

MEETING REPORT - a Floral Feast

We were given a very different talk by Kathy Brown, of Manor House Gardens, Stevington, who gave us tips on how to use flowers in both sweet and savoury recipes, cakes, drinks, and decoratively. Violas are a popular decoration in modern restaurants. Some perennials can impart a flavour, day lilies are crunchy, primroses are soft. Flowers can be used to make drinks, soups and salads, and her photos of beautifully adorned and delicious sounding cakes had us all frankly drooling. There are floral liqueurs, such as cowslip wine, elderflower wine, and Violette liqueur is available in Waitrose, delicious in Prosecco or mineral water. Borage flowers are used in Pimms, but did you know you can peel the stems and use in salads as they taste of cucumber? Why not try a summer punch using rose wine, tonic water, rose liqueur, and strawberries decorated with rose petals? She showed how to make a decorated ice bowl by taking two bowls which fit inside each other but with at least 2cms between them. Fill the larger halfway with water, add flowers and greenery and freeze. Top it up and freeze again. Sticky tape the bowls together to stop them moving. When needed, slightly warm the bowls and carefully separate then refreeze until used.

Simple tisanes can be made using lavenders sprigs, or lime tree flowers and are very relaxing. Elderflower and gooseberry work well and you can mix cordials in with icing, butter cream or whipped cream. Chives and fennel flowers are attractive to top cold soups, and fennel pollen is very trendy to decorate fish dishes. Add marigold flowers to a carrot cake mixture for intriguing flavor and lovely colour. Primroses, Violas and violets, and rose petals can be crystallised by taking the flowers, paint them