This edible plant list was originally written by the late Jane Nicoll and was updated/amended in March 07 by Martin Dann. Jane spent many hours observing the plants and flowers that her tortoises ate by choice. Although this plant list was originally written for horsfields, it applies to tortoises in general.

For an extensive weed list (and pictures for easy ID) please visit www.tortoises.net

EDIBLE AND NON EDIBLE GARDEN PLANTS AND FLOWERS FOR TORTOISES

To ensure a balance please grow as many different varieties as you can, and use to supplement weeds and wild flowers., which should, if possible, form the main part of your tortoise’s diet.

GARDEN PLANTS
Agave

Aloe vera

Anagallis Linifolia - (annual) leaves & flowers

Antirrhinum - leaves & flowers

Ameria (thrift ) - flowers

Aubretia - leaves & flowers

Begonia Semperflorens - flowers & leaves (avoid all tuberous begonias however, as may be toxic)

Cactus, opuntia (Prickly pear/Indian fig) - spineless or semi spineless varieties easier to handle

Calendula officinal - flowers

Campanula - especially C. carpatica

Coreopsis - flowers

Cornflower - leaves of young plants nibbled

Crassula

Dead Nettle (Lamium) - leaves

Echeveria

Eschscholzia (californian poppy) - flowers

Fuchsia - leaves & flowers eaten occasionally

Gazania - flowers & leaves

Geranium species (perennial) leaves & flowers

Hebe - flowers (leaves may be nibbled)*

Hemerocallis - (day lily) flowers

Hibiscus - flowers especially, also leaves
Honeysuckle - flowers

Hosta - leaves

Hottentot Fig (Carpobrotus edulis) - leaves

Lavatera - (Mallow) - leaves & flowers

Mesembryanthemums (annual) - leaves & flowers

Malva - (Mallow) leaves & flowers

Meconopsis Cambrica (Welsh Poppy) - leaves & flowers

Mimulus (annual) - especially flowers

Mysotis (forget-me-nots) - leaves & flowers

Mulberry (Morus alba) - leaves

Nasturtium - leaves & flowers

Nemesia - leaves & occasionally flowers

Osteospermum - flowers & leaves eaten occasionally

Pansies - leaves and flowers

Pelargonium - leaves & flowers

Petunia - leaves & flowers

Rose - petals only

Sedum spectabilis - leaves (other pink flowered alpines sedums are also consumed)

Sempervivum (house leeks) - leaves

Strawberry (wild and cultivated) - leaves & flowers. Give fruit only as treat or to disguise medicine

Sweet Woodruff (galium odoratum)*

Viola/Violet - leaves & flowers
* Dwarf or small hebes are ideal for tortoise garden planting providing both
dapples shade and the occasional nibble. Sweet woodruff is more useful as a low
growing evergreen shelter plant, but is occasionally eaten. In general, tortoises
do not eat herbs but will use them for shelter. Rosemary, thyme, sage, wild
marjoram and bay can all be used in tortoise enclosures.

POISONOUS PLANTS

Keepers can be very worried about tortoises eating poisonous plants. In reality,
the risk is small as tortoises will naturally avoid them. However, occasional
cases of poisoning, even death, have been recorded through accidental
ingestion of some garden plants, and it is therefore best to exclude these from
tortoise habitats, or at the very least ensure they are nor grown in close
proximity to edible plants and weeds. Another thing to take into consideration is
that plants straight from the nursery or garden centre may have been treated
with chemicals, and should therefore not be fed to tortoises until after few
months of natural weathering.

As a guide, common plants to be avoided include: Daffodils and Narcissi,
Hellebores, Hypericum-(often called Rose of Sharon, not to be confused with the
Hibiscus variety Rose of Sharon which is quite edible), Hydrangea, Convallaria
(lily of the valley), Euphorbias, Digitalis (foxglove), Monkshood (Aconitum)
Nicotiana (tobacco plant), Rhododendrons & Azaleas, Ragwort (senico), Crocus,
Dicentra (bleeding heart), Lupin (Lupinus), Vinca (periwinkle), Paeony (paeonia),
Rhubarb, Misletoe and Lobelia. In general plants which grow from bulbs, tubers
& corms should be excluded as many, although not all, are potentially toxic.

Conifers which produce needles or pine cones should also be avoided.

However, if you see your tort nibbling a few leaves of, for example, sweet peas or
impatiens (busy lizzies), don't panic. Many plants which are often listed as toxic
are, it would appear, safe when taken in small amounts as part of a varied diet.

WRITTEN BY JANE NICOLL

(Amended and revised March 2007 by Martin Dann)