



Erasmus+

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CHAPTER 18.

HERB, SPECIES AND FLOWERS IN THE KITCHEN

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18.1. AROMATIC HERBS, SPICES AND FLOWERS. SOME HISTORY

The art to enhance the taste of food is as old as the world, and it would be a mistake to believe that the introduction into the human food of spices, aromatic herbs and seasonings it is only due to a refinement of taste and olfactory senses. It is true that today we associate the use of these substances as a sign of an advanced civilization, but the prehistoric man, bored with unsavory wild herbs and berries, proved how to season them to stimulate his appetite, but naturally also to complete this instinctive need: hunger.

Having exploited the plants world for food, our ancestors struggled to find the first natural seasoning: salt. In the sap of certain trees and certain wild berries, substances were found to sweeten their food.

Quickly these two basic condiments were not enough for the unpleasant or too insipid taste of some of their crude culinary preparations. Thus man began to look for other substances that have scents and flavors, some soft, others bitter or acidic, but always aromatic.

These substances can be regarded as the primitive forms of spices and flavorings that we know today.

The use of spices came from the East, the place from which the majority are originated. In Europe, the first known spice was "the grain of Paradise" (Guinea pepper), cited in several manuscripts before and after Christ. All

spices have undergone major desires with all the struggles they imply, they were priced as if it were gold and rulers trading with them greatly enriched. In the thirteenth century, spices were so precious that they were accepted as currency along with gold. The rich Romans, Phoenicians and Genoese merchants bought spices at gold price and these served during a long time as a “currency”. Even now in Spain exists the expression “to pay in spices”. In France, salt was a very important source of wealth, its exploitation was strictly regulated and was subject to a special tax, GABELA. Probably the word “salary” comes from salt: the Romans paid in salt to their soldiers.

Little was known of the trade routes to India and the Middle East at this time. The search for spices and the spice route drove explorers like Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Magellan to travel the seas and discover new continents.

The use of flowers in the kitchen is not new. The culinary use of flowers dates back thousands of years to the Chinese, Greek and Romans. Flowers can give an exotic and different touch to our dishes but for their use some precautions must be taken.

18.2. FRESH AND DRY HERBS, SPICES: DEFINITION AND PRESERVATION.



Herbs are considered to be the leaves and greener parts of the plant - the seeds, bark, roots, etc. are normally considered a spice. Some plants are both.

In the culinary arts, the word spice refers to any dried part of a plant, other than the leaves, used for seasoning and flavoring a recipe, but not used as the main ingredient. The term spice comes from Latin, which roughly translated means “fruits of the earth”.

Most herbs can be found dried or fresh and can be used either way with ease.

Fresh herbs are great for garnishes and they provide bold flavor. They have great aromatic qualities and work very well for roasting and sauteing, or for chopping and mixing into foods such as mashed potatoes.

Dried herbs are best when used with oil (or butter, fat) or water - this way they can infuse the oil or cooking liquid. Make sure to crush the herbs with your

fingers or saute them a bit to wake them up. Crushing a bunch of them in a mortar and pestle also works very well.

The scent of fresh and a dry herb have no comparison. Fresh herbs are always preferred to dried herbs. The flavor seems to be more complex and complete. Dried herbs deliver a more concentrated flavor. Their behavior when cooking is very different.

Examples: Cinnamon is the bark of a tree. Cardamom is a seed pod. Allspice is a dried berry. Cloves are dried flower buds. Saffron is the flower. These are all examples of spices. Note too that spices are used in dried form while herbs can be used either fresh or dried.

Spices are used singly or in combination, intended to highlight the taste, perfume or coloring of food. Spices are used in very small amounts because of their pronounced sour, spicy or violent flavor. Example: Cayenne pepper, pepper, curry, paprika, etc.

We're not at the time when bunches of herbs remained in the kitchen, where they not only lose their characteristic perfume, but also develop secondary aromas often unpleasant. Refrigerators can store fresh herbs without alteration during a long time. Fresh herbs can be preserved in the following ways:

Storage in the Refrigerator

Pick and wash the herbs, dry them well.

Store in plastic bags, take out the air and tie them with a firm bond. Store them in the vegetables drawer. Perfect preservation during 4-6 days.

Freezing

Pick and wash the herbs, dry thoroughly

Divide into portions to be used, wrap each portion on a piece of thick aluminum foil, especially for freezing.

Arrange all packets on a dish and place in the freezer. After 24 hours put them in a freezing plastic bag and label them.

Shelf life: 6 months.

Preservation in oil

Old special recipe for green leaves, especially basil:

Pick and wash the herbs, dry thoroughly and take only the leaves.

Sort them in small containers in 1 cm layers, placing a small pinch of salt between each layer.

Cover them with olive oil.

Shelf life: 5-8 months.

Please note that it is preferable to cut fresh herbs and avoid mixing.

One thing to keep in mind when cooking with spices is that spices start to lose their flavor when they are ground. So whenever possible, it's best to grind your own spices immediately before using them, rather than using spices that are already ground. You can use a coffee grinder or mortar and pestle for this purpose.

