

## Producing local flowers to meet a growing floral flavours food trend

June 19, 2018

By Lilian Schaer



Vineland – Flowers don't usually spring to mind when Ontarians think of locally grown food, but that could soon be changing.

Professional chefs have been using them for years and now researchers at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (Vineland) have teamed up with Freeman Herbs of Beamsville to look into what consumers prefer when it comes to edible flowers.

"Edible flowers are used primarily as a garnish, mostly commonly in salads, but also in ravioli, sushi or baked goods," says Dr. Alexandra Grygorczyk, consumer insights research scientist at Vineland. "There are different flower-eating traditions in different cultures, but it is becoming more mainstream as the foodie culture becomes more popular."

Grygorczyk led consumer preference research into edible garden plants like strawberries, raspberries and gooseberries several years ago that also included options for edible flowers. More than a third of respondents indicated they would prefer buying edible flowers for their garden over more traditional plants like strawberries and raspberries.

This led to the partnership with Freeman Herbs and production trials of over 25 types of edible flowers to screen out those that don't have right growing criteria, such as taking too long to flower, not producing enough blossoms, or not having a compact enough shape. The ideal edible flower varieties are compact, easy to grow and consistent, according to Grygorczyk.

Ten plants were selected for further evaluation by Vineland's trained sensory panel and over 200 consumers from the Greater Toronto Area.

“Consumers fall into two groups when it comes to edible flowers: bold flavour fans that like strong aromas and spicy tastes and smooth texture lovers that like more subtly flavoured flowers,” explains Grygorczyk.

Nasturtium and candy pop mint are examples of strongly flavoured flowers, whereas impatiens and dianthus are milder, with smooth texture. Other edible varieties include some marigold varieties, pansies and petunias. Not all flowers are edible, and consumers are encouraged not to eat plants that are grown for ornamental and not food uses.

“Sometimes consumers aren’t familiar with edible flowers so they expect them to taste fruity and floral but they are actually more like cucumbers or herbs, which is what makes them great in salads,” she adds.

Freeman Herbs is conducting more trials this year and will be releasing several varieties in four-inch pots into the U.S. market next year, where Grygorczyk says consumers are more familiar with edible flowers, before launching in Canada.

The edible flower work is supported by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs – University of Guelph partnership, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, and Freeman Herbs.

*Photo source: Vineland Research and Innovation Centre*

<https://www.aginnovationontario.ca/en/producing-local-flowers-to-meet-a-growing-floral-flavours-food-trend/>