

Garnishes of Beauty: Edible Flowers

Sister Kathy O'Keefe on behalf of the Federation Ecology Committee



At Stillpoint House of Prayer, we are blessed with Karen and Jasmine Hardy, a mother and daughter team, who prepare nutritious and appealing meals for our guests. Admiring their presentation of food, someone on retreat commented “They have a spiritual gift.” This statement got me thinking. When someone takes a bit of extra time to add a garnish as a creative touch, this gesture shows that person cares. The added ‘ingredient’ brings beauty with the potential to touch a person’s soul and can stir up a natural response of gratitude to God. Edible flowers are garnishes that offer a delightful sensory experience. The thought of eating them may seem unnatural to some; however, for centuries, cultures around the world have brightened their recipes by adding flowers. When innovative cooks use flowers and artistically arrange them on a plate, they enhance our lives with a burst of colour, interest, taste, and texture. The flowers are meant to harmonize with the foods and accurately represent what is contained within the dish, give a clue to the flavour of the meal, complement the taste of the dish, enhance food’s aromatic qualities, and fill empty space on the plate.

There are many options for edible flowers that can be used throughout most seasons. Nasturtium, pansies, marigolds, tulips, cornflowers, verbena, geraniums, honeysuckle, johnny jump-ups, and calendula flowers are just some of the varieties available. When the anthers are removed, gladiolus act as lovely receptacles for sweet or savory spreads or mousses. Roses are sweet with subtle overtones, ranging from fruit

to mint to spice, reminiscent of strawberries and green apples. Although all roses are edible, the darker varieties have a more pronounced flavour. Always check to make sure a flower is edible and, when in doubt, don't eat it! Azaleas, buttercups, daffodils, delphinium, and wisteria are poisonous. Never use pesticides or other chemicals on any part of any plant that produces blossoms you plan to eat. Roadside flowers are not to be harvested because they may have been exposed to vehicle exhaust and salt runoff from the winter months. Anyone with allergies proceed with caution. When dining out, ask if a flower used as a garnish is edible.



Edible flowers are always best when picked fresh from the garden at a cool time of day; morning is often best. Be sure to wash the flowers and check to be sure that no insects are stuck inside your flowers. The petals are the best parts of many edible flowers so remove the heel at the base of the petal as well as the stamens, pistils, and calyx of larger flowers. Some, like pansies, however, can be eaten whole. After cutting the petals away from the bitter base of the flower, carnations can be steeped in wine, candied, or used as cake decorations.

Every year when planning the landscape of your garden, be sure to add varieties of edible flowers. These flowers not only add beauty to your landscape, but valuable nutrients as well. As perfect companion plants, they will naturally enhance your gardening success. Most edible flowers like roses and lavenders contain vitamin A, C, and E. Antioxidants also protect the body from damage linked to disease and ageing. Now, this is “flower power”!

