



Monday, June 18, 1990 O&E

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taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Everybody just loves the noodle

If there is just one food that comes close to global popularity, it has to be the noodle.

Noodles are beloved in every European country, in the Far East, the Middle East and everywhere in between. Even in the Janes gang kitchen, noodles are at least a once-a-week staple that find themselves in everything from spaghetti sauce to pierogi.

Noodles reproduce themselves in just about every nationality. There are the classic Italian ravioli, the Chinese wontons, the Jewish kreplach, the Polish kolduny and the German maultaschen. You name it, and noodles can be a part of just about anyone's heritage.

The USDA, which sets the standards for domestically manufactured as well as imported noodles, describes noodle products as "the class of food prepared by drying formed units of dough made from semolina, durum flour, farina, flour or any combination of eggs, with or without water." Macaroni, in contrast, does not contain egg.

NOODLES ARE made from flour or vegetable starch, either of which is mixed with a liquid to form a dough, then divided into individual strands or pieces by rolling and cutting or through an extrusion device. What enables these noodles to hold their shape is gluten, that tangled network of protein filaments that forms as a wheat flour dough is kneaded.

The more protein in the flour, the more gluten it will develop when moistened and worked. Eggs will coat the flour granules and interfere with gluten formation, so they can act as a tenderizer in noodles. That is why egg noodles are always flat. If shaped, they would tend to over-soften when cooked.

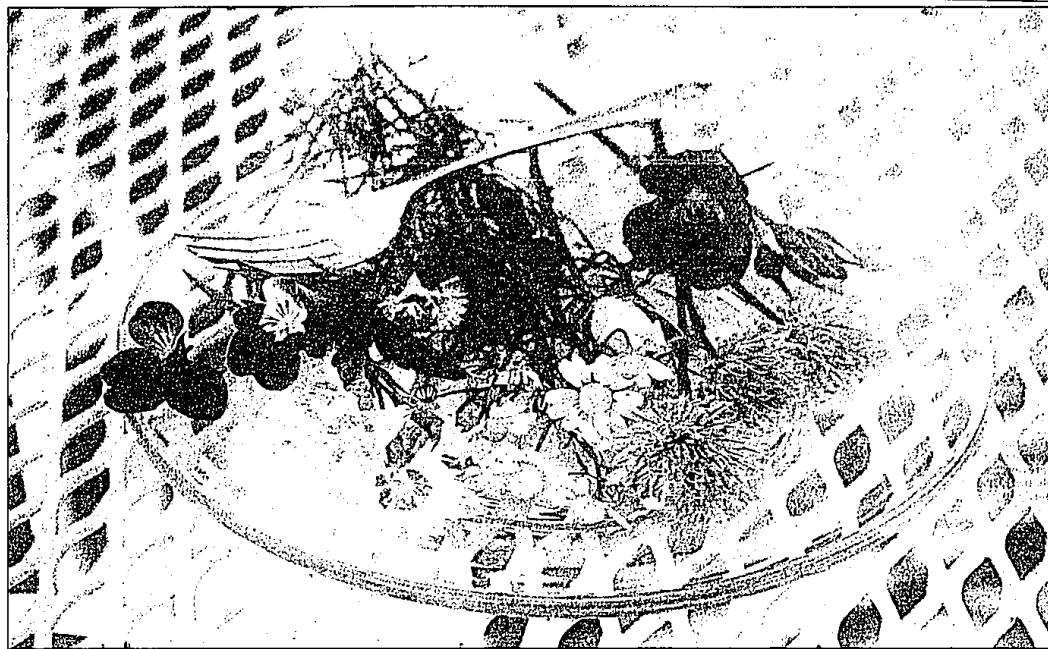
Any pasta maker worth his or her weight in dough knows that semolina flour makes the best noodles. Indeed, in Italy, a law passed in 1907 decrees that all pasta must be made from semolina.

While all-purpose, cake, pastry and whole wheat flours are milled from various mixtures of hard and soft wheat kernels, semolina is made exclusively from durum wheat — a different species, which is golden in color and harder than any other wheat. Since most wheat protein is insoluble in water, and of all the commonly grown wheats durum has the highest protein content, semolina will always make the most resilient dough that holds together best during cooking.

