

Calendula; cheer up your winter landscape



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Calendulas grow to 10-24 inches tall, and grow best in full sun or part shade. The blossoms open and close with the sun.

Question: Last summer I threw out some flower seed mix over a garden plot and enjoyed a season-long show of beautiful flowers. With the coming of winter, however, all the flowers have disappeared except for these cheery bright orange and yellow blossoms. Can you identify them and tell me more about them?

Answer: What you have growing in your flower garden is calendula, also known as “pot marigold” (*Calendula officinalis*).

Considered an annual herb, calendulas can continue to grow and bloom, surviving temperatures down to 25 degrees, which keeps the cheer factor alive and well in your winter landscapes. In fact, many gardeners will plant calendulas in their winter vegetable gardens next to the collards and cabbage to give more color contrast.

And when planted amongst summer vegetables like tomatoes, these hardy, self-sowing plants help deter insect pests as well.

As their common name implies, calendulas do fantastic in containers and can add a lot of seasons-long color to your deck or doorstep. They also work well in mass plantings as an annual ground cover or tucked under a small garden tree.

Calendulas have been used by the ancient Greeks, Romans, as well as in the Arabic and Indian cultures as a medicinal herb and as a fabric, food,



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and cosmetic dye source. American colonists used the blossoms to add yellow color to butter and cheese.

The plant is non-toxic and the flowers are edible as well, though they do have a slightly bitter taste. Cooks use the blossoms also as a garnish to add flare to a salad or cake. Dried blossoms can be added to soups and stews. Oil from the flowers have also been used in perfumes, and crushed parts of the whole plant can be used for skin disorders. The flower head itself is an antiseptic, anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory and can aid in digestion.

With all these wonderful uses, calendulas are also loved by bees, butterflies and other insect pollinators, and can help draw these beneficials to your garden.

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from seed, seed should be directly sown in early spring once the soil temperature has reached 60 degrees and frost danger has passed. Sow the seed thinly, covering them with 1/4 inch soil. When plants have reached 1-2 inches tall, thin them out to 16 inches apart.

As mentioned, calendulas are self-sowing and can become a bit invasive. This can be prevented by dead-heading the flowers before they go to seed. But if you want them to come back next year, you can allow some of

them to set seed, then save the seeds to plant next spring.

These plants should get 1-1.5 inches of water per week during the summer, but can survive in low water conditions. Definitely avoid overwatering. They need very little if any additional fertilization.

Whiteflies, aphids and powdery mildew are problems that can arise, but can be easily controlled by a hard stream of water from a hose for the former two, and an application of a fungicide for the powdery mildew.

Calendulas are the most popular of the 15 species of the genus *Calendula*, cultivars coming in single or double blooms from pale yellow to deep orange, having uniquely colored centers.

Coronet and Pacific Beauty tolerate higher heat temperatures. Touch of Red features red tipped petals with their double blossoms. Kabouana cultivars have dark centers. These are just a few recommended varieties.

With all these winning characteristics, what's not to like about calendulas?

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.