



K-STATE
Research and Extension
Master Gardener
Johnson County

Edible Flowers

... beautiful meals are more satisfying and life enhancing than plain fare.

— Rosalind Creasy

Looking for a way to dress up your meals? Want to add some style to your hors d'oeuvres? Try incorporating edible flowers into your salads, entrée's, desserts or beverages.

Interest in edible flowers is on the increase. Trendy restaurants and upscale caterers are using edible flowers as a way to decorate their plates and at the same time add unique flavors to everything from appetizers to desserts. Chefs find that edible flowers add a new dimension to their culinary creations.

Many edible flower varieties are available by seed, so you may want to try growing your own edible flowers. Edible flowers can also be found in some upscale grocers or farmers markets.

First of All, a Word of Caution . . .

- Research edible flowers using a good reference book such as those listed in the "Works Cited" at the bottom on the last page.
- Eat flowers only when you are positive they are edible. When in doubt, refer to plant identification books.
- Eat only flowers that have been grown organically. Do not eat flowers from florists, garden centers or those picked from the roadside.
- Introduce flowers into your diet in small quantities. Some flowers have particular properties that could impact your health; for example, daylilies are found to have a mild diuretic effect.

History

Throughout history, edible flowers have been a part of our culinary customs. Medieval Europeans frequently served dishes with edible flowers as an ingredient. Today we are seeing renewed interest in using edible flowers to enhance foods. These colorful and tasty blooms add texture, aroma and flavor to many dishes.

Suggestions for Use

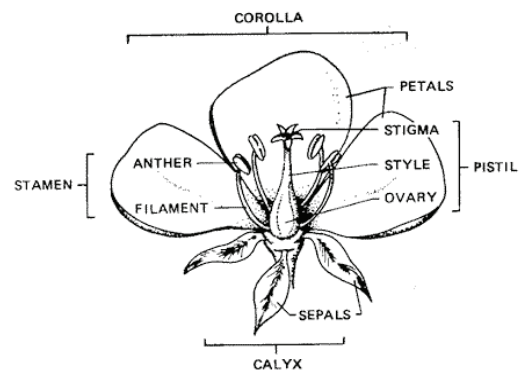
The use of edible flowers opens up new culinary possibilities to the professional chef and home cook alike. Some are best eaten raw, while others need to be cooked for best flavor. Look for cookbooks that include recipes with edible flowers. Other suggested uses include garnishes, salads, dips, fritters, flavored butters, oils and vinegars, candied flowers, jellies and syrups.

Harvesting

Generally, flowers are most flavorful when the blossoms are about three-quarters open. The best time of day to harvest is the early morning, after the dew has evaporated. Put flowers with long stems in water. Put those with short stems, such as borage, between layers of damp paper towels or in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Wash the flowers just before using, checking carefully for dirt or insects.

Remove the stamens and styles from flowers before eating because the pollen can detract from the flavor. Remove the sepals of all flowers except violas, Johnny-jump-ups and pansies. Do a taste test, especially if you are using a particular flower for the first time, to make sure the taste is palatable to you.

Then let your imagination take over. Try a few recipes using edible flowers and just have fun!



Suggested Edible Flowers for Kansas Gardens

Plant Name	Description and Culture	Uses
Bee Balm <i>Monarda didyma</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun to light shade • Perennial • Scarlet to pink flowers in summer 	Citrus, minty flavor. Use in salads, as a garnish or to make tea. Include the petals in dishes with peaches, apricots and other fruits.
Borage <i>Borago officinalis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Sun • Annual • Delicate blue flowers in summer 	Slight cucumber flavor. Toss blossoms into a fruit salad, or freeze in ice cubes and add to a cool summer drink. Candied flowers can be used to decorate cakes.
Calendula <i>Calendula officinalis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun • Annual • Yellow to yellow-orange bloom from spring to fall 	Tangy, slightly bitter taste. Petals can be eaten fresh in salads or dried into a powder and used to impart a saffron color to foods.
Chives <i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun to part shade • Perennial • 12" tall • Lavender blooms in spring 	Flowers and foliage lend a light onion flavor to salads, soups, stews, omelets and baked potatoes. Break flower into individual florets before use.
Daylilies <i>Hemerocallis</i> spp.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun to part shade • Perennial • Yellow, orange, red and pink flowers in summer 	A popular ingredient in Oriental cuisine. Adds a vegetal, sweet flavor to foods. A key ingredient in Chinese hot and sour soup.
Mint <i>Mentha</i> spp.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun to part shade • Perennial • Dainty lavender flowers in July and August 	The minty flavor of the flowers mixes well in a fruit salad. Makes a nice garnish for sweet desserts, such as ice cream or cake.
Nasturtium <i>Tropaeolum majus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun to part shade • Annual • Red, yellow, orange, or bicolor flowers mid-summer to frost 	Peppery mustard-like taste with added perfume and sweetness. Use minced to flavor butters and soft cheeses. Sprinkle petals in salads or use as a garnish.
Pansy <i>Viola x wittrockiana</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun to light shade • Annual • Combinations of blue, purple, maroon, yellow and white in spring and fall 	Slightly sweet green or lettuce-like flavor. Attractive bicolor and tricolor varieties work very well in fruit salads and green salads. Popular as a candied garnish on desserts.
Roses <i>Rosa</i> spp.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun • Perennial • Red, pink, white, yellow, orange and more 	Roses impart a perfumed, floral taste to foods. Add to salads or make rose vinaigrette dressing. Always remove the whitish, bitter base of the petal before use.
Sage <i>Salvia officinalis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun to light shade • Perennial • Lavender-blue blooms in summer 	Flowers are mild version of the leaf flavor. Use as a flavoring for soups and salads, or in combinations with pork and fish dishes.
Squash Blossoms <i>Curcubita pepo</i> spp.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun • Annual • Large yellow blooms 	Mild, slightly sweet nectar flavor. Large blossoms can be stuffed with an herbed cheese and breadcrumb mixture and sautéed for a tasty appetizer.
Violet <i>Viola odorata</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full sun to shade • Perennial • Purple, white or lavender flowers in spring 	Strong, sweet, floral flavor. Add fresh flowers to fruit and green salads. Candy the flowers for use as a dessert decoration.

