

Flavorful Flowers  
By Ora Emmerich  
UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers  
For Print January 28, 2011

It's just about that time of year again...time to peruse the many seed catalogues to determine the course of the garden for the upcoming year. Pictures of perfect, vine-ripened heirloom tomatoes vie with striped zucchini and haricot verts (green beans), all of which fill your head when you dream at night. If you love the taste of food from your garden, you will certainly love the taste of that food when the harvest ends and the winter months begin. Plan now for garden produce that you can preserve for tasty winter meals. While you're thinking up the perfect garden plan for fruits and vegetables, don't forget to take a look at the flowers in those catalogues.

Flowers? Yes, flowers. Many varieties of edible flowers not only look great in the garden, but also add subtle taste and beautiful presentation to your meals. The University of California Davis Small-Farm Program website contains an article that recommends some plants for edible flower cultivation. "The many flowers that can be packaged for gourmet chefs and discerning grocery shoppers include old favorites like calendula, chrysanthemum, dianthus, dandelion, geranium, hibiscus, lily, nasturtium, pansy, rose and blue violets. Others include certain herb flowers like mint, sage, basil, and bergamot and even vegetable flowers such as pumpkin, okra, and squash." This list does not contain all the edible flowers, but will give you a good idea of where to start. Do remember this warning from the University of Kentucky, though. "...Not all flowers are edible. Some delicious-looking flowers are poisonous and can lead to serious illness or even death. Pansies are a good example because there are over 60 commercial varieties of pansies with only three that are safe to eat. Flowers should be chosen from edible plants that are listed in a reliable source and should be eaten only in the amounts specified in recipes. Individuals prone to allergies may have an allergic reaction to flowers. If you have any doubt about the identity of a flower, do not eat it. Your best bet is to use flowers which are commercially grown especially for eating."

Most edible flowers taste great as soon after harvest as possible. Pick flowers early in the morning, before the sun begins to shine on the plants. This also will be the time of day when natural sugars in the flowers peak, before the sunshine begins the photosynthesis that will turn the sugars into starches. Look for bruise free, perfect blossoms. Wash carefully and thoroughly, being sure to remove all dirt and insects. Never use flowers that have been exposed to pesticides or that are from roadside areas. For best flavor, the University of Iowa recommends you "Remove the stamens and pistils from flowers. Also remove the sepals (except on pansies, violas, and Johnny-jump-ups, in which they add flavor)." Once you have the clean blossoms ready to preserve, think about what method you will use.

Most flowers take well to air-drying. For flowers with stems, hang by the stems in a cool, dry, dark place until thoroughly dry. When dry, store in an air-tight container in a cool, dark place. Be sure to label your dried flowers. If the flowers do not have stems, dry the blossoms on a fine mesh screen.

Another popular method for preserving flowers, candying, involves "painting" the individual blossoms and covering the wet blossom with sugar. The Colorado State University Extension fact sheet on edible flowers says to "Choose flowers with larger petals, such as pansies, and paint the petals with an egg-white wash. Use a soft brush and dehydrated egg whites to avoid food borne illness. These flowers are edible if the dehydrated egg powder has been pasteurized. After

painting, dust the petal with super-fine granulated sugar and dry it. Store preserved flowers in an airtight container in a cool, dark place. Avoid dark-colored petals; they turn even darker with this treatment.” The beautiful blossoms can be used year round to decorate cakes and other goodies.

A very simple method of preservation for flower blossoms involves ice cube trays. Just put individual blossoms in each section of the tray, fill with water and freeze. Use these unique ice cubes to flavor and decorate lemonade, iced tea or other cold beverages. Here is a lavender syrup recipe that can be served over fruit or pancakes or added to tea.

### **Lavender Syrup**

Make a simple syrup of 1 cup sugar and 1 cup water and heat until sugar is dissolved. Add 4-6 sprigs of lavender stems, with flowers, if possible, and allow to cook for 10 minutes on low. Add a few blueberries for color then drain syrup through a sieve into a jar with a tight sealing lid. Allow to cool then store in refrigerator. You can keep it for 2 weeks in the refrigerator.

*Recommended by Penn State Extension Office, recipe from AC Gardens*

If you have any further questions, call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at 530-621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will get back to you with an answer. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for your group. For more information about the public education classes and activities, including the free public classes on food safety and pressure canning, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at [http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master\\_Food\\_Preservers/](http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/).

Interested in becoming a certified Master Food Preserver and volunteering to educate others about safe home food preserving? We are now accepting applications for our 2011 training classes. For more information, go to our website or call the UC Cooperative Extension Office at 530-621-5528.