



For Immediate Use

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[www.viriniagreen.org](http://www.viriniagreen.org)

## Culinary Herbs Disguised

Herbs are plants used for medicinal, fragrant or culinary purposes and includes hundreds of plants, which have been indispensable to kitchen gardens for centuries, according to Len Diacont, President of the Virginia Green Industry Council.

In addition to their culinary qualities, a number of herbs have very decorative foliage or flowers. Many showy garden flowers were historically included in the herb garden; among these are scented geraniums, calendula, nasturtiums and violets. These lovely plants are often included in flower gardens without people ever appreciating their culinary benefits.

Everyone is familiar with the showy, scarlet blossoms of zonal geranium, but few have experienced the delicious aromas of scented geraniums. Grown more for their aromatic foliage than for their blossoms, the flowers are less showy than those of zonal geraniums. The foliage ranges from narrow, fernlike foliage to variegated, heart-shaped leaves. Scented geranium fragrances are quite diversified: apple, lemon, lemon-rose, pine, peppermint, mint-rose, nutmeg, filbert, eucalyptus, balsam, spicy-rose, lime and strawberry. Use the foliage fresh or dried to flavor beverages, preserves, jellies and desserts or make scented potpourri.

At least two varieties of geraniums have striking flowers as well as scented foliage. One *P. graveolens* has deep rose or lavender flowers with spicy-rose scented, gray-green leaves. *P. nervosum* has outstanding purple flowers and lime-scented foliage. All scented geraniums prefer full sun and well-drained soil, but will tolerate some light shade. They are easily propagated from stem cuttings. Many of the varieties are trailing and beautiful in hanging baskets.

Calendula, an easy-to-grow annual, is one of the most decorative herbs. The plants grow 12 to 18 inches tall with abundant orange and yellow chrysanthemum-like flowers, 2 to 4 inches across. The petals are used as an inexpensive substitute for saffron to color butter, cheese, sauces, soups, stews and teas. To dry, separate the petals and lay them in a shallow layer in a cool, dark, airy room.

Calendula flowers are striking in garden beds or cut arrangements. They bloom from late spring to early frost. To encourage more flowers, remove the old blooms before they go to seed. The plants prefer full sun and will self-sow.

Nasturtium leaves, seeds and flowers have a spicy, peppery taste. The round tender leaves can be harvested anytime and eaten like watercress, fresh in salads. The flowers are brilliantly colored in shades of orange, red, yellow and salmon. They make an exciting, flavorful garnish in salads and are often minced and blended with butter. These blossoms in a salad will always draw curious comments. The buds and seeds can be pickled and used as a substitute for capers. To pickle, gather the seed pods while they are still green and put in a jar. Cover with boiled cider vinegar.

Violets have been grown in gardens for generations. There are two types. One is the sweet violet valued for its fragrance and used in perfumes and potpourri. It has crinkled heart-shaped leaves and deep violet, pink or white flowers. The flower is often candied and used as a confection or cake decoration. For strongest fragrance, harvest the flowers when they first open. Sweet violets are tender perennials and prefer partial shade. On the other hand, *Viola tricolor* prefers full sun and is a biennial, which self-sows. The petals of this plant are three colors: deep violet, soft violet, and yellow. Both of these violets are beautiful garden inhabitants.

Choose any or all of these plants to add color, fragrance and flavor to your garden.

More gardening information is available at [www.VirginiaGardening.com](http://www.VirginiaGardening.com)

The Virginia Green Industry Council is the voice of the horticulture industry in the Commonwealth and is dedicated to enhancing the beauty of the state's environment, the well-being of our citizens, improving our state's economy, and improving the health and wellness for everyone in Virginia. The Council is made up of providers and consumers of horticultural products and services. The Council works to provide public and industry education, environmental guidelines and other information that will keep Virginia green and growing. For more information, visit [www.viriniagreen.org](http://www.viriniagreen.org). 540-382-0943 FAX: 540-382-2716

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