



Greetings everyone,

We are enjoying all the flowers bursting out around us at the moment, so this month's newsletter will be dedicated to edible flowers, three of which we use in our Herb Spread: Lavendar, Calendula, and in particular, Nasturtium. Sunset Coast organics, our organic herb supplier, creates a wonderful mesclun salad mix using calendula petals, and nasturtium (available at Farro Fresh) and anyone who has tried nibbling a nasturtium flower or leaf will no doubt vouch for its spicy, hot and sweet flavour.

Also of news this month:

* As of 1 October, we became a registered limited liability company;

- Waiheke Herbs Limited,

* We launched our Herb Spread at our first New World supermarket; Victoria Park, Ponsonby, Auckland. Shoppers will now find our Herb Spread amongst the pestos. Our product launch there last week went very well, and we received positive feedback, moving all the stock we had brought with us. We will be going back for three more promotions to get established before Christmas, so watch out for us!



EDIBLE FLOWERS are coming back into vogue, according to 'www.



<http://whatscookingamerica.net>, having been very popular back in the Victorian era, and commonly used in Chinese, Indian and Middle Eastern cuisine. Not surprising, considering growing competition by top chefs to create ever more original dishes using visually stimulating artistic arrangements with unusual ingredients, in their bid to either win another reality cooking show on television, or gain attention from high-paying connoisseurs!

I was introduced to edible flowers by my grandmother, who often sprinkled her salads with nasturtiums. Last night, I gathered rocket flowers, calendula petals, and the flowers from my broccoli plants which have begun going to seed, to spice up our coleslaw. The delicate flavours of these flowers are perhaps best enjoyed with simple accompaniments such as crackers and a soft cheese perhaps, or as an aside with a meal where you could choose when to mix in the flavour of the flower.



A few words of warning though:

* never eat a flower you have not thoroughly affirmed as being edible. Some are highly toxic, and you never know if the chef who has used them, fully knows whether they are edible or not either. (inedible flowers should not be used as a garnish at all...)

* never eat too many flowers at once as they can be quite concentrated, and you may have an unknown allergy to them

* some flowers will have inedible pistils and stamens, eg. calendula petals only, are edible

* don't eat any flowers which may have been sprayed with pesticides, or have other toxic residues.

Here we will list some of the more popular edible flowers, their uses and qualities



Calendula: ranges in taste from spicy to bitter, tangy to peppery. Also known as Poor Man's Saffron, it can be used dried or fresh, the attractive gold and orange petals adding colour and a delicate flavour to soups, pasta and rice dishes, herb butters, salads, spreads, and scrambled eggs. Said to be an emmenagogic! (regulating hormones and menstruation..)

Carnations: can be steeped in wine, candy, or used as cake decorations. To use the surprisingly sweet petals in desserts, cut them away from the bitter white base of the flower. Dianthus are the miniature member of the carnation family with light clove-like or nutmeg scent. Petals add color to salads or aspics. Carnation petals are the secret ingredient in Chartreuse, a 17th century French liqueur.

Dandelions: (*Taraxacum officinalis*) - Member of the Daisy family. Flowers are sweetest when picked young. They have a sweet, honey-like flavor. Mature flowers are bitter. Dandelion buds are tastier than the flowers: best to pick these when they are very close to the ground, tightly bunched in the center, and about the size of a small gumball. Good raw or steamed. Also made into wine. When serving a rice dish use dandelion petals like confetti over the rice.

Nasturtium: The interesting thing about nasturtium, is that they are very high in sulphur and vitamin C. I have tried pickling the berries as they are said to be a cheap alternative to capers, but think I should have added more salt, or cooked them first... When I opened the jar after soaking the seeds in vinegar for a couple of weeks, the jar exploded with a smelly, sulphurous gas, like Rotorua thermal pools escaping! Needless to say, we never ate them. All this sulphur gives Nasturtium antibiotic, antiseptic and antifungal qualities. Originating in South America, Nasturtium can be found worldwide today. Chemical analysis reveals "high contents of glucosinolates, sulpho-nitrogenous oil, iodine, iron, phosphates, potash, bitter extract and water. Also spilanthol, oxalic acid and the myrosin enzyme. Its volatile oil is rich in nitrogen combined with some sulphur in the sulpho-cyanide of allyl." The juice rubbed over spots and blemishes will aid healing, and it has been used to help treat cancer, congestion, colds, flu, candida, urinary tract infections, liver disorders, induce sleep, appetite and regulate the metabolism. The other great thing about Nasturtium, is that it grows like a weed almost all year round (although being very easy to get rid of), and fills up back corners of the garden with colour, and a source of flavour and medicine!

Pansy's, violias and violets: Pansies and violas have a slightly sweet green or grassy flavor. If you eat only the petals, the flavor is extremely mild, but if you eat the whole flower, there is a winter, green overtone. Use them as garnishes, in fruit salads, green salad, desserts or in soups. As a child, I would help my grandmother crystallize them in a sugar syrup to use as cake decorations for weddings and anniversaries. Once crystallized, they can last for many months!

Roses: petals have a lovely delicately sweet flavour, something between apples and strawberries, and can also be crystallized. Try them fresh or dried, floated in bowls of punch, decorated over desserts, or used to make delicious, rose flavoured and coloured jellies and jams.

Most vegetable and herb flowers: Are safe and delicious to eat, and look very pretty sitting on the edge of meals. **Avoid flowers from the nightshade family: tomato, potato, eggplant and peppers. Also asparagus.**

There are many more varieties: geraniums, primrose, lilac, impatiens etc. The above mentioned website has a full list, and is worth checking out. Your local library may even have a book dedicated to edible flowers. It is worth checking out the photos so you can positively identify those that are safe to eat.

Herb Spread Recipe of the Month: Salad Dressing!

With summer coming, it's the best time of the year to spring clean your body, and eat more salads. Make a vinaigrette with your Herb Spread by adding a dash more vinegar: try balsamic, red or white wine, or even lemon juice! Double the volume by adding more oil; extra virgin olive, avocado or sesame are tasty and healthful! Mix and pour over your salad for extra nutrition, flavour and texture! Also try adding Herb Spread to other plain dressings.



Wishing you all health, wealth and well-being
From Wendy and Waiheke Herbs Team