

## Edible flowers are a blooming food trend

September 14, 2018

By Mark Cullen and Ben Cullen, Special to the Star

Last week we talked about food-industry trends spilling over to the cut-flower business, where “local,” “organic” and “heirloom” is taking hold for flower buyers.

What happens when the flower business becomes the food business?



*Zucchini blossoms have a squash-like flavour and can, for instance, be stuffed with goat cheese, battered and fried (ANDREW SCRIVANI / NYT)*

According to Whole Foods Market, edible flowers — “floral flavours — are the No. 1 consumer food trend for 2018.

Researcher Alexandra Grygorczyk, at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, west of St. Catharines, Ont., is studying the consumer preferences behind this trend. She found that in one study, “35 per cent of respondents were highly interested in edible flowers and would prefer purchasing edible flowers for their garden over more traditional plants such as blueberries and raspberries.”

Grygorczyk has since partnered with Freeman Herbs to find marketable opportunities in this field.



*The entire flower of an unopened, sunflower bud can be steamed or sauteed, and has an artichoke flavour. (MarkCullen.com)*

Looking at this issue from a gardener's perspective, here is our list of flowers you can grow that look as good as they taste:

- **Dandelion** (*Taxacum officinalis*) is most likely growing in your yard — whether you want it there or not. It is, however, an edible crop. It was imported by European settlers to use the root as a coffee substitute and the young leaves as salad greens. Hard to imagine now, right? Make the most of your crop by enjoying the young greens, either steamed or raw. The small, unopened flowers are surprisingly sweet. You might go as far as brewing tea from its dried root.
- **Squash and zucchini flowers**, both female and male, are edible and even have a squash-like flavour. They can be prepared in a variety of ways — stuffed, fresh or fried — and they are sure to stand out on any plate.
- **Sunflower** (*Helianthus annuus*) is another seldom-considered, but easy-to-grow and common edible flower. The petals of an open sunflower can be removed and added to soups or salads for a slightly bitter flavour. More remarkably, the entire flower head can be cooked (steamed or sautéed) before it opens and served whole for an artichoke-like flavour.

- **Honeysuckle.** Believe it or not, it has a honey-like flavour in its long, tube-like flowers. Japanese honeysuckle vine (*Lonicera japonica*) is the sweetest but be careful to avoid the rest of the plant and berries as they are poisonous. So is a tomato plant — but we still eat tomatoes.
- **Nasturtium** (*Tropaeolum majus*) is a colourful salad mix, as both the flower and leaves are totally edible, with a sweet-peppery flavour.



*Honeysuckle, true to its name, has a sweet, honey-like flavour. (MarkCullen.com)*

- **Calendula** (*Calendula officinalis*) have edible petals with a peppery taste. Their yellow, gold and orange colour can really stand out on a plate.
- **Chamomile**, particularly German chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla* syn. *M. recutita*) has a cheery, daisy-like flower that can be consumed fresh or dried. Dried chamomile is best consumed as tea, however we will keep it on this list as the fresh flowers are totally edible.
- **Clover** (*Trifolium* spp.) not only makes a great ground cover, germinating easily and fixing nitrogen into the soil, its flowers have a sweet, vaguely licorice-like flavour. While the whole plant is technically edible, the tender sprouts are the most delicious. Mature clover can be difficult to digest, unless you are a cow.
- **Common Hollyhock** (*Alcea rosea*) has very little flavour, but its brightly coloured flower petals can add an attractive splash of colour where your meal might

otherwise be lacking.

- **Rose** (*Rosa spp.*) is one that surprises a lot of people. It is hard to imagine a more romantic garnish than rose petals. Indeed, all roses have edible petals, but you will want to remove them from the white base at the bottom of each petal. Intensely perfumed roses can be deceiving, as their flavour is typically subtle.



*Nasturtium flowers and leaves are both edible, and have a peppery flavour. (MarkCullen.com)*

There is only one caveat to enjoying flowers as food: be mindful of any chemical treatments that have been applied to your flower crop — especially with roses, as they are more often treated than most flowers.

<https://www.thestar.com/life/homes/2018/09/14/floral-flavours-flowers-that-taste-as-good-as-they-look.html>