

taste buds

chef Larry Jones

Flowers to smell and eat

Ah, spring! With spring comes flowers, a delight to the senses. Not only do flowers offer us a lovely fragrance to behold, they also include a sight that will cheer and a touch that can soothe.

But most of us never get the opportunity to realize that flowers are also intriguing to the sense of taste. Many flowers are edible and what was originally touted as another flaky California trend continues to blossom for the adventuresome cook.

In total honesty, Californians never really started the trend of cooking with flowers. Rose water dates back to the first century B.C. in Persian literature. The Romans enjoyed honey with lavender and frequently cooked with roses and violets to add zest to their dishes. Gladiolus bulbs were once baked with wine, as many of us do today with garlic bulbs.

However, since the 19th century, cooking with flowers has been looked down upon, mainly because flowers then were so often associated with peasants, who regularly cooked with them.

EATING FLOWERS is as easy as picking them from your garden, especially the blossoms from herbs, as long as they have not been sprayed with pesticides.

Flowers add a new dimension of color and taste, reviving an outdated trend, a resurgence of aroma to various salads, dressings, vinegars, sauces and ice creams. Chopped flowers such as pansies and borage can be used in flavoring homemade pasta. Steeping rose petals or geranium leaves in milk for ice cream will give the ice cream a more unusual taste and a delicate sweeter aroma.

My tiger lilies are just beginning to sprout but I can't wait to get my hands on the buds and combine them with game dishes, especially duck. They can be inserted in the cavities while cooking or can be strategically placed around the wild game.

I'm really excited about the fact of using squash blossoms with cooking. Anyone who has planted a few zucchini plants can appreciate the fact that there is only so much you can do with club-sized zucchinis. Now, an early-morning jaunt to the garden will have me reaping all the new blossoms which can be stuffed with cheese, chopped, fried and sprinkled over pasta or just plainly sautéed with other vegetables.

The range of edible flowers is wide, but be warned that only certain varieties are edible. For example, you can cook with the pot marigold (calendula), but the African marigold is a poor choice for cooking. The marsh marigold (American cowslip) is poisonous.

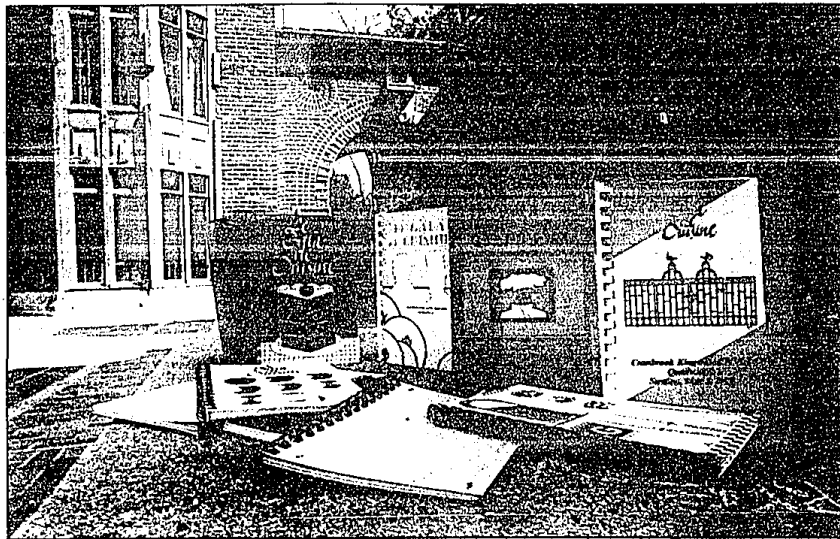
If you are looking for a good source, check out "Cooking With Flowers" by Jenny Leggett (Fawcett Columbine, 1987). Another good choice would be "Cooking from the Garden" by Rosalind Creasy (Sierra Club Books, 1988).

Here are some recipes you might like to try.

BEER BATTER
SQUASH BLOSSOMS
2 large eggs, separated
1 tablespoon white vinegar
1 tablespoon water
1 1/4 cups flat beer
1/4 cup flour
1 teaspoon salt
pinch sugar
15-20 squash blossoms

Place egg whites in a food processor bowl or mix by hand, using a wire whip. Stir in vinegar and mix till the whites hold their shape. Beat egg yolks, beer and oil in processor or by hand until well mixed. Add flour, salt and sugar and beat well. Stir in beaten egg whites. Cover and store in refrigerator for 2 hours. Before dipping squash blossoms, mix well by hand.

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The 16 cookbooks printed for Le Gala de Cuisine are photographed at the Cranbrook Schools' Quadrangle, where the annual culinary event is held. The benefit, always the first Sunday

in May, will celebrate its 11th year. Recipes from participating chefs are featured in the cookbooks.

The 11th annual Le Gala de Cuisine will be held from 3-7 p.m. Sunday at Cranbrook Schools' Elsie Saarinen-designed Quadrangle. Tickets are \$225 or \$175 per person, \$200 benefactor. Proceeds benefit Cranbrook Schools' scholarship funds. For more information call 645-3134.

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

A LONG WITH ALL the glorious food and drink at Cranbrook Schools' Le Gala de Cuisine, afternoon paraders receive a specially created cookbook and a poster each year.

Chairman of the 1989 Le Gala is Mary Ann Lutomski of Bloomfield Hills, who has been attending the annual event since its first year in 1979. She said that, as far as she knows, she is the only person who has collected a copy of each Le Gala cookbook — all 10 of them.