If grinding your own spices isn't possible, try to use the freshest spices you possibly can. As a general rule, ground spices that are older than six months should be replaced.

Finally, spices last longer when stored in a cool location. So keeping jars of spices right next to your stove will significantly reduce their useful life.

All the parts of the plants are used:

- BERRIES: Pink berries, juniper berries.
- BULBS; Garlic, shallots, onions, chives.
- LEAVES: Parsley, chervil, basil, tarragon, mint, sage, sorrel.
- THE STIGMA OF FLOWERS: Saffron
- FLOWER BUDS: Capers, nasturtiums, cloves, etc.
- FLOWERS: Mace (flower of nutmeg)
- FRUITS: Cornichons, peppers, vanilla.
- BEADS: Coriander, fennel, cumin, caraway, pepper, nutmeg.
- BARK: Cinnamon
- ROOTS: Celery, raifort.
- RHIZOMES: Turmeric, ginger.

18.3 SEASONING AND FLAVORING, CLASSIFICATION AND ROLES IN FOOD.



Seasoning can be described as the enhancement of natural tastes that are present in food without drastic alteration to the basic flavor. Salt in its various forms is the basic seasoning agent. They are represented by the aromatic

and at the same time spiced substances or associations of aromatic substances that added to food enhance its taste.

Flavoring, as opposed to seasoning, is the addition of a new flavor to a food. Flavorings enhance the natural taste of the food it is added to. This results in an alteration of the natural flavor of the food. The various types of flavoring agents can be categorized as herbs, spices, concentrated flavoring agents, wines and spirits, vinegar and marinades. Without flavors, there will be little distinction between one dish and the next. It is flavor in most cases that defines international cuisine. The chilli of Mexico, the tomato and basil of Italy, the fermented soy of the Eastern countries, the spices of India, all of them provide strong and distinctive flavors.

Mostly originated in Europe, flavorings represent plant substances (aromatic plants or herbs, fresh or dried) that exhale aromatic emanations, with a mild and pleasant characteristic flavor, soft, perfumed, slightly pungent, etc. In

their perfume has more importance the force than the taste. They serve to perfume, improve taste, color and presentation of the dish. Current kitchen rediscovers and makes a great use of fresh herbs. Some examples are: Basil, chervil, tarragon, parsley, anise, thyme, etc.

Classification:

- Aromatic (Aromatic Plants)

Dill, angelica, fresh anise, basil, cilantro, celery, chives, chervil, citronella, tarragon, fennel, marjoram, oregano, mint, sorrel, parsley, rosemary, sage, savory, thyme, bay leaves, etc.

- Mixed herbs (fresh, dried, or paste).

Bouquet Garnie (Thyme, parsley, and bay leaf. Used to flavor broths and soups, France), fine herbs, Herbes de Provence (usually savory; contains rosemary, marjoram, thyme, and sometimes lavender. Use as a marinade or dry rub for roast chicken, fish, and vegetables. France), mix for salads, grills, etc., turtle herbs, pesto, etc.

- Spices

Aniseed, star anise or badiane, cinnamon, juniper berries, pink pepper, cloves, coriander, cumin, turmeric, caraway. Mace, nutmeg, paprika, peppers (gray, white, green, Jamaica), peppers, cayenne pepper, saffron, sesame, etc.

- Mixed spices (chicken, pasta, liquid extract)

Four spices, curry (typically includes turmeric, coriander, cumin, fenugreek, and red pepper, but mixes can vary. Used primarily to quickly flavor curry sauces. India), spices salt, harissa, garam masala (typically includes cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, cumin, coriander, nutmeg, and pepper. Sweeter than curry powder. Also used to season curry sauces. India), tabasco, etc

- Strongly flavored condiments

White garlic, smoked garlic, scallions, onions, small dried onions, white and red onions, shallots, leeks, horseradish, etc.

- Salty taste condiments

Sea salt, rock salt, sodium glutamate, pewter salt (Potassium Nitrate), smoked salt, celery salt, etc.

- Sweet taste condiments

Different cane and beet sugars (flower, crystallized concassé, cubes, candy), honey, sweetener, vanilla sugar, etc.

- Sour taste condiments

Juices of citrus (lemon, grapefruit, orange, tangerine, etc).

Mustards: Dijon (strong), sweet, old recipe (Meaux), scented or flavored, etc.

Vinegars, Verjus (vinegar alcohol, cider wine, sherry, perfumed with garlic, shallots, tarragon), etc.

Pickled gherkins

Pickles, Onions, cherries with vinegar, etc.

Capers, Nasturtium blossom, etc.

- Bittersweet condiments

Different Chutneys (mango, apple, etc.), ketchup, relisch (bittersweet Cornichons), Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, etc.

- Fatty condiments

Butter, Composed butter (Fine herbs), scented butter (red butter, tarragon, chives, truffle).

Scented oils (with garlic, basil, tarragon, with pink pepper).

Animal fats (goose fat, foie gras, from "soup").

- Alcohols, Wines & Spirits

Cognac, Armagnac, calvados, rum, kirsch, pears, raspberries, etc spirits.

Oporto, Madeira, moscato, sauternes, red and white wines, etc.

