delectable old-fashioned hand-pulled sodas, cherry phosphates, and the best malts around make the eclectic business a go-to spot for locals and out-of-town travelers.

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Williams and Siebert "dressed up" a Ford van with shag carpet to mimic the "Mutt Cutts" vehicle from the 1993 movie "Dumb and Dumber."

'Shaggy Van' Creation Replicates Movie Vehicle

Creative ideas often lead to clever products that solve difficult problems. That wasn't the case with Parker Williams and his outlandish invention, the Shaggy Van, a carpet-covered vehicle.

"It might be the stupidest or most ingenious thing I've ever built," Williams says. "In the small Wyoming town we live in, this is really something else."

Williams was just a couple of years out of high school, making a living by creating clever videos on YouTube, when he came up with the van idea. He was inspired by the "Mutt Cutts" carpet-covered van in his favorite movie, the 1993 classic comedy "Dumb and Dumber." Williams, along with his best friend Seth Siebert, filmed themselves as they built a nearly identical replica of the movie van.

They glued tan shag carpeting to the vehicle's sides, roof and back. The windshield, side windows, wheels and headlights are exposed. Carpet is stapled to the top and sides of a wooden framework made of 2 by 4s and plywood that squares off the hood. Round cutouts allow the headlights to shine through. A square opening lets them open the hood to check the oil and engine. Breather holes allow air to pass through to the radiator.

Williams paid \$3,000 for the base vehicle, a plain white diesel-powered cargo van. He and Siebert spent several hours customizing the exterior, including the headlights and blinkers, to make it legal on Wyoming roads. The Powell Police Department inspected it and passed it without issues, and calmly suggested he might want to carry spare fire extinguishers.

Williams, Siebert and their buddies drive the vehicle often and say it's just fun to see people's reactions. They say people ask to take pictures with it, while others just stare, smile and give them a thumbs-up. Some people get the movie reference, and others just say, "What is that thing on the road?"

For an extended road trip, Williams and his friends loaded a couch into the back of the van and drove 12 1/2 hours from Wyoming to Minnesota to attend a CboysTV car show. It drew plenty of attention during the trip and on the show grounds. Driving in the rain posed a major problem, as all the carpet became soaked. Williams also got stuck in the mud, and instead of washing the van, he says, "I had to shampoo the whole thing."

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