

## Flowers in the kitchen...and extending to the bar

Edible flowers have been a gastronomic delight throughout the ages; their colours, texture and flavours lend themselves well to food and drink innovation.



Banana blossom

We eat flowers: whole fresh flowers such as cauliflower, broccoli can be cooked as a vegetable. With cauliflower, typically only the head – the edible white flesh called ‘curd’ is eaten. Broccoli has large flower heads, usually dark green in colour, arranged in a tree-like structure branching out from a thick stalk. Zucchini flowers can be dipped in light batter and fried to make fritters, the same can be done with pumpkin/squash flowers, which can also be stuffed. Banana blossom, also known as ‘banana heart’ is a fleshy, purple-skinned flower which grows at the end of a banana fruit cluster. After the external tougher and darker ‘petals’ are removed, the light-coloured tender heart – the most prized part of the blossom – is revealed, ready for use, either cooked in

curries, stews, stir-fry or raw in salad. And there are many more edible flowers... When they are used in salads, they add not only freshness but also colour, texture and flavour.

Nasturtiums, violets, marigolds, borage, chive blossoms are just a few of the many edible salad flowers. Dressings based on vinegar infused with flowers as well as floral flavoured butter add a ‘flowery’ note in the seasoning department.



Brussel sprouts in spiral along stalk

Not only we eat flowers, we also eat flower buds. Botanically speaking, cabbage and head lettuce are enlarged terminal buds. In brussels sprout, the edible sprouts grow like buds in spiral patterns along the side of long, thick stalks, maturing over several weeks from the lower to the upper part of the stalk. Globe artichoke is a flower bud.



Artichoke is a flower bud

We ‘drink’ flowers: Flavoured beverages have been made in many ways by steeping flowers – sometimes with added herbs and spices – in water, either by infusing or by fermenting and distilling the fermented products. Many flowers retain their perfume when dried and released in hot water. Dried flowers can be used alone as tisanes or added to tea leaves. Soft drinks, jams, jellies made with flowered syrups such as hibiscus, rose, orange flower or

jasmine are some favourite drinks/conserves. Now and then, we move from the kitchen to the bar and enjoy floral cocktails, geranium gin, elderflower liqueur etc. and probably the most famous floral alcohol of all, the ‘crème de violette’, the bold, purple-hued liqueur made from infusing violet flowers in brandy.



Chrysanthemum tea

We preserve flowers and flower buds: Flowers and flower buds can be preserved as savouries or sweets. The condiment capers are the preserved flower buds of the caper bush which are harvested and brined before the blossoms pop open. The curing brings out their tangy lemony/green olive flavour. If you decide to let the plant flower, the edible fruits known as caperberries will develop, they can be pickled and eaten like olives. Caper buds range from about the size of a baby green pea to the size of a small olive. Generally, the smaller bud



Crystallised roses and petals

has the more delicate texture and better flavour. On the sweet note, confectioners crystallise flowers to decorate cakes and chocolates. Crystallised violets, pansies, nasturtiums, borage flowers, rose petals are some popular cake/biscuit decoration.

Capers buds in brine



Caper flowers and buds



Crimson clove flowers and dried buds

Flowers as spice: The spice saffron comes from the autumn flowering species *Crocus Sativus*. It has purple flowers, and the spice saffron is obtained from the reddish dried stigmas. Saffron is used traditionally to colour and flavour rice dishes.

Nowadays, it is also widely used in sweet recipes like puddings, custards and baked goods. Its unique colour and subtle flavour also go well with fish, seafood and chicken. The famous French seafood soup *Bouillabaisse* is flavoured with saffron. Saffron is also one of the ingredients in the liqueur Chartreuse, Alcoholic Bitters and Vermouths.

Cloves are the immature unopened flower buds of the clove tree. The buds are at first of a pale green, gradually turning pink, when they are ready for harvesting; if left unharvested, they develop into small bright crimson flowers. The harvested buds – the ‘nails’ – consist of a long calyx, terminating in four spreading sepals, and four unopened petals that form a small ball in the center; when dried, the buds turn from pink to rust-brown. Cloves are used as a spice in cuisines all over the world. Hard to imagine festive food such as mulled wine, Christmas pudding, leg of ham, and the humble apple pie dessert without the spice clove!



3 red stigmas of the flower crocus, when dried, become the spice saffron

Flower power! Spice up your days, turn a simple meal to a gourmet banquet with flowers and flower buds.