Favorite Edible Flower Recipes

Candied Flowers

To candy flowers, you will need a small paintbrush, a bowl, a cake rack, a fork, finely ground granulated sugar, and an egg white.

Choose flowers such as baby roses, Johnny-jump-ups, violets, scented geraniums, or borage. Select flowers that are perfectly shaped and newly opened. Keep enough of the stem so you can put them directly in water and hold them comfortably. Wash the flowers a few hours before working with them so they will be dry.

In a small bowl, beat egg white slightly. Holding flower by the stem, gently paint the petals with a light coating of egg white, thoroughly covering all areas of the flower (any uncovered part will wilt and discolor). Sprinkle with sugar, covering thoroughly. Lay it on a cake rack, and spread the petals in a natural position. After a few hours, put the flowers in a warm, dry place. After a few days, they should be fully dry and ready to use or store in a sealed tin.

Use candied flowers to decorate cakes, cookies, ice cream and hors d'oeuvres.

Flower Confetti Salad

Pick flowers as close to serving time as possible, putting stems of flowers in a glass of water and refrigerating them.

For the dressing:

- 2 tablespoons rice-wine or champagne vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon frozen white grape juice or apple juice concentrate
- 3 or 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

In a small bowl, combine the vinegar, salt, pepper and juice concentrate. Wisk in the oil until blended.

For the salad:

- 1 large, or 2 small heads of Bibb lettuce
- 1 large handful of mixed baby greens
- 6 to 8 edible flowers such as nasturtiums, calendulas, violas, pansies or rose petals

Wash lettuce and baby greens and dry. In a large salad bowl, break the lettuce leaves into bite-size pieces. Toss with the dressing.

Wash the flowers gently, pat dry and pull off the petals. Combine all the petals in a small bowl. To make a confetti, you should have about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup.

Divide the salad equally among four salad plates, scatter the flower-petal confetti over each individual salad and serve.

Chive Blossom Butter

- 4 ounces unsalted butter (1 stick)
- 10 to 12 large, barely open common chive flowers, florets (petal clusters) washed and separated
- 2 small sprigs of fresh parsley, or 8 –10 chive leaves, washed and chopped

Allow butter to soften, combine with other ingredients and transfer to a small butter crock or decorative bowl. Refrigerate until serving time. Flower butters can be frozen in a sealed container for up to two months.

Lavender Sugar

- ½ cup dried lavender leaves and flowers
- 2 cups superfine sugar, or finely ground granulated sugar

In a jar with a tight lid, mix the dried lavender and the superfine sugar. Shake it up occasionally to equally distribute the sugar. After about 3 weeks to a month, the oil of the lavender will have flavored the sugar sufficiently. Use it to flavor cookies, lemonade, and hot or cold teas.

Works Cited

- Barash, Cathy Wilkinson. *Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate*. Golden, Colorado; Fulcrum Publishing, 1993.
- Creasy, Rosalind. *The Edible Flower Garden*. Boston, Massachusetts and Singapore; Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd., 1999.
- Nichols McGee, Rose Marie and Stuckey, Maggie. *The Bountiful Container*. New York, New York; Workman Publishing Company, Inc., 2002.
- Tenenbaum, Frances. *Taylor's 50 Best Herbs & Edible Flowers*. New York, New York; Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.

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