Not to be outdone, Oriental cuisines feature noodles that are made from all manners of vegetable starches: rice, corn, seaweed, potato, yam, mung bean, taro, and even acorn. First the starch is steamed to create a paste. Then it is frozen, defrosted and dried. After this process, the starch is so easily rehydrated that the noodles generally need not be boiled but just softened by soaking. They will, in fact, turn mushy and gluey if boiled.

IT'S REALLY NOT difficult at all to prepare your own homemade noodles. A few pounds of good semolina flour, a few eggs, a splash of olive oil, a sprinkle of salt and a few drops of water are all that is needed to prepare great homemade noodles. The difficult technique arises when it's time to roll and cut the noodles, but this is where an inexpensive pasta machine can perform wonders.

Sure, you can roll and cut your own and, as a matter of fact, Momma to this day still does it by hand, but investing in an under \$40 pasta machine can turn an hour into a fun experience for anyone in the kitchen. Kids from 1 to 100 will marvel at the rolling process that stretches the dough into Inhuman lengths. Cutting can be done with a sharp knife or, again, with a pasta machine in hand, just a few cranks of the handle.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Edible flowers and blossoms of herbs from Marty Figley's garden in Birmingham include pinks (or Dianthus), Johnny-jump-ups (Violas), chamomile, chives, sweet woodruff and roses.

Flowers make meals bloom

By Marty Figley
special writer

FLOWERS HAVE BEEN used for culinary purposes for centuries and have long been used in Europe and China.

Their use is becoming more popular in this country as cooks discover new ways to use them to enhance the flavor and texture of foods and to make the presentation very special. It's fun to try new and exciting recipes in our own kitchens and be creative.

While doing research for this article, the more I investigated, the more I learned. A Texas friend sent a recipe for Redbud cookies. I hope to share some of the information with you so that you can enjoy new experiences.

Some flowers such as nasturtiums have a great deal of taste, while others are used for garnishing, although they are still edible. Rose water adds a delicate flavor to cookies and other foods, and squash blossoms can be used to hold foods such as chicken salad. Tulips, with their pistils removed, are a delightful treat stuffed with tomato salad. Lily buds added to stir-

frys add a unique flavor.

From main dishes to desserts, edible flowers will make any meal more interesting. Conversation will be lively around a table when they are used.

I must caution all cooks to be positive in the identification of the flowers used and to always choose those that have not been sprayed with pesticides. Although many flowers would make attractive garnishes, they may also be toxic. Don't guess, be positive. The botanical names will help, since a particular plant (or parts of it) in a species may be toxic while another one is not.

Pick flowers at their peak, cut off stems and leaves, wash and drain carefully.

Presented in alphabetical order, here are some of the more interesting and readily available flowers:

Apple Blossoms (*Malus* spp.) have a delicate taste and can be used as a garnish right from the tree, sprinkled over a fruit salad to welcome spring. The can also be crystallized.

Borage (*Borago officinalis*) flowers are a bright starlike blue and

can be used the same as apple blossoms. Cakes and other desserts and salads are improved by their use, or a single blossom floating on a cup of punch is nice. Borage has been known as the herb of courage for many centuries.

Bergamot (*Monarda didyma*) leaves and blossoms were used to make tea by the Colonists after the British wanted to tax the imported tea. The flowers also make a suitable garnish. Sugar can be flavored by putting a handful of the leaves in a cup or so of white sugar and letting it sit for several weeks. Use the leaves when a minty flavor is desired, perhaps on fruit or in a cup of tea.

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) is often called Pot Marigold. Its bright golden-hued color is used to tint dishes with a saffrony gold, and the blossoms are used to garnish tossed salads or soups. You might want to sprinkle some petals on brown bread and butter for tea sandwiches, which will impart a slightly salty taste. Folklore tells us that their bright colors wards off evil charms of witchcraft.

