

Colorful Hibiscus

Exotic and delicately beautiful, the hibiscus plant is a tall, erect annual cultivated in the tropics and subtropics. There are over 300 species of hibiscus, including *Hibiscus abelmoschus* (musk-mallow), *H. rosa-sinensis* (tropical hibiscus) and *H. sabdariffa*, also known as Guinea sorrel, Jamaica sorrel, and roselle. All belong to the Malvaceae (mallow) family, along with cocoa, okra, and cotton.

Most hibiscus are grown as ornamental plants. *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, in particular, is the state flower of Hawaii, where it's presented in leis to visiting dignitaries. Ornamental hibiscus is available in reds, pinks, yellows, lavenders, whites, browns, golds, and blues and with various types of flower petals.

Hibiscus sabdariffa is the variety enjoyed in beverages and flavorings. This hibiscus plant flaunts pale yellow flowers with purple centers and large, bright red calyces (outermost sepals that form around the seedpods). To flourish, the plant needs plenty of water, warmth, and sunshine -- about 13 hours a day during its first

months of growth. The calyces are harvested by hand when fully mature, in autumn, then stripped off the seedpods and dried in the sun.

Hibiscus varies in color and taste, depending on where it's grown. China is the primary supplier to the U.S., but many other countries -- such as Thailand, Mexico, Egypt, Sudan, Senegal, Mali, Tanzania, and Jamaica -- also grow hibiscus commercially. Quality hibiscus has a clear, deep red (or orange-red) color with purple hues. The scent is slightly berry-like, and the taste is tart and astringent, with cranberry notes.



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Hibiscus

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Q&A

Since hibiscus is so colorful, is it ever used as a dye?

Yes, hibiscus flowers can be used to dye fabrics and yarns. (The colors achieved depend on the type of hibiscus and the mordant and method used.)

Hibiscus is also a successful food coloring and — when added to hair treatments such as oils, shampoos, tonics, and conditioners — it's said to both moisturize the hair and naturally bring out red highlights/cover an occasional grey hair.



How much dried hibiscus should I use to brew tea, and how long should I let it steep?

Start with about 2 teaspoons of dried hibiscus to 1 cup of water. Pour boiling water over the hibiscus, cover, and steep about 10 minutes. To make a stronger tea, add more hibiscus rather than steeping longer. Strain. Sweeten if you like, and enjoy hot or cold.



To learn more about hibiscus, visit www.frontiercoop.com.

Hibiscus

Hibiscus is enjoyed in beverages all over the world, but especially in Egypt, the Sudan, and Latin American countries. Jamaicans steep the calyces with ginger, then sweeten them with sugar and dose them with rum to produce the chilled beverage Agua de Flor de Jamaica. In Panama, an hibiscus beverage is made during the Chinese New Year and Christmas holiday by boiling the herb in ginger, sugar, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg. In West Africa, where it's sold in the streets, you'll find it flavored with mint or ginger. And in Italy, you'll find carcade, as it's called, served cold with sugar and lemon juice.

Naturally caffeine free, tart, and colorful, hibiscus tea is delightful on its own (hot or cold, sweetened or not) or as the basis of an herbal tea blend. It combines especially well with green or black teas and with other herbs such as peppermint, rosehips, spearmint, linden leaf, and lemongrass. Also try it mixed with a juice (such as cranberry), lemonade, or sparkling water for a refreshing spritzer.

The fresh flowers of the hibiscus plant are also added to salads or frozen in icecubes to float in punch bowls. Cosmetically, hibiscus is used in hair rinses and shampoos and in facial steams.



Hibiscus Blend Tea

Here's a fruity, spicy tea blend that's delicious hot or cold.

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| 4 cups water | 1 vanilla bean |
| 4 teaspoons hibiscus flowers | 3 cloves |
| 1 teaspoon spearmint leaves | 1 stick cinnamon |

Boil water and pour over remaining ingredients. Steep for 10 minutes, then strain. Sweeten with honey.



Pleasing Potpourri

Hibiscus imparts a faintly sweet fragrance and deep red color to this soft, musky mixture.

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| 2 cups hibiscus flowers | 1/4 cup linden flowers |
| 1/2 cup angelica root | 1/4 cup uva ursi leaf |
| 1/2 cup lavender flowers | 1 tablespoon whole allspice |
| 1/2 cup roses, pink buds and petals | 1/4 cup calamus root |
| 1/2 cup feverfew | 1/4 cup orris root powder or myrrh gum powder |
| 1/2 cup orange peel, cut and sifted | 1 teaspoon rose oil or lavender oil |
| 1/2 cup lemon peel, cut and sifted | |

In a large bowl, combine hibiscus flowers, angelica root, lavender flowers, roses, feverfew, orange peel, lemon peel, linden flowers, uva ursi leaf, and allspice. Sprinkle with calamus root and orris root or myrrh gum powder and mix well. Sprinkle with rose or lavender oil. Toss.

Place mixture in covered glass jars in a cool, dark, dry place for a couple of weeks. Smell the mixture. Add more essential oil, one drop at a time, if desired. Place in potpourri jars or glass bowls.

Hibiscus Facial Steam

A facial steam can cleanse and soothe both your skin and your psyche. This one offers lovely aroma and color, to boot.

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| 1 cup hibiscus flowers | 2 tablespoons dried chamomile flowers |
| 2 bay leaves | |
| 2 tablespoons dried rosemary | |



Place ingredients in a large bowl. Cover with boiling water. Lean over the bowl, and cover your head with a towel to form a tent. Steam your face, staying about a foot over the bowl, for about 10 minutes. Rinse with cool water and pat dry.

Frontier sells whole organic hibiscus petals and hibiscus flowers cut and sifted (both organic and non-organic).