Unpretentious and practical, Lutomski is planning this year's event with an easy manner that belies her busy schedule. She squeezed in an interview, leaving her house just as an inspection for its upcoming sale was getting under way. After a stop at the Cranbrook School Quadrangle, where photographs for this article were taken, she chatted about the cookbook in Cranbrook's public relations office before going on to a diet program she has just enrolled in.

Each of the chefs who participates in Le Gala is asked to contribute a

Each gala brings new cookbook

recipe to the year's cookbook, although not necessarily the same recipe they will be serving. Lutomski



sign," Lutomski said. Jones' design, showing the fountain of the Quad, will grace the cookbook cover.

Lutomski said this year Le Gala planners are updating the look of the cookbook. There is a redesign, with more emphasis on the recipe, and the chef's photograph moved from the top of the page. "I don't like to put my fingers on people's faces," said Lutomski, opening one of the old cookbooks to show how that was a problem.

"We are also going to be numbering the pages and have an index and table of contents," she said. "Our aim is organizing the recipes so they are easily referred to and used."

Lutomski said, "I love to cook."

She admitted, however, the previous Le Gala cookbooks were more for perusing than using. "I read them and get ideas," she said of the 10 she has. "I feel some of the recipes are very vital."

KINGWOOD GRADUATE Tobye Wietke of Bloomfield Hills, cookbook chairman this year, is working on the cookbook redesign. She and her business partner, Judy Lloyd, are creative advertising consultants in the Detroit area.

Lutomski is a graduate of Kingswood School and her husband Karl is a graduate of Cranbrook School. She has attended every Le Gala since the event began, keeping the cookbooks from each year, and has worked on Le Gala committees for the past five years.

One of the changes she noticed

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'Creative cuisine' is tops at Medallion

The Laxa family has had a battle on its hands operating a restaurant in West Bloomfield's Crosswinds Mall. Antonio and Avelina Laxa fought for business under the banner of the Aristocrat and Oliverio's before winning their way into diners' hearts under the latter name.

Then, in 1987, an ice storm forced them to close for several months and repairs and remodeling. The new operation had a new look and, unfortunately, few of its old customers.

All that's behind them now. The Laxas are conquering new cuisines under their new name, Medallion, and with their sons, Pierre and Tony, at their sides. They deserve the restaurateur's Red Badge of Courage.

Taking its name from the Laxa's largest for excellence, and using the Medallion rose as its motif, the restaurant offers comfort, style — and great food.

WHATEVER YOU CHOOSE from the varied menu, your meal will be served on an extra-large white china plate, looking quite elegant against the black tablecloth. The fresh vegetables: potatoes, pasta or rice, and entree will be arranged with care and an eye for color (as when they add a splash of purple cabbage). Here, the presentation counts, too, for a complete dining experience.

Medallion's "creative American cuisine" is just what it advertises. Take the grilled chicken breast (\$10.95), which sounds a bit ordinary, and add Chef Eddie Matteson's mixture of fresh herbs and you have a

meal worth remembering. The Canadian whitefish (\$11.95), served with a sauce of tomatoes, oyster mushrooms and fresh chili, is another example of taking something that could be bland and turning it into a winner with careful preparation and presentation.

Not surprisingly, the word "medallion" sets off some of the restaurant's specialties. Like medallions of monk fish. Or medallions of beef. The beef medallions (\$18.95) were tender and juicy, complemented by an almost tangy, braise sauce.

Entrees give customers quite a choice, from white Peking duck (\$13.95) — served with a different sauce each night — and green up muscles and linguine (\$14.95) to Provençal calves liver (\$10.95) — sautéed and served with a sauce of caramelized onions, balsamic vinegar and dried cherries — or cheese tortellini (\$3.95), tossed with boursin cheese, bacon, fresh sage, caramelized onions, mushrooms and tomatoes.

Among the array of desserts was an OK chocolate mousse, which became exquisite when garnished with frozen strawberries.

YOU CAN NOW choose a cappuccino or espresso to complete your meal, but we enjoyed the "regular" coffee accompanied with grated chocolate, cinnamon and fresh whipped cream. Nice touch.

The restaurant has an air of elegance, with its etched-glass win-

dows, green and black interior, and clusters of booths and tables. We liked being tucked into a comfortable booth in a quiet corner, where we received excellent service. Somehow you feel welcome to linger — and we did. It wasn't until a week later that we learned the restaurant normally closes a half hour before we finally tore ourselves away.

When friends got together for an overdue visit, it's great to find a spot where the food is premium, the service is excellent — and the setting offers privacy, comfort and an unruffled atmosphere.

We found all that at the Medallion.

Details: Medallion, 4343 Or-

hard Lake Road, north of Lone Pine Road, West Bloomfield. 851-5540. Seats 200 and has a room for private parties. Carryout. Catering.

Hours: Lunch: Mondays-Fridays 11 am to 2:30 p.m., Dinner: Tuesdays-Thursdays, 5-10 p.m. and Fridays-Saturdays, 5-11 p.m. Prices: Lunches: \$4.50-\$9.95. Dinners: \$7.95-\$16.95. Visa, MasterCard, Diner's Club, American Express, Carte Blanche, honors Michigan Trade Exchange.

Value: Great food, comfortably elegant setting, style. You can't lose.



Eddie Matteson is chef at the Medallion

DAN DEAN/staff photographer