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Bloomin' good: how to use those pretty flowers you see at markets



IMAGE

VIDEO

AUDIO

Add a burst of colour and flavour to your dishes with these decorative little beauties.

By Justine McClymont



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Avyssa Corvisy is holding a small basket bursting with colour – star-shaped borago flowers, brightly coloured violas and dainty white elderflowers. Picking up a viola, she explains “I’ve always loved flowers. My great-great grandparents were market gardeners from Cornwall in England. I was always interested in what was growing in mum’s garden. We would spend days wandering the nurseries and I just loved pressed flowers as a kid. I guess you could say it’s in the blood.”

At the crack of dawn each Wednesday, Corvisy packs hundreds of tiny flowers into her car and travels the road to the Yamba Farmers Markets. In between the stalls of fresh veggies, local honey and baked goods, she sets up her table and carefully arranges little punnets of freshly picked flowers.



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A DELICIOUS BUNCH

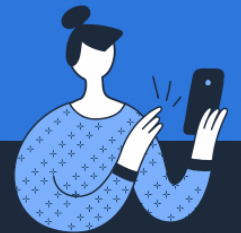
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But these flowers aren't just for show. Corvisy is one of a growing (pun intended) band of edible flower growers helping home cooks, as well as chefs, discover how to use these little pops of colour in their cooking.




Pretty flowers and herb leaves add pop to these [floral spring rolls](#)

"I was working with chef Peter Gilmore in front of house in Sydney," says Corvisy. "He knew I was a keen gardener and asked me to grow him some edible flowers. I remember saying, 'sorry, Pete, I don't have time'. I look back now and think it was crazy, although it was true at the time! But the seed was well and truly planted back then."

That was 20 years ago and she's now busy running her small-scale edible flower business [Little Things Grown](#) on the NSW North Coast in Maclean. "I pretty much started digging as soon as we got here," says Corvisy of her backyard, which has been transformed into a colourful array of flowers.


"I guess it's a micro-farm, but you can fit thousands of flowers in a small space," she says. "I grow seasonal varieties and there are literally hundreds of flowers that are edible. My personal favourites are flowering herbs."

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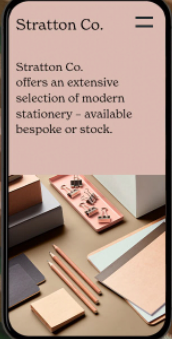
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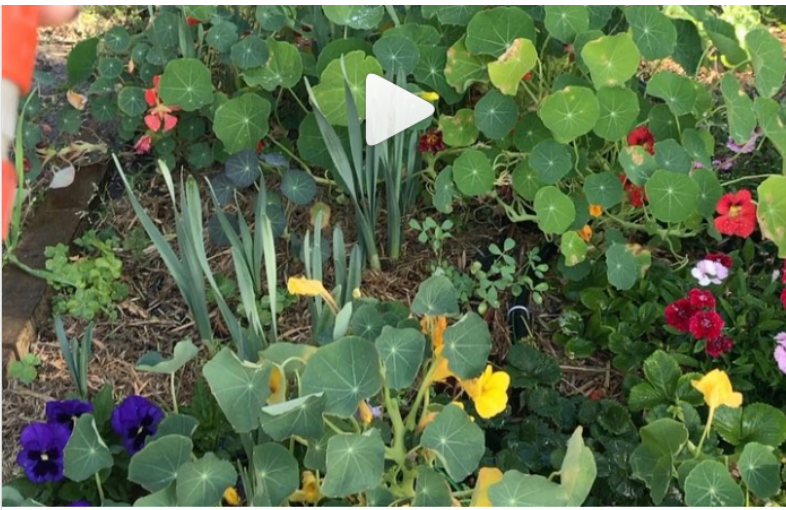
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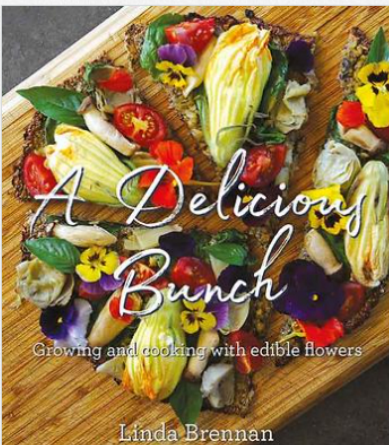


The growing interest in edible flowers appears to be set to continue according to Shane Holborn, the executive officer of the [Flower Association Of Queensland](#). "Although there has always been a market for edible flowers, there is definitely a larger demand at the moment and that is a function of them being promoted through cooking shows on television, the trend of including them on wedding cakes and the availability of them as more growers offer them.

"The industry is responding by increasing the production quantity and variety of edible flowers available. We've had an increase in our membership of flower growers servicing the edible flower market over the past couple of years."

And while the edible flower market be a growing niche in Australia, edible flowers have been used throughout history, from the ancient Romans and mustard flowers to the Chinese using daylilies, jasmine and calendula for centuries.

"Our Asian neighbours have been incorporating flowers into their menus for hundreds, if not thousands of years. It's just been a part of their normal dietary intake, whereas we're just discovering them," says [Linda Brennan](#), south-east Queensland based author, creative cook and horticulturalist. Her recently released book *A Delicious Bunch* covers 30 edible flowers including tips on how to grow them, store them and use them in the kitchen.



Brennan says that the obvious pleasure of experimenting with edible flowers is creating a feast for the eyes. "It's adding a thing of beauty that you can eat and enjoy," she says. "We eat with our eyes first. Flowers can add both nutrition and flavour to whatever you're eating. I like to use them as decorations, but I also like to use them as the hero of the dish."





Borage flowers and leaves add a cucumber-like freshness to [this smoothie bowl](#) from A Delicious Bunch.

When it comes to her favourite edible flowers, Brennan has a sweet spot for the fragrance of elderflower. "I just have this love affair with elderflowers, since I went over to England many years ago." It makes a great cordial, she says. "Then there are things like the crucifix orchid sponge [in my book]. It's my mum's sponge recipe. It's [a really easy, never-fail sponge recipe](#), which has an elderflower cream, with crucifix orchids on top and lavender jelly inside."

She says it's important to know which flowers are edible, including which parts of the plant can be eaten. "You need to correctly identify what you're eating because some flowers are poisonous." Brennan also says it's important that flowers are grown without chemical sprays. For this reason, she advises people not to eat flowers foraged from roadsides or from florists. It's best to grow your own or to source them from a reputable edible flower grower or supplier.

Back on the NSW North Coast, one of the chefs sourcing edible flowers on a regular basis is Charles Etienne Pr  tet from [The French Pan Tree](#) restaurant in Yamba.



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The French Pan Tree

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"I've used edible flowers for quite a few years, even when I had my restaurant in Paris," he says. "We used garlic flowers, chive flowers, zucchini flowers, thyme flowers and borage. So when I met Avyssa from Little Things Grown for the first time at the markets I asked her if she was growing those flowers.

"At the moment, I'm lucky to have zucchini flowers. Last week I did an entrée with clams and zucchini flowers stuffed with dill goat cheese and zucchini tartare. I'm currently using borage and coriander flowers on a snapper tartare.

"I love edible flowers; they are little flavour bombs."

Recipe images from [A Delicious Bunch](#) by Linda Brennan (ecobotanica, pb, \$39.95), available online.

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Discover more about edible flowers in [Food Safari Earth](#) 8pm Thursday 23 November on SBS then on [SBS On Demand](#).

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