



## Flowers, Not Just Another Pretty Face in a Vase

Pansies, daylilies, nasturtium - all are beautiful in the garden. But what about their other uses? Say perhaps, eating them? You have probably already eaten flowers—broccoli and artichoke are flowers but for this article, we're going to look at more typical flowers.

As beautiful as they are in the garden, edible flowers add another dimension to food on the table. From pansies enlivening the colors of your salad, nasturtiums brightening your pizza, sautéed daylilies as an interesting side dish, or tuberous begonias petals dipped instead of chips, some flowers are edible and certainly add conversation at the table.

A few warnings: first and foremost, make certain the flower is edible and not poisonous. Generally, an internet search will give you a long list of edibles as well as non-edibles. Also make sure that no pesticides have been used on the flowers. When choosing the flowers to use, make sure that no one who will be eating them is allergic to flowers. And as an added precaution, always make sure to remove the stamens that contain all the pollen.

Generally you will only use the petals, so separate them from the base of the flower. Taste the petals first to make sure you like the flavor before experimenting on family and friends. If the petal tastes a little bitter, it probably has a small white part at the bottom. Remove it and taste again.

Now, start using your creativity. Always rinse and dry your flowers before starting to cook. If making vinegar, damp flowers will turn the vinegar cloudy. You can make flavored sugars and vinegars just by adding the flowers to a container of sugar or high quality vinegar. Try lavender in sugar and chive blossoms (purple in the spring, white-which are garlic flavored-in the fall). Allow them to sit in a cool dry area for a few weeks. The flavor is subtle but definitely noticed.

Want to save on flavored honey? Add 1 cup chopped fresh flowers to 16 oz. of honey in a glass container. Cover the jar loosely and place in a pan of boiling water. Remove from the heat and leave it in the water for 10 minutes to warm the honey infusing it with flavor. Let it sit at least a week, remove the flower, and spread on toast. Lavender or rose is a favorite of mine for this. Flavored jelly can easily be made by the same method. Use a jar of apple jelly, melt gently in the boiling water, add the flower of choice, cover and let sit for at least a week.

Take your favorite biscuit, muffin, shortbread, yellow or white cake recipe and add a few tablespoons of calendula, bee balm (for a mint flavor), or pineapple sage. If you're baking a cake, save some flowers for decorating the top. Using fresh flowers is a lot easier than crafting flowers from frosting.

One of The Planter's Palette favorites is chopped nasturtiums on pizza. Take your favorite pizza-homemade, frozen, or take-out and just before serving sprinkle nasturtiums to add a peppery flavor. Pickled, nasturtium seeds can actually double as capers.

To make your own mint ice cream, soften a quart of vanilla ice cream. Chop a cup of monarda petals and mix into the ice cream. Refreeze and you have mint ice cream. You could actually make your own vanilla ice cream but this is so much easier—and you can still say you made it.

With Mother's Day just around the corner, try garnishing frosted cupcakes with candied pansies or violets. Use meringue powder available at craft stores instead of raw egg whites and avoid the risk of salmonella. Follow the directions on the label to make about a cup of egg whites adding a few drops of vodka to act as a drying agent. 'Paint' the flower petals with the meringue then sprinkle with superfine granulated sugar. Place on a sheet of parchment paper and allow them to dry. Candied flowers are beautiful on frosted cupcakes or cake. Mint leaves done this way for your summer iced tea or mint juleps are nice as well.

Wondering what to do with all that zucchini? Use some of the blossoms before they become squash as an appetizer. Soften your favorite herbed cream cheese or make your own. Boursin is especially good. Fill a pastry tube fitted with a plain round or large star tip with the cream cheese. Gently fill the flowers and place on a platter.

Try adding flowers to sautéed dishes and vegetables. Just add at the very end and cook just long enough to warm. Heat will affect the color and texture.

I hope this has started your creative minds thinking about another use for flowers. They just aren't another pretty "face" in a vase.



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