

How to Grow Calendula in Your Garden



Summary

Calendula, also called pot marigold, is an annual herb grown for its medicinal blooms, edible leaves and stems. It grows best in fertile, well drained soils from full sun to part shade. Calendula blooms throughout the season with yellow to orange blossoms that open and close with the sun. Calendula is easily grown from seed. Sow seeds in the spring planting ¼ inch deep and thin seedlings to 8 to 12 inches apart after emergence. Plants grow 8 to 24 inches tall and require regular irrigation for best performance. Harvest flower heads when the plant reaches full bloom and use fresh or dried.

Recommended Calendula Varieties

There are 15 species in the Calendula genus with *C. officinalis* being the most popular. Cultivars are mostly ornamental selections with single or double blooms that vary in color from pale yellow to deep orange and have uniquely colored centers. 'Coronet' and 'Pacific Beauty' exhibit increased heat tolerance. The 'Touch of Red' series features double flowers, with red petal edges, and the 'Kabouana' series has dark centers. 'Resina' and 'Erfurter Orangefarbige' have high resin content in the blooms.

How to Grow Calendula

Soils

Calendula prefers well drained, moderately nutrient rich soils with a pH of 6-7 but can survive in a wide range of soil types. Most soils in Utah are suitable for calendula.

Soil Preparation

Before planting, determine fertilizer needs with a soil test and then follow the test report recommendations. If fertilizer applications are warranted, work the fertilizer into the top 6 inches of soil. If you fertilize with compost, apply no more than 1 inch of well-composted organic matter per 100 square feet of garden area.

Plants

Calendula can be grown by transplants or seed. Seeds germinate readily. Plant seeds ¼ inch deep when soil temperatures reach 60°F. Seeds germinate in 1-2 weeks. Transplants are available at many garden centers, often grown as ornamental annuals. Plant transplants after danger of frost has past.

Planting and Spacing

After emergence, thin seedlings to 8 to 12 inches apart in the row. Calendula prefers cooler temperatures (< 85°F) and often stops blooming in extreme heat. Plants will survive temperature down to 25°F. Removal of the old flowers (deadheading) will encourage re-bloom.

Water

Routine watering is advisable, but calendula can survive in low water conditions. Avoid overwatering. Supply 1 to 1½ inches of water per week in mid-summer for optimal growth.

Fertilization

Calendula needs little additional fertilization. Side dress plants every month with a complete soluble fertilizer to insure optimal growth and constant bloom development.

Problems with Growing Calendula

Weeds

Manage weeds by cultivation or hand pulling. Avoid damaging the plant roots during cultivation. Mulches also effectively control weeds. Calendula self-seeds readily if not deadheaded and may become weedy in the garden.

Pests and Disease

Calendula is often planted as a companion plant around tomatoes and potatoes to help deter insect pests.

Insect	Identification	Control
Whiteflies	Small white flies that hide and feed on the underside of leaves.	These insects are easily controlled by a hard stream of water or by regular applications of insecticidal soap.
Aphids	Green or black soft bodies insects that feed on the underside of the leaves. Aphids produce honeydew and cause crinkled or curled leaves.	These insects are easily controlled by a hard stream of water or by regular applications of insecticidal soap.
Disease	Symptom	Control
Powdery mildew	White fungal patches on leaves that can spread to all the plants. Associated with cool, wet weather conditions.	Insure good air circulation, control irrigation and remove infested plant parts.

How to Harvest and Store Calendula

To harvest flowers, pick the complete flower at full bloom. Petals can be removed for culinary use. Blooms can be harvested multiple times in a season. Plants will re-bloom in about 2 weeks. Collect seeds when fully mature and dry.

Drying

Dry the blooms in a well ventilated area, away from sunlight. A food dryer can also work effectively. Flowers should dry in 1 to 5 days.

Storage

Store blooms in a moisture tight container in a cool, dark place.

Productivity

Calendula has a high productivity rate. A 60 foot row of calendula will produce 1 pound of dried flower heads.

Uses

Ornamental uses of calendula include cut flowers and as border annuals. Culinary uses include the use of petals, stems, and leaves. Petals can add color to dessert and salads, and have a slightly salty taste. Calendula is often used as a saffron substitute, but contributes the color more than the flavor. The flower head is bitter and resinous and used more for medicinal purposes. It is reported to be antiseptic, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, and can help aid digestion and skin ailments. This plant is non-toxic and is safe for any use.

Frequently Asked Questions with Growing Calendula

How do I keep calendula blooming all season?

Thin to 8–12# apart, deadhead spent flowers regularly, and optionally side-dress monthly with balanced fertilizer.

How much water does calendula need?

Water weekly with 1–1½# during summer, then reduce once established—avoid overwatering to prevent root rot.

When should I plant calendula?

Sow seeds in spring when soil reaches ~60°F; they typically germinate within 7–14 days.

Additional Resources

- Mindy Grace. *Calendula*. Keats Publishing, 1998. Lesly Bremness.
- *Smithsonian Handbooks: Herbs*. Dorling Kindersly Inc., 2002.

Published January 2020
Utah State University Extension
Peer-reviewed fact sheet

Authors

Liz Braithwaite and Dan Drost

