Blossom Basics

Edible flowers may boost the taste, appearance and nutritional value of meals and beverages.

March 5, 2018 By Gerrie E. Summers

Some flowers, such as fiery, spicy nasturtium, can add bright color and a dose of nutrients—like vitamin C and lutein—to a salad. Other blossoms might embellish a plate or party platter but taste rather insipid.

“When using edible flowers, think about why you are using the particular flower,” advises Katie Hess, author, flower alchemist and founder of the floral apothecary Lotuswei. “Is it for the aroma, visual beauty or the flavor?”

“For example, the elusive aroma of lilacs can be infused into organic cane sugar or coconut sugar to appreciate the fragrance in teas or baking,” Hess says. “Another heavily aromatic flower like night-blooming jasmine can be infused into maple syrup and then drizzled over fresh fruit or folded into the foam of a homemade dairy-free cappuccino. Rose petals can be infused into honey, teas or added to cakes, frostings and mousses, where the soft floral aroma can be appreciated.”

Hess’s new book, Flowerevolution: Blooming into Your Full Potential with the Magic of Flowers, is a guide to using flowers in everyday life. “When using edible flowers for visual beauty, they can be placed on top [of foods], chopped up and folded in for color or frozen into ice cubes. In some cases, flowers can even be the serving dish: Tulips can be used as cups for mousse, sorbet, chia pudding or other fun desserts,” she says.

“Flowers with a strong flavor, such as lavender, can be used in baking cookies or cakes,” she continues. “They can also be obtained dry, which also makes them appropriate for high heat, whereas when you’re working with fresh flowers, it’s best not to cook them, using them instead for beverages, desserts or garnish.”

For best results, experts recommend choosing fresh flowers and petals from organically grown blooms or plants from your own garden or a local farmers market. The type of flowers available will depend on the time of year and your location. If you’re using flowers from a local farm, make sure that they’re sourced from soil that hasn’t been fertilized with manure for at least four months, Hess warns. In addition, pick plants not sprayed with chemicals so that they’re safe to eat.

When picking flowers from a garden, pluck them early in the day. “Always rinse the flowers, remove any insects and gently dry the flowers with a paper towel,” Hess advises.

You can also order edible flowers online. If you do, “opt for hardy, long-lasting flowers like dianthus and karma orchids and use them as soon as they arrive,” Hess says.

In addition, it’s best to use flowers right away because they wither quickly and petals will start to dry out after two hours.

If you’re not going to use them immediately, keep flowers fresh for up to 10 days by placing them on moist paper towels inside an airtight container and refrigerating them—but it’s best to use them within a week. (Tip: A sprinkle of ice water will revitalize wilted flowers.)

And here’s more practical advice from a number of other experts:

- Make sure that the flavor of the flower complements the dish. One should not overpower the other.
- Don’t use flowers from a florist, as they will likely contain harmful chemicals or pesticides.
- Check the produce section of specialty grocery stores for edible flowers.
- Never use flowers growing by the road or in public parks, as they are likely to be tainted by pesticides, herbicides or fumes from vehicles.
- If you have ragweed allergies, avoid chamomile and carnation. If you you’re allergic to composite flowers (those in the daisy or sunflower family), skip calendula, chicory, chrysanthemum and marigold.
- Use petals sparingly; some can cause digestive problems.

Although some flowers can be eaten whole, only the petals of some others are edible. (The pistils and stamens can be bitter, so these ought to be removed before eating.)

Certain flowers have parts that aren’t good to eat and can even be poisonous. For example, some species of lilies are edible, while the ones that contain alkaloids shouldn’t be eaten. Research all flowers you want to consume.

Easy Edible Flower Recipes

Lilac Sugar

Rinse fresh lilac petals. Once completely dry, remove the petals from the stems. Use equal portions of granulated sugar and lilac petals. In an airtight glass jar, alternate layers of sugar with layers of lilac petals. Gently shake the jar to mix, and store in a dark, dry place for a week to one month. Shake periodically (daily if you plan to infuse only for a week or two). Sift and remove the petals before use if you prefer. The dried petals and sugar can also be blended in a food processor.

The infused sugar will last three months.

