

Edible flowers make summer meals bloom

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gamot leaves, and they also can be used as a garnish. The flowers can be candied. The first geraniums arrived in Europe about 1682 on Dutch and English ships from the South African Cape.

Lavender (*Lavandula spp.*) blossoms are used to garnish cold beverages, and a few petals placed in the bottom of a jelly glass before adding the preferred jelly will add a gourmet touch to the finished product. Lavender flowers are always used in the dry culinary mixture, Herbs in Provence, for flavoring poultry and meats. Lavender has long been used to scent linens; toilet water was a necessity for 19th century ladies. The

fragrance can evoke many nostalgic memories.

Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*), called Indian watercress, is probably one of the most recognized edible flowers, with its peppery and piquant flavor. The orange, red, yellow and creamy white flowers make any dish sparkle when used as a garnish and in tossed salads. The stems can be chopped and added to vegetable soup, a favorite of President Eisenhower. The blossoms will hold dips or sandwich fillers while the leaves make an attractive bed on which to put pickled carrots and the like. In addition, the seeds are pickled and used as a substitute for capers. Nasturtiums were highly valued by Thomas Jefferson.

Pinks (*Dianthus spp.*) grow readily in the garden and with their clove-like taste add a pretty touch to many dishes. Float some on cold soups or in a punch bowl, or add to a salad. A relative of the carnation, they can be used in a similar fashion. A carnation-flavored vinegar will dress a summer fruit salad. In olden days they were used to flavor wine, hence the name *Sops in Wine*.

Roses (*Rosa spp.*) have been used since the beginning of civilization and are the flower of Venus and a symbol of true love. The petals can be candied, used in salads, used as garnishes and even used to make rose-flavored butter and water. Roses can be combined with other flowers for tasteful vinegars. Al-

ways cut away the bitter white tip of rose petals before using.

Squash Blossoms (*Cucurbita spp.*) will elicit surprised exclamations when served, and since the vines are prolific bearers, a few blossoms won't be missed. Even pumpkin blossoms can be stuffed, and don't forget the zucchini. The flavor is mild, squash-like. There is evidence that this vegetable from antiquity was used as long ago as 2000 B.C.

Viola, Pansy and Johnny-Jump-ups (*Viola cornuta*) have a light floral flavor, while the Violet (*Viola odorata*) is stronger. All can be candied and used to add the finishing touch to cakes, pudding and other desserts. Fresh ones can be floated in a tea cup or punch bowl. They comple-

ment fruit salads, cottage cheese and sherbert and are used in fritters. Happy thoughts are associated with these little gems.

Many flowers can be frozen in ice-cubes or ice rings to add elegance to a punch bowl. Try borage, sweet woodruff and the violas. Vinegars can be made with a combination of flowers. Try 4 parts fragrant rose petals and 1 part lavender blossoms, or equal parts, pinks, rose petals and rosemary. A cupful of petals to a pint of warmed white vinegar, infused 10 days in a warm place, then strained and bottled, will do the trick. If the vinegar is made of just rose petals it will be ready for the rose petal salad which you will find in the accompanying recipes.

Here's an easy way to candy flowers. Pick the flowers after the dew has dried. Then use a soft paint brush or your finger and paint the flowers with a lightly beaten egg white mixed with 1 tablespoon cold water. Dip the flowers in extra-fine sugar, dry in a very slow oven until crisp, or lay in a single layer on an uncovered dish, placed in the refrigerator for several days. The flavor of these flowers can be enhanced by adding to the egg white: For violets, 2 drops almond flavoring, or to rose petals, 2 drops lemon extract. Mint leaves, dipped in green colored sugar, will be especially colorful.

Enjoy! Flower cookery should be an adventure, not a chore.

CARNATION VINEGAR

1 cup carnation petals
4 cups white wine vinegar
6 cloves

Pull the petals off the flower stems; snip and discard white heels. Wash carefully and dry well. Heat the vinegar to lukewarm. Place the flower petals and cloves in a jar and crush gently with a wooden spoon. Cover with warmed vinegar and cap tightly. Do not use a metal cap. Steep, on a sunny windowsill about 3 weeks. Strain into bottles and cork tightly. Makes approximately 1 quart.

