



Flowers. Let's Eat!

by Marilyn Loser

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Definitely, my favorite eating flower is the nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*). People are often surprised that these bright orange, yellow, and red blossoms have a distinctly peppery flavor. I serve them raw in salads and as garnish. Not everyone is a fan, but most people will at least try them. And if they don't like them, they can enjoy a small bouquet on their plate!

Apparently, buds and seeds can be pickled and used like capers. A Google search turns up many recipes.

My next favorite are squash blossoms stuffed with a sweet tamale filling, deep fried in a fluffy beer batter and served with salsa verde. I use acorn squash blossoms and a variety of summer squash blossoms. Some folks stuff them with a ricotta-egg mixture, roll in breadcrumbs, and bake them in the oven. Check out the flowers before bringing them inside. The last time I picked I forgot and ended up bringing two bees into the kitchen!

Bakers often use candied or fresh violets (*Viola odorata*) and pansies (*Viola x wittrockiana*) to decorate cakes. Johnny-jump-ups (*Viola tricolor*) are attractive and have a sweet to bland flavor. However, one web site says they contain saponins and may be toxic in large amounts. Impatiens (*impatiens wallerana*) of varying colors can also be used – they don't add much flavor but that may be an advantage! Lavender (*Lavendula* spp.) blossoms add a light purple color and delightful aroma.

I remember as a child plucking and nibbling on dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale*) as we lay on the grass and watched passing clouds. They had a sweet, honey-like flavor, if young, and were bitterer if older. So much for youth, now I just pull them out! Of course, some people make wine out of them – sounds very labor intensive to me.

Orange and yellow marigolds (*Tagetes patula*) are often used to color foods, such as cheesecake and curry. Typically, the petals are pulled out separating them from the stem rather than using the entire flower head. Some people aren't crazy about using marigolds in cooking as they plant them in vegetable gardens to deter pests. It's the strong odor that drives the pests (and possibly cooks) away.

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), called pot marigold in England, is often included in stew recipes. Some recipe authors say it is used more for its beautiful orange color than for its flavor.

Lovage flowers, although not as tangy or crunchy as the leaves, are good in soups, egg salads, slaws and stews. Flowers from a variety of other herbs are tasty and attractive. Some of my favorites include mint, basil, chives, and thyme.

I didn't realize lilacs (*Syringa vulgaris*) were edible until I researched this article. They're used in jelly, sugars, and are candied. I even came across a recipe for lilac pavlovas (a meringue-based dessert named after the Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova).

It turns out that many flowers aren't just for viewing! All of the edible flowers listed in this article grow in Alamosa.

"Eat flowers only if you are certain they are edible," says Cyndi Lauderdale, Extension Agent at North Carolina State University. A further caution is to make sure the flowers haven't been treated with any harmful chemicals. It's easier to insure this if you've harvested them from a garden you know to be chemical free. Lauderdale also suggests removing the pistils and stamens from most flowers since the pollen can distract from the flavor and possibly cause an allergic reaction in some people.

For a list of edible flower references, please visit the newspaper tab at AlamosaFlowers.net.

"In the end, there is really nothing more important than taking care of the earth and letting it take care of you." Charles Scott