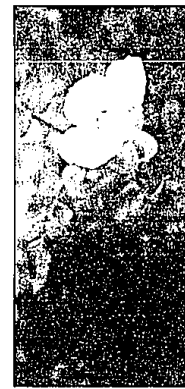
Chive Blossoms (*Allium schoenoprasum* and *A. tuberosum*) are so versatile in cooking, with their

mild onion flavor, when used in tossed salads or floating on a clear broth they add a delicate touch. The blossoms can be steeped in white vinegar resulting in a lovely pink, onion-flavored vinegar, handy to use in a dressing or marinade. Its symbolism means usefulness, and that it is.

Daylily (*Hemerocallis* spp.) often used in Oriental cooking also can be used fresh. A simple preparation is to gather buds while they are still quite green and boil them in salted water for three minutes. Serve with butter, oil and vinegar or a cream sauce. They can be added at the last minute to soups and stews. So named because the flowers are open for only one day, they bloom for several months and won't miss the harvesting.

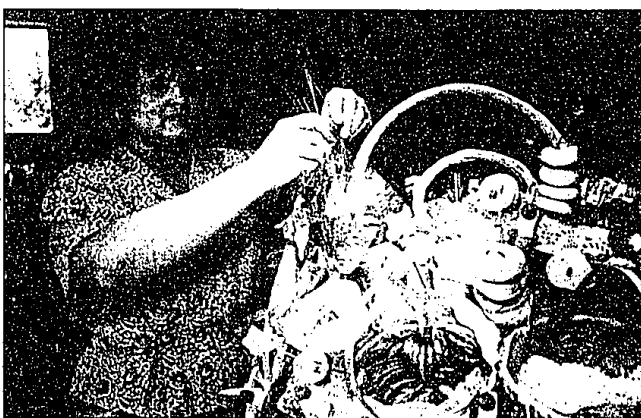
Scented Geraniums (*Pelargonium* spp.) are used in many culinary recipes. The rose, peppermint and lemon varieties are especially nice. A petal or two placed in the bottom of a well-buttered pan before pound cake batter is poured in will impart a special flavor to the cake. The leaves can be used to flavor sugar the same as is done with Ber-

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Closeup of a rose

These centerpieces really have bite



LEE KRSTROM

Basket sculpture filled with delicious food is just one of the imaginative centerpieces created by Judy Opie of Clarkston.

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

The bouquet, a breathtaking centerpiece of exquisite loveliness, looks good enough to eat.

To eat? Indeed, the arrangement, artfully planned with consummate skill, consists of strawberries, dipped in red or pink-toned chocolate, melon and pineapple chunks, and strands of grapes — hundreds of pieces of fruit floating from an abundant bed of decorative lettuce.

The unusual inspiration, a creation of new Oakland County resident Judy Opie, is an edible piece of art meant to adorn the most lavish of tables.

"It's elegant. It's extravagant. It's a stunning statement. And, it tastes great," said Opie, quick to point out these are the comments most often repeated to her by those admiring her work.

"It's very interesting. People both and eat, even little kids. Crowds always gather around. They have never seen anything like it before and, because it's so unusual, it always becomes a topic of conversation. Let's face it, people don't realize you can eat it."

IT WAS LATE SPRING 1981 and the eldest of Opie's three sons, Edward III, was set to graduate from high school. Opie wanted the post-ceremony party to be memorable.

Letting her imagination run wild, Opie began experimenting, expanding on an hors d'oeuvre vegetable theme that could serve as both appetizer and decoration.

Amid a sturdy base of 12 pounds of lettuce, Opie strategically nestled whole artichokes and cabbages whose centers had been hollowed out.

She artfully placed skewers of plump mushrooms and ripe cherry tomatoes, intertwining them with scented sprigs of eucalyptus and drapes of ivy. Slender asparagus shoots gracefully blended the creation.

Finally, cabbage bowls were filled with celery and carrot sticks, wedges of green pepper and cauliflower pieces.

THE TOTAL effect was pure artistry, an edible sculpture. Judging by the reaction of her son and his guests, Opie knew she had hit upon a successful formula, a meaningful

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