



Incredible Edible Flowers

“Marigolds seasoned the venison, roses graced the stew, and violets mingle with wild onion in the salad.”

-Medieval feast description-

Have you ever admired the flowers blooming in your garden and thought, “those look good enough to eat”? This may be closer to reality than you may think.

Flowers can enhance your dinner table in a number of ways beyond the centerpiece. Current culinary uses of flowers include additions to soups, salads, sauces and main entrees. From appetizers to dessert, flowers are an easy way to add color and flavor to food.

A Little History

The culinary use of flowers dates back thousands of years with the first recorded mention in 140 B.C. The Romans used mallow, rose and violets. Dandelions were one of the bitter herbs referred to in the Old Testament of the Bible. During the Victorian era rose petals were included in dishes and sweets.

Many different cultures have incorporated flowers into their traditional foods. Oriental dishes make use of the daylily buds. Italian and Hispanic cultures stuff squash blossoms. Chartreuse, a classic green liqueur developed in France in the seventeenth century, boasts carnation petals as one of its ingredients.

Colorful and Tasty

What do flowers taste like? Nasturtiums are spicy and peppery. Chive blossoms add a touch of onion to foods. Herb flowers such as sage, basil and thyme taste similar to their leaves. Violets and petunias are sweet while English daisies and chrysanthemums can be bitter. Hollyhocks, pansies, calendula and squash flowers are mildly flavorful. It is advisable to start out with small amounts in your dishes so that the flowers do not overpower the foods' flavor. Moderation works best when learning to cook with flowers.

Selection and Storage of Flowers

Caution: Before selecting a flower/plant, be sure you can correctly identify what it is and that it is safe to eat. Many popular flowers such as foxglove, lantana, periwinkle, and marsh marigolds are poisonous.

Keep in mind that many plants with edible parts also have other parts that are poisonous. Tomatoes are a good example with edible fruit and poisonous leaves. Rhubarb is another example where the leaf is poisonous while the stalk is edible. If uncertain about a particular flower/plant, consult a good reference source on poisonous plants and flowers before consumption.

When collecting, select freshly opened flowers that are free of insect and disease damage. Flowers that are not fully open, those that are past their prime, and flowers that are starting to wilt or go to seed should not be chosen.

Caution: Do not use commercially grown cut flowers from florists, nurseries, garden centers or roadsides. These flowers may have been treated with chemicals not labeled for food crops. When growing your own flowers for eating, use pesticides that are approved for flower and vegetable production and wait for the recommended time before harvesting.

After harvesting, place long stemmed flowers into water and then in a cool location. Within three or four hours of using, pick short stemmed flowers and place them between layers of damp paper toweling or in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

Immediately before using, gently wash the flowers, checking carefully for insects or soil. If flowers appear wilted, drop them into a bowl of ice water for 30-60 seconds and then drain on paper towels.

Some grocery stores now offer edible flowers in their produce section along with herbs and salad greens. Purchased flowers should be refrigerated until they are used. Damp paper towels placed over the purchased flowers may help to extend their life.

Preparation of Flowers

For most flowers eat only the petals. Remove the inner floral parts (pistils and stamens) from flowers before eating. The pollen can detract from the flavor of the flower. In addition, the pollen may cause an allergic reaction in susceptible individuals. If someone has allergies, they should refrain from eating flowers or introduce edible flowers gradually into their diet.

Also remove the green leafy sepal and stem. This is not necessary in pansies, violets and violas. The petals of roses, calendula, tulip, chrysanthemums and lavender should be removed from the flower receptacle. When using just the petals, separate them from the rest of the flowers just prior to use to minimize wilting.

Roses, dianthus, English daisies, signet marigolds, and chrysanthemums have a bitter white portion at the base of the petal where it is attached to the flower. Break or cut off the bitter part of the petal before using.

Have some fun adding incredible edible flowers to your meals.

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Incredible Edible Flower Recipes



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Nasturtium Nibbles

3 dozen nasturtium, hollyhock or daylily blossoms-washed and drained
1 jar (5 ounces) cream cheese and pineapple spread
¼ cup whipped cream cheese with chives
¼ cup ham salad spread
With a small spoon carefully stuff each blossom with a small amount of one of the three fillings. Line serving tray with nasturtium leaves if desired and top with filled blossoms. Refrigerate for 30 minutes. Yield: 3 dozen



Nasturtium Tea Sandwiches

8 slices bread
8 ounces softened cream cheese
2 tablespoons low fat or fat free sour cream
12 nasturtium blossoms coarsely chopped



Combine cream cheese, sour cream and chopped nasturtium blossoms. Spread thinly on bread. Top with another slice of bread and cut into quarters. Refrigerate 1/2 hour before serving to blend the flavors. Line plate with nasturtium leaves, arrange sandwiches and garnish with flowers. Yield: 4 servings

Hearts and Flowers Salad

¾ cup extra virgin olive oil
½ cup red wine vinegar
2 crushed garlic cloves
1 teaspoon crumbled dried Italian herbs
½ teaspoon sugar
½ teaspoon salt
Freshly ground black pepper
5 cups mixed greens
3 ounces thinly sliced Cheddar cheese, cut into small and medium heart shapes
2 ounces shaved ham, cut into small and medium heart shapes
Edible flowers, flower petals, and buds



Place the olive oil, vinegar, garlic, herbs, sugar, salt, and pepper in a medium cruet or jar with a tight fitting lid. Shake briskly until mixed. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Wash the greens well and spin dry. Place the greens in a bowl and toss gently to mix. Use a cookie cutter to cut cheese and ham into heart shapes. Add the Cheddar and ham hearts to the greens and toss. Very carefully wash the flower petals and buds. Shake to dry and toss gently with the salad. Shake the dressing well and pour over the salad or serve on the side. Yield: 6 servings.