Grand Marnier and Cointreau, strawberries, raspberries, cassis, etc liqueurs.

- Natural and artificial aromatic essences

Coffee, vanilla, bitter almond, orange blossom, peppermint, Angostura, etc.

- Aromatic Garnitures

Matignon and mirepoix, giving a particular flavor to the preparation.

- Truffles and Truffle Juice

Particularly heavy flavor and fragrance.

Roles in food

- To flavor, to highlight, to perfume.
- Give a special character to a dish.
- Vary the flavors avoiding monotony.
- Provide a sweet, palatable and pleasant color.
- Improving the presentation (bouquet of parsley, chervil leaves, tarragon leaves).
- Encourage or revive the fallen appetite (usually in tropical countries), stimulating the senses of taste, smell, etc.
- Facilitate digestion favoring the secretion of digestive juices (salivary, gastric, pancreatic, bowel).
- They provide a fairly interesting minerals or vitamins amount.

But be careful: the abuse of aromatics and/or spices can bring harmful effects: digestive difficulty, gastro intestinal irritation, hemorrhoids, bladder expansion, etc. Salt promotes hypertension and water retention in the body.

18.4. FLOWERS IN THE KITCHEN

Flowers stimulate the senses of taste, smell and touch. In this sense flowers bring numerous textures, delicious to the palate.

Some flowers are safe to eat only in small amounts. Toxic flowers are easily mistaken for edible varieties, and unrelated safe and unsafe species may share a common name. Various non-toxic plants can cause severe allergies in some people. Flowers commonly carry traces of pesticides and harbor organisms such as insects. Flowers cultivated as ornamental plants for garden use are not intended for use as food.

Tips to keep in mind when cooking with flowers:

- Consume only the petals.
- Do not buy flowers at the florist or take them from protected Parks, unknown gardens or fruit trees, because they may contain toxic substances. The best option is to buy in shops specialized in edible flowers.

- Always make sure that the flowers that will be consumed have not been treated with chemicals.
- Take measures to prevent pests if you decide to grow them at home.
- Do not abuse in their use. Flowers should give a different touch to the dish but not to obscure the flavor or taste of the main ingredient.
- Flowers are very fragile and difficult to maintain so they should be used immediately. In a covered container in the refrigerator can last only a few days.

The most used flowers in Spanish cuisine are the flowers of tagete, borage, rosemary, mint, begonias and carnations. Pansy flowers are being used a lot too. But keep in mind that the taste of the chefs is constantly changing.

They are used in all kinds of dishes. Meat, salads, soups or even flowers alone. For example in El Bulli restaurant they had a starter with 10 white begonia flower and leaf of nasturtium. Mugaritz Restaurant has created a dish called "Flowers, flowers, flowers" with 30 flowers.

The majority of flowers are not cooked (except, for example, yarrow, pumpkin and zucchini flowers). Therefore majority of flowers are added when the food is already cooked add, at the end when the final presentation of the dish is done. But we must know something essential that many chefs, waiters and customers have yet to learn: the flower is an integral part of the meal, not just a decoration. So, the flower is always something decorative (for the sense of sight), but also intervenes smell (for the sense of smell) and taste in many cases (for the sense of taste). Therefore, it is an experience of several senses.

18.5. RECIPE: ZUCCHINI FLOWER STUFFED WITH COD BRANDADE

Ingredients:

18 zucchini flowers, 1/2 kg of cod desalted and crumbled, 6 ripped tomatoes, 2 cloves of garlic, 1 dried red chilli, 1 carrot, 50g celeriac, 1 small leek, 1 bunch of chives, a pinch of sage, 1/2 l of extra virgin olive oil, ground white pepper, salt, a bunch of fresh chervil, 1/4 l of fish fumet, sugar.

Preparation

1. Perfume olive oil with garlic and chili (fry a little). Cook the cod about 10 minutes in boiling water. Blanch the tomatoes, peel them and remove excess of water or liquid.
2. Fry in a pan 1 clove of garlic, a pinch of chopped carrot, leek and sliced celeriac. Add diced tomatoes, cook all together and check the salt point. Add a pinch of sugar and chopped dried sage.
3. Preheat oven to 120 ° C, put the sauce inside the oven and cook 1½ hours.
4. Drain well the cod, transfer to a bowl and crush with a whisk. Gradually add the oil used in cooking, until a smooth cream. Allow to cool and carefully fill the zucchini flowers. Close the flowers with leaves and arrange on a baking sheet. Sprinkle with oil.
5. When the tomato is cooked, turn up the oven to 180 ° C. Blend the tomato, gradually adding the fish fumet until a very light cream, then pass by the Chinois and reserve it. Finely chop the rest of the carrot, leek and celeriac.

6. Cook the flowers 3 minutes in the oven at 180 ° C.
7. Finishing and presentation: in a bowl put a small serving of cream of tomato, place in the center the stuffed zucchini flowers and over them chopped vegetables. Sprinkle the dish with olive oil. Decorate with a few leaves of chervil.



GOOD HERBS Show cooking. Touristic Qualification Centre, Murcia, 15th May 2015

18.6. REFERENCES

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