

Nasturtium: Simple to grow and versatile

Origin: South America (naturalised to most parts of the world)

Species: *Tropaeolum majus*

A wonder plant of the Andes, this South American native was brought to Europe in the 18th century and is well known to most gardeners for its bright flowers and interesting flat round leaves.

Not to be confused with *Nasturtium* genus which includes watercress.

What does it need to grow?

- prefers (poor) sandy soils but happy in any well drained soil
- requires full sun or part shade, moderate water
- weedy matted growth but easy to control (ground cover or climbing)
- self seeds by dropping mature seeds
- quite drought tolerant; sensitive to frost
- add wood ash (potassium) to increase seed production/size
- add chicken manure (nitrogen) to increase leaf size

How can it be used?

The flowers, leaves and seeds of the *Nasturtium* are edible. The plant has many uses in the garden, on the table, in and on our bodies.

In the garden

Nasturtium makes an effective *companion plant*:

- grow under apple trees to repel codling moth
- grow with cucurbits (squash, pumpkin, zucchini, melon, cucumber, luffa) to protect from beetles and attract butterflies and improve flavour
- grow with cabbage family to protect from beetles, cabbage looper and cabbage worm
- grow near vegetables as a trap crop for aphids and white cabbage butterfly

It also has other uses in the garden:

- grows as a *protective ground cover* to keep soil moist and reduce weed growth
- bright flowers are a strong bee attractant *bringing pollinators* to your garden

Woolly aphid spray – simmer 1 cup of nasturtium leaves with 1 cup water for 15 minutes; cool and strain; dilute to equal parts water; spray as required.

On the Table

Use *Nasturtiums* as you would a green leafy vegetable in salads and cooking or as a peppery spice.

Nasturtium capers – place 1 cup of firm green nasturtium seeds into a suitable jar; bring 1 cup white vinegar, 1 teaspoon of salt and 8 peppercorns to the boil; pour mixture over seed; seal and refrigerate; enjoy after about 3 months.



Illustration 1: *Tropaeolum majus*



Illustration 2: Seed



Illustration 3: Leaf



Illustration 4: Flower profile

Stuffed Nasturtium flowers – mix 1 pack of cream cheese with 1 minced garlic clove, 1/2 tablespoon of fresh chives and 1 tablespoon of lemon balm; place 1 teaspoon of mixture in the centre of the flower; pull petals up to cover as much of the mixture as possible; press to stick petals to cheese.

Nasturtium pesto – blend 4 cups Nasturtium leaves, 2 cups Nasturtium flowers, 1.5 cups olive oil, 1 cup parmesan, 1 cup walnuts and 5 cloves of garlic until consistent; fill into jars; will keep up to 2 weeks in refrigerator.

Nasturtium pepper – dry mature Nasturtium seedpods; break up and place in a pepper mill to use as a substitute for black peppercorn.

Nasturtium and citrus smoothy – blend 1 banana, juice of 1/2 lemon, 1 orange and 1 mandarin with 5 large nasturtium leaves until smooth; serve immediately



Illustration 5: Yellow flower



Illustration 6: Red flower

In and on our bodies

Nasturtiums are high in Vitamin C and rich in minerals but also contain other powerful compounds that are important to health:

- *Mustard Oil glycosides* – antibiotic, anti-inflammatory, peppery flavour
- *Isoquercitrin* – reduce blood pressure, anti-thrombotic, potential to treat cardiovascular disease
- *Cucurbitacin E* – antioxidant, prevents the attachment and growth of tumors
- *Lutein* – reduce age related eye conditions such as macular degeneration and cataracts, yellow colour
- *Pelargonidin* – orange dye (red and orange petals)

Traditionally Nasturtiums are used in Andean herbal medicine as disinfectant, wound healing, antibiotic, treatment of coughs, colds, flu, sore throat and bronchitis, treatment of scurvy and blood disorders. Stems are traditionally used for a yellow dye.

Internal applications

Nasturtium juice – 1 teaspoon of extract from leaves diluted in one cup of water

Nasturtium tea – steep 2 teaspoons of fresh nasturtium leaves in boiling water for 10 minutes; strain the leaves; maximum 3 one cup servings per day

External applications

Nasturtium poultice (wound healing, antibacterial) – bruise several leaves; place between two layers of gauze and apply to skin; check frequently for any adverse reactions.

Nasturtium compress (antibacterial, antifungal) – prepare Nasturtium tea; soak clean cloth in tea; apply where needed; remove after maximum 10 minutes.

Nasturtium foot soak (antifungal) – steep 2 cups of Nasturtium leaves in 4 cups of boiling water for 15 minutes; dilute with 10 litres of water; soak feet for 20-30 minutes each day in this solution

Nasturtium, nettle and rosemary rinse (stimulate hair growth) – Boil 1 cup of each herb in 2 L of water; cool and strain; massage into scalp then rinse.

CAUTION: Nasturtiums contain very potent compounds. They are safe to consume in moderate portions. Ingesting excessive amounts may lead to vomiting. Speak to your doctor if you wish to use Nasturtium to treat a health issue – any medicine in excess is a poison.

Do not consume Nasturtiums if you are pregnant, breast feeding, suffer from kidney complaints, have stomach or intestinal ulcers.

Care should be taken in applying Nasturtiums to the skin. **Avoid contact with sensitive areas of skin**, particularly the skin of children. Limit skin contact to no more than 10 minutes to avoid burns.