

ROSES AND OTHER EDIBLE FLOWERS

By Marty Hammond

The flower garden has been the county cook's extended kitchen for generations. Flowers have been considered food by many cultures for centuries. The Japanese cook daylily buds, the Italians fry zucchini blossoms and the French make rose-flavored desserts. Edible flowers can be used in a multitude of ways: a pretty spot of garnish on a platter; an edible container when stuffed with savory ingredients; an interesting ingredient in fruit or vegetable fritters; an extract to flavor essences; an essential ingredient in pastry; adding color and flavor to a cold salad; decorating a pat of butter; floating in drinks; flavoring herbal teas, liqueurs, vinegar, sorbets, custard, soup and sauces.

Before cooking with a flower, taste it to see if you like its flavor. Flowers with a strong scent like lavender may be overpowering and should be used sparingly. There are hundreds of varieties of marigolds that are very spicy and taste rather awful, however, 'Lemon Gem' and 'White Snowbird' are recommended. Marigold petals dry easily and can be stored in an airtight jar for winter use in cakes, breads and muffins. Many flowers can be candied and used as tasty snacks or to decorate desserts. Flowers that work best are roses, violets, scented geraniums and pansies.

If you don't grow your own edible flowers, they can often be purchased in the produce section of the market and occasionally in area farmers markets. Look in the fresh herb area, where your flowers are packed in light plastic containers. Look for fresh-appearing petals in a damp, but not really moist container. Most edible flowers are sold as a sort of stem-less bouquet, with a colorful assortment. Put them in the refrigerator, in the crisper drawer and use within three days. Nutritional value will vary but all flowers have small amounts of vitamins C and A, potassium, etc., and are practically devoid of fat and sodium. Before using, gently wash your bouquet and blot dry with a paper towel. These blooms are very perishable, so wash, dry and eat!

Edible flowers can be used, as they are, to garnish any dish that needs a color pick-me-up. Fresh flowers added right before serving, make a cake look just wonderful. Get really fancy and place a small candle in the center of a desert, circled by a ring of roses, daisies, or hollyhocks. Nasturtiums and other colorful flowers add taste and texture to green salads, and can be found flavoring vinegar, pickles and mustards. Try sprinkling some orange blossoms in a sandwich of cream cheese and red onion or on some buttered toast with honey. Shred the edible flowers and sprinkle on a plate to make a sweet-tasting rainbow. If raw is not your thing, locate some squash blossoms, stuff them with a savory meat or grain and bake or fry them, or chop up some flowers, mix with a fritter batter and bake or fry for an interesting side dish.

Some flowers are poisonous – potato, foxglove, sweet pea, lilies of the valley, and stars-of-Bethlehem, to name a few. Make sure you know which ones are harmless.

On the following page are listed flowers that are edible, provided they have not been sprayed with harmful pesticides.

EDIBLE FLOWERS ARE: (not sprayed with harmful pesticides)

Bee Balm	Nasturtium
Chrysanthemum	Pansy
Cornflower	Pinks (Dianthus)
Daylily	Pot Marigold
Hollyhock	Redwood Sorrel
Honeysuckle	Roses
Johnny-jump-up Viola	Scented Geranium
Lilac	Tuberous Begonia
Marigold	Tulip
	Violet

EDIBLE HERB FLOWERS ARE:

Arugula	Mustard
Bergamot	Oregano
Borage	Pineapple Sage
Chive	Sage
Garlic Chive	Thyme
Lavender	Wild Onion

EDIBLE HERB FLOWER SEEDS ARE:

Coriander
Dill
Fennel

EDIBLE FLOWERS FROM VEGETABLES AND FRUITS ARE:

Fruit tree blossoms – Apple, Orange, Plum
Broccoli Flower
Pea blossom (NOT SWEET-PEA, WHICH ARE POISONOUS)
Scarlet runner bean blossom
Squash and Zucchini blossoms
Strawberry blossoms

For recipes using Roses, see: 'Cooking Etc., With Rose Petals, Flowers & Hips (RSA 017)

This article includes excerpts from:

'Gifts from Your Garden' by S.F. Bales
'Herbs' by Tolley and C. Mead
'On Flowers' by K Kleinman and S. Slavin
'Some Blooms Are pretty and Tasty Enough to Eat', from O.C. Register, 3/23/96
by Nancy Berkoff