Violet Cloud

1 package of lemon-flavored gelatin dessert
1 cup freshly picked violets, stems removed, packed lightly
1 quart vanilla ice cream
1 cup heavy cream
16 candied violets



Make up gelatin dessert according to the directions on the package. Chill until only partly set, not firm. Put violets in the jar of a blender and run blender at high speed until they are almost liquid. Take out about half of the violets and reserve them. Add half of the ice cream to the violet puree in the jar and blend until it is a thick liquid. Empty the jar into a freezer container or metal bowl and repeat the blending with the rest of the ice cream and violets. Add to the first batch. Put bowl of ice cream mixture in freezer. Whip cream until it forms stiff peaks. Whip the partially set gelatin till it is frothy. Quickly fold the whipped cream and the ice cream mixture into the fluffed gelatin. Pour into long-stemmed dessert glasses and refrigerate until firm. At serving time, top each glass with a couple of candied violets. Yield: 8 servings

Lavender Cookies

1 tablespoon ground lavender flowers
1 cup butter, room temperature
2/3 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon lemon extract
2 cups all-purpose flour
1/8 teaspoon salt
Lavender Frosting (recipe below)



In a medium bowl, cream together ground lavender flowers, butter, sugar, vanilla extract, and lemon extract. Add flour and salt; mix until combined (dough should be soft but not sticky.) Refrigerate 1 to 2 hours or until dough is firm. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Remove dough from refrigerator. On a lightly floured surface, roll dough approximately 1/4-inch thick. Cut into desired shapes with cookie cutters and place onto ungreased cookie sheets. Bake 12 to 15 minutes or until cookies are lightly browned around the edges. Remove from oven and cool on wire racks. When cool, frost with Lavender Frosting. Yield: 2 dozen cookies.

Lavender Frosting

1 cup powdered sugar
2 tablespoons lavender flowers
2 tablespoons milk
2 teaspoons light corn syrup

In a small plastic bag, combine powdered sugar and lavender flowers. Let stand at least 1 day before using. When ready to use, sift the mixture into a medium-size bowl; discarding lavender flowers.



Add milk and corn syrup, mixing well. Additional powdered sugar or milk may need to be added (enough milk to make frosting easy to spread). Spread on cooled cookies.

Turkey Calendula Roll-Ups

8 ounces cream cheese, softened
2 tablespoons low-fat or fat free mayonnaise
1 tablespoon horseradish
2-3 teaspoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons diced sweet pickle relish
1 tart apple, peeled, cored, and finely diced
1 cup calendula petals
4 twelve-inch tortillas
8 ounces wafer thin turkey slices or ham, if desired
Lettuce leaves and calendula petals for garnish



In a bowl, blend the cream cheese with the mayonnaise, horseradish, lemon juice, and pickle relish. Gently stir in apple and calendula petals. With a spatula spread the mixture evenly over each tortilla. Cover spread with a single layer of turkey or ham slices. Roll up the filled tortilla, jelly-roll style. Cut immediately, or wrap tightly in plastic wrap and chill until serving. To serve, cut to desired thickness, and arrange on a serving platter over a bed of lettuce leaves. Sprinkle with additional calendula petals.

Lemon-Orange Mint Tea

4 tea bags
8 fresh mint sprigs
4 cups boiling water
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup lemon juice
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup orange juice
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar, or to taste
3 cups hot water



Add tea bags and mint to water; cover and let steep for 10 to 15 minutes. Combine remaining ingredients in a 2-quart pitcher. Remove tea bags from tea mixture; add tea to pitcher and stir well. Chill. Serve over ice. Yield: 2 quarts.

Flower Sugar

2 cups granulated sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup minced flower petals (rose geranium leaves, rose petals, lavender flowers, clover, pinks, lemon verbena, bee balm or anise hyssop)

Process sugar and minced flower petals in a food processor. Place in a clean jar, cover and let stand until flavor develops. Sift, if desired, and store in an airtight container. Flower sugar is an elegant topping, lightly sprinkled over fruit or sorbet.

Basil Flower Linguine

- 1 pound linguine, cooked and drained
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 cup basil leaves, coarsely chopped
- 1/3 cup pine nuts
- 1 cup basil flowers

In a large skillet, heat olive oil over a medium heat. Add basil leaves and toss in oil for 2 minutes. Add pine nuts and continue sautéing for another 2 minutes. Add basil flowers and toss to mix. Add the cooked pasta to the skillet in small batches, tossing after each addition. Serve hot. Yield: 4 servings

Dilly Soup

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon curry powder
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated ginger
- ¼ cup onion, finely chopped
- 2 cups zucchini, thinly sliced
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon dill florets, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup fat free half-and-half milk



Heat oil in a medium saucepan. Add curry powder, ginger, and onion. Sauté until onion becomes translucent. Stir in zucchini and cook for 4 minutes. Add chicken stock and dill florets. Simmer gently for 15 minutes. Allow soup to cool for 15 minutes. Puree soup in a blender or food processor. Return to saucepan and add fat free half-and-half milk. Reheat but do not boil. Serve garnished with additional dill florets.

Carrot Slaw with Rose Petals

- 4 large carrots, grated
- 1 small zucchini, grated
- ½ cup raisins
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon celery seed
- 1 tablespoon balsamic or other herbed vinegar
- Rose petals
- Dark green or red leaf lettuce



Mix all ingredients together except rose petals. Refrigerate overnight to blend flavors. Serve on a bed of rose petals atop dark green or red leaf lettuce. Yield: 4 servings

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2006