DEEP-FRIED DAY LILY FLOWERS

2 quarts fresh Day Lilies
Oil for deep frying
1 cup flour
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons melted butter
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup milk

Sift the flour and salt together. Mix in the melted butter and beaten eggs. Beat in the milk, a little at a time. In a large skillet, heat the oil till sizzling. Dip each Day Lily flower in the batter until well covered. Add, one at a time, to the hot oil. Fry until a light, golden brown. Drain on paper towels. Serve hot. Serves 6-8.

NASTURTIUM FRUIT SALAD

1/2 cup finely chopped nasturtium leaves and blossoms
3/4 cup Basic French Dressing
2 tablespoons honey
1 tablespoon dry white wine
3 oranges, peeled and sectioned
1 cup fresh pineapple chunks
1 cup sliced grapes
1 cup halved strawberries
1 tablespoon finely chopped ginger
Lettuce leaves
Additional nasturtium blossoms, for garnish

Add chopped nasturtiums to french dressing along with honey and wine. In large bowl, combine prepared fruit, add ginger. Pour dressing on fruit and toss well. Arrange on lettuce leaves on large plate; garnish with additional blossoms. Makes 4-6 servings.

Basic French Dressing

1 1/2 cups vegetable oil
1/2 cup cider or wine vinegar
1 tablespoon salt
1 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon dry mustard

Put all ingredients in jar, cover and shake well before serving. Makes 2 cups.

Centerpieces really have bite

Continued from Page 1

craft she could play into a home business.

Capitalizing on the idea, she launched Basketris in 1984, billing herself as a food stylist and floral designer.

Drawing on an active imagination and earlier art training at Flint Junior College and the Flint Institute of Art, Ople's menagerie of creations expanded into dozens of dreamy ideas.

THE BASKET SCULPTURE. Some 20-30 baskets of varying sizes and weaves, are joined to a common base.

On average, it takes 25 hours of concentrated labor to fill each with a tasty variety of miniature bagels, petite homemade muffins, bread sticks, fruited cream cheeses, assorted nuts and flowers fashioned of seasoned salami and colorful olives.

For added taste, bread sticks di-

rect from the supermarket are wrapped in bacon, dipped in Parmesan cheese and microwaved. Strawberries or limes are used to flavor cream cheeses.

Empty spaces in the sculpture are visually spiced with gathers of net, dried flowers, or live calla lilies; mini-carnations, and baby's breath of the season.

OPIE USES only "the finest products I can find," striving for excellent taste and extreme beauty.

"It's all in how it's presented," she said of each new creation. "I want it so pretty, people want to be a part of it. They want to eat it."

The edible sculpture is enough for 200 guests if it is served with hot

hors d'oeuvres, or 100 guests, if served alone.

Ople also creates fruit sculptures, genuine bouquets that are both lovely and edible. Each always includes five varieties of fruit.

THE COOKIE BOUQUET. Features one dozen homemade cookies, each measuring two inches in diameter. The bouquet is now, replacing earlier bouquets containing numerous small cookies. The change followed one particularly grueling Valentine's season.

"I had orders for 500 cookies. For three days and nights, I did nothing but bake," Ople said.

She is so busy cooking and arrang-

ing for others, precious little time is left for personal entertaining, she said.

After relocating with her family from Flint to Clarkston late last year, Ople decided to streamline the business into a more manageable endeavor. Hence, the less-time-consuming cookie bouquets.

IN ADDITION, she now fashions three basic styles of edible sculpture: bread, fruit or vegetable. Each serves 100-200 guests, depending upon accompanying foods, and costs \$400-\$500, depending upon the contents of each. She personalizes every sculpture with color and theme.

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While few people have ever been hit over the head with a frying pan, many have been hit in the heart. The prostate gland, and the colon, dried flowers, or live calla lilies; mini-carnations, and baby's breath of the season.

"It's all in how it's presented," she said of each new creation. "I want it so pretty, people want to be a part of it. They want to eat it."

The edible sculpture is enough for 200 guests if it is served with hot

including breast cancer, for a free booklet on how to help reduce your risk through low-fat eating, call 1-800-EAT-LEAN

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