Decadent Crystallized Gardenia Petals*

Use only organic flowers or flowers from a garden.

1 egg white

2 tablespoons water

1 handful gardenia flower petals**

1 teaspoon organic cane sugar

Using a fork, mix the egg white and water in a bowl. With a small paintbrush or pastry brush, apply the mixture on both sides of each petal. Sprinkle sugar on both sides of the petals, and let dry for a couple of hours.

The crystallized petals can be eaten as a snack or used to decorate cakes or treats. Petals will keep in an airtight container for several days.

(**You can also use other sweet florals, such as roses, violets, pansies and Johnny-jump-ups.)

Jasmine-Infused Maple Syrup*

Use this jasmine-infused maple syrup as a sweetener for coffee drinks. To make it at home, you need a jasmine plant that flowers every morning. If you don’t have one, buy one from a nursery in your area. Note that there are many varieties of jasmine. Some, such as star jasmine or pink jasmine, may bloom only for two weeks at a time, but two weeks should be enough time to make the syrup.

Each morning, pick the jasmine blossoms that have bloomed the night before. Remove dirt or bugs, and place the flower clusters in a glass jar. Completely cover the petals with maple syrup. Seal the jar and refrigerate. The next day, using wooden chopsticks, remove the blossoms and replace them with freshly collected flowers. Repeat this step as many days as you like, according to your desired intensity of fragrance and flavor. For heavily scented syrup, Hess recommends infusing for 20 to 30 days.

Jasmine Foam Cappuccinos*

Heat 1 cup of dairy or nut milk in a small saucepan over medium-high heat.

After heating the milk, use a handheld milk frother to create bubbles in the liquid.

Brew the espresso or coffee and pour the foamy milk over it. Gently fold 1 teaspoon of jasmine maple syrup into the foam.

Delightful Golden Nasturtium Salad*

To make the nasturtium vinaigrette: Fill 3/4 of a jar with fresh nasturtium blossoms. Top with 1/2 cup of white rice vinegar or white wine vinegar. Store in a dark place for three weeks.

After three weeks, add a sprig of fresh rosemary, a handful of fresh chives or a couple of crushed garlic cloves to the jar to enhance the flavor.

Rinse fresh nasturtium flowers and leaves with water and dry with a paper towel.

Combine the nasturtium vinaigrette with 1/2 cup of olive oil. Then add 3 tablespoons of maple syrup, 2 teaspoons of Dijon mustard and 1/2 teaspoon of pink Himalayan salt, and 2 large handfuls of nasturtium flowers and leaves. Shake well. Allow the flavors to marry for a couple of minutes. Refrigerate and use within five days.

To make the salad: Combine a large handful of salad greens and eight nasturtium flowers and leaves in a large bowl. Top with nasturtium vinaigrette and toss.

*Adapted from Flowerevolution: Blooming into Your Full Potential with the Magic of Flowers (Hay House) by Katie Hess.

Flower	Flavor	Use	Tip
Arugula (Eruca sativa or vesicaria)	Peppery, milder than the leaves	In salads and savory dishes	
Bachelor's Button (Cornflower) (Centaurea cyanus)	Cucumber or clove-like	As a garnish	Eat only the petals.
Borage (Borago officinalis)	Cucumber	In salads or as a garnish	Avoid if pregnant or lactating.
Chrysanthemum (Chrysanthemum morifolium or indicum)	Sweet to peppery	In salads, salad dressing and stir-fries	Remove white base.
Daylily (Hemerocallis)	Melon, sweet lettuce, asparagus or zucchini	In desserts and other dishes; can be stuffed and fried	Cut out white base; eat in moderation, as it can act as a diuretic.
Geranium (Pelargonium)	Melon, sweet lettuce, asparagus or zucchini	As a garnish	
Hibiscus (Hibiscus rosa-sinensis)	Sweet and tart, like cranberries	In salads, teas, cocktails and desserts	
Impatiens (Impatiens walleriana)	Sweet	As a garnish	
Jasmine (Jasminum sp.)	Sweet	In teas, ice cream and desserts	
Johnny-Jump-Up (Viola tricolor)	Wintergreen and minty	As a garnish; with soft, mild cheese	
Lavender (Lavandula)	Minty, citrus	In teas, cocktails and desserts	
Lilac (Syringa vulgaris)	Lemony to pungent	In salads, jellies, liqueurs, ice cream; crystallized with egg whites and sugar	

Flower	Flavor	Use	Tip
Nasturtium (Tropaeolum majus)	Peppery	In salads and savory dishes	Buds, flowers and leaves are edible.
Pansy (Viola × wittrockiana)	Lettuce-y or minty	As a garnish	Eat only the petals; remove the pistils and stamens.
Peony (Paeonia lactiflora)	Sweet	In salads, lemonade, punches and teas	Use to decorate cakes.
Rose (Rosa rugosa or gallica officinalis)	Depends on the variety	As a garnish	Snip off bitter white part at base of petals.
Squash or Zucchini Blossom (Curcurbita sp.)	Zucchini, yellow squash	In salads and soups, fried, stuffed with cheese	
Violet (Viola odorata)	Sweet	In desserts, jams, jellies	Freeze in ice cubes to decorate drinks.

Flower: Arugula (Eruca sativa or vesicaria)

Flavor	Peppery, milder than the leaves
Use	In salads and savory dishes
Tip	

Flower: Bachelor's Button (Cornflower) (Centaurea cyanus)

Flavor	Cucumber or clove-like
Use	As a garnish
Tip	Eat only the petals.

Flower: Borage (Borago officinalis)

Flavor	Cucumber
Use	In salads or as a garnish
Tip	Avoid if pregnant or lactating.

Flower: Chrysanthemum (Chrysanthemum morifolium or indicum)

Flavor	Sweet to peppery
Use	In salads, salad dressing and stir-fries
Tip	Remove white base.

Flower: Daylily (Hemerocallis)

Flavor	Melon, sweet lettuce, asparagus or zucchini
Use	In desserts and other dishes; can be stuffed and fried
Tip	Cut out white base; eat in moderation, as it can act as a diuretic.

Flower: Geranium
(Pelargonium**)**

Flavor	Melon, sweet lettuce, asparagus or zucchini
Use	As a garnish
Tip	

Flower: Hibiscus
(Hibiscus rosa-sinensis**)**

Flavor	Sweet and tart, like cranberries
Use	In salads, teas, cocktails and desserts
Tip	

Flower: Impatiens
(Impatiens walleriana**)**

Flavor	Sweet
Use	As a garnish
Tip	

Flower: Jasmine
(Jasminum sp.**)**

Flavor	Sweet
Use	In teas, ice cream and desserts
Tip	

Flower: Johnny-Jump-Up
(Viola tricolor**)**

Flavor	Wintergreen and minty
Use	As a garnish; with soft, mild cheese
Tip	

Flower: Lavender
(Lavandula**)**

Flavor	Minty, citrus
Use	In teas, cocktails and desserts
Tip	

Flower: Lilac
(Syringa vulgaris**)**

Flavor	Lemony to pungent
Use	In salads, jellies, liqueurs, ice cream; crystallized with egg whites and sugar
Tip	

Flower: Nasturtium
(Tropaeolum majus**)**

Flavor	Peppery
Use	In salads and savory dishes

Flower: Nasturtium
(Tropaeolum majus**)**

Tip	Buds, flowers and leaves are edible.

Flower:
Pansy
(Viola × wittrockiana**)**

Flavor	Lettuce-y or minty
Use	As a garnish
Tip	Eat only the petals; remove the pistils and stamens.

Flower: Peony
(Paeonia lactiflora**)**

Flavor	Sweet
Use	In salads, lemonade, punches and teas
Tip	Use to decorate cakes.

Flower: Rose
(Rosa rugosa or gallica officinalis**)**

Flavor	Depends on the variety
Use	As a garnish
Tip	Snip off bitter white part at base of petals.

Flower: Squash or Zucchini Blossom
(Curcurbita sp.**)**

Flavor	Zucchini, yellow squash
Use	In salads and soups, fried, stuffed with cheese
Tip	

Flower: Violet
(Viola odorata**)**

Flavor	Sweet
Use	In desserts, jams, jellies
Tip	Freeze in ice cubes to decorate drinks.

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