

OUT

The Culinary World Wants You to Stop and Eat the Roses



Courtesy of Jennifer Olson (Corrida)

Here's why chefs fell for the edible flower.

BY JEFFREY URQUHART

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Spring has sprung — at least judging by all the plates in full bloom at restaurants throughout the country. The not-so-secret ingredient of so many great dishes these days isn't an exotic spice; it's eye candy in the form of a billowing magenta cornflower or button-sized blossom from a lemon basil plant.

"You eat with your eyes, and ingredients like this really make dishes pop," says chef Trace "TJ" Jerome, who tops a yuzu-glazed duck breast with miniature orange marigolds at his Japanese-inspired San Diego hot spot [Cloak & Petal](#).

But it's not just about making things prettier for Instagram. Jerome says the marigolds give his duck a "tiny mustardy pop." And chef Juanma Barrientos, who incorporates various petals into the rotating tasting menus at Miami's [El Cielo](#), considers a flower just another kind of vegetable — a refined, nuanced, very tasty one. Over 16 courses, guests at El Cielo will feast on a bonanza of floral gems ranging from clavelins to rose petals to daisies. "They give a freshness and lightness to our dishes that contrasts with the stronger flavors and spices in our sauces," says Barrientos.

And in an age when diners seek out the most hyper-local produce their city has to offer, these botanical elements have turned the concept of farm-to-table into backyard-to-table. The violets that adorn the oak-grilled Spanish octopus at chef Amos Watts's **Corrida**, a new restaurant in Boulder, Colo., come straight from his garden (they're swapped out for blue cornflowers, depending on the season).

That said, don't think you can just start foraging from your own yard to doll up that lackluster roast chicken. "It's important to know if the flower you want to use was grown to eat," says Jerome. While some flowers can be consumed in their entirety, others, like roses, must have their stamens and pistils removed before they can be added to a dish. Furthermore, adds Jerome, "Do your research to make sure what you're using wasn't grown in harmful chemicals." All the more reason to get outside and start cultivating your own bed of culinary delights.



Petal-glazed duck breast. (Courtesy of Cloak & Petal)

The Smell of Success

How to cook with floral ingredients Ready to bring petals from your garden into your kitchen? Jeff Bednar of **Profound Microfarms**, which grows edible flowers for Texas restaurants like **FT33**, offers these three helpful tips.

1. Keep It Simple

“Start with an easy perennial for your area, such as marigolds or lemon basil.”

2. Bag It Up

“If you don’t have a garden, just purchase a grow bag. You can just add organic soil, seeds, and water.”

3. Drink Your Orchid, Shelby

“Think beyond food. Try adding flowers — like elderflower, lavender, or roses — to a craft cocktail. You’ll be the hit of the party.”