

# February 2012



## BRANDON GARDEN CLUB

Editor Shannon Brichon

### President Deane's Message

Days are much happier now with the arrival of new seed catalogues. I don't have enough room in my gardens to plant everything I want to order; so I must content myself with just a few favorites. Remember when you order from McFayden's to use our club loyalty program number which is **#169109**.

At our January meeting Pat Zmetana gave a talk on the care and maintenance of trees and shrubs. We are so fortunate to have members with so much horticultural knowledge that they are willing to share with us. If you have questions about your gardens or a particular plant, don't

hesitate to ask these members for advice.

Good News! We were successful at acquiring the M.H.A. convention for 2013. The theme chosen is "Out of Africa"; we will be having more information in the coming months.

Volunteers will be needed to help make this a wonderful celebration of our 120th Anniversary.

### Feb 15 Meeting-Carolyn's Floral Designs (726-18th Street or call 728-9047)

Will design 3 live arrangements which will be drawn for at the end of the night!!

Carolyn's Floral Design is a professional local florist serving the Brandon area.

They create beautiful fresh or silk arrangements for all occasions.

Browse their green plants, blooming plants and dish gardens for a gift.

OR

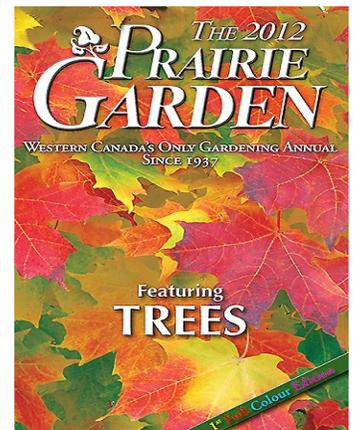
They offer gift baskets of fruit and goodies, plush stuffed animals, balloon bouquets and assorted candy and chocolates.

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## Edible Flowers *Cathy Wilkinson Barash*

Edible flowers have become familiar garnishes in countless restaurants—the 21st century's equivalent of parsley. However, like parsley, most people don't eat them. They move the flowers—nasturtiums and pansies are the most commonly seen—to the side of the plate just like they used to do with parsley.

However, buying edible flowers is expensive and they are fragile and ideally eaten the same day they are picked. Even day-old flowers lose some of their texture and flavor. If you want to have a salad with a bunch of nasturtiums, great guacamole with cilantro flowers, or dandelion "mushrooms," you need to grow your own.

By growing your own edible flowers, you are assured of their freshness and that they are grown organically. No doubt, some of the plants you already grow from seed to beautify your home have edible flowers.

Nasturtiums are the most readily recognized edible flower, having made their debut on salads in restaurants across the country. Their bold orange or scarlet color enlivens mixed greens. Up close, they have a slightly sweet fragrance, but their unique flavor sets them apart. Pop the entire flower into your mouth and as you chew, you first get a sweet essence from the nectar, followed by a bold peppery tang. Make colorful and flavorful vinegar from nasturtiums by adding flowers to a good white wine vinegar. Let it sit in the dark (light will fade the color) for several weeks. Strain the flowers out and pour the vinegar into a clean glass bottle. Use it to make a flavorful salad dressing. You can also make a unique martini with vodka steeped in nasturtiums. In addition to orange and scarlet, nasturtium

flowers come in yellow, pale orange, cream, and bicolors.

Pansies are a favorite as they come in so many different colors – single and combinations. When eating pansies, you can break two of the cardinal rules of edible flowers: eat only the petals and remove the pistils and stamens before eating. In fact, you can eat the pansy sepals as well. Some pansies have a delicate fragrance, primarily the blue-flowered ones. They have a mild wintergreen flavor. Make simply elegant hors d'oeuvres by spreading some cream cheese on a plain cracker (round or square) and top it with a whole pansy. If you are planning a special event, you can sow seeds for the color you fancy. Pansies are perfect for candying and decorating cakes—anything from a simple sheet cake to a wedding cake.

Although most people think of dandelions as weeds, the flowers are edible when young. There are varieties that have been bred for their size and leaves, which make a lovely addition to the spring garden—and will surprise your neighbors. Native Americans dipped the entire young flower in egg and then in cornmeal and fried it. It's amazing how this turns the slightly bitter flower into the flavor of a mushroom.

Calendulas, also known as pot marigold, used to be called poor man's saffron. The yellow or orange petals of the daisy-like flowers can be used like saffron, but to get the effect, you need to chop them and cook them with oil to bring out the color and flavor. Sauté some chopped onions in a bit of olive oil, add chopped calendula petals, rice, and boiling water or broth. The result is a beautiful side dish that looks like (and could be made into) Spanish paella. Calendula petals add pizzazz to carrot cake. Sprinkle petals on the cream cheese icing.

Squash blossoms have a mild vegetable flavor—similar to zucchini or yellow squash. All squash flowers are edible from acorn to patty pan squash to crookneck squash and zucchini, of course. Traditional in Mediterranean cuisine, squash blossoms are usually stuffed with flavored breadcrumbs or ricotta cheese and sautéed or fried. Pumpkin and gourd flowers are also edible. As far as zucchini are concerned, they seem to grow from small tasty fruits to baseball bats overnight; you can never keep up with them. Eating the flowers is sort of like birth control for the plants—the more flowers you eat, the less zucchini you have to deal with.

'Lemon Gem' and 'Tangerine Gem' marigolds – *Tagetes tenuifolia* with their fernlike foliage are the only edible marigolds. They have a citrusy-tarragon flavor, but little scent. When you pull the petals from the flower, break off the right-angled portion; it is bitter. Marigolds add spice to something as common as deviled eggs.

One of the best things about edible flowers is that they make ordinary family food into something fit for a visit from royalty. Their colors add excitement and the flowers themselves add zest to any dish.

Most herb flowers are safe to eat; their flavor is milder and sweeter than the leaves. Try growing dill, fennel, arugula, basil, chives, cilantro, dill, garlic chives, mustard, and society garlic. Adding flowers to a dish as mundane as potato salad or macaroni salad (especially from the deli) transforms it into something special.

