



by Judy Fleming, HCMG

Medicinal Plants: Nasturtiums *Tropaeolum majus*

Are you ready to add some beauty and color to your garden, repel pests and amend your salad bowl? Nasturtiums are just the thing! The colorful flowers are gorgeous in a pot or as an edging plant in your garden. All parts of the plant are edible. The flowers may be strewn over salad, the leaves add a peppery flavor to sandwiches, salads and stir-fry; and the unripe seeds may be pickled as a substitute for capers. The *mashua tuberosum* variety produces an edible tuber that is a major food source in parts of the Andes. Although the most common use of the nasturtium plant is as an ornamental flower, they also repel a great many pests, like squash bugs, cucumber beetles, and several caterpillars. They are additionally great companion plants for broccoli and cauliflower. They are considered a “trap” plant and attract aphids and whiteflies away from other plants in the garden.



Although nasturtiums can be started in early spring indoors, the best method of growing them is by directly sowing the seeds about an inch deep in moist, well-drained soil. The large seedling will emerge within a couple of days, and much like beans, are fun and interesting for children to watch grow. Plant them with tomatoes, radishes, cabbage, cucumbers, and under fruit trees. Plant them 8 – 12 inches apart in the garden and be sure to keep them well watered in the growing season. Pick the blooms freely once they start coming, and you will have many more during the summer. If you do notice aphids you can spray them with a safe soap, alcohol and water mixture. Remember, as with vegetables, you don't want to use chemicals on your plants. The following is a recipe by Marion Owen from her web site www.plantea.com.

Marion Owen's Poor Man's Capers

Real capers are pickled buds from the caper bush, a perennial shrub that thrives in the Mediterranean region. Capers are a gourmet condiment and these pickled nasturtium seeds are an impressive substitute.

Pick the half-ripened (still green) nasturtium seed pods. Continue picking as long as the seed crop continues. Drop them in a boiled and cooled mixture of:

1 quart white wine vinegar	2 teaspoons pickling salt
1 medium onion, thinly sliced	1/2 lemon, thinly sliced
1 teaspoon pickling spice	1 clove garlic, smashed
4 to 6 peppercorns	1/2 teaspoon celery seed

Keep the mixture refrigerated and use the nasturtium pickles in sauces, dips, casseroles, soups, stews and as edible decorations. For an added attraction, freeze 2 or 3 nasturtium capers in ice cube trays and use them to dress up your next glass of V-8 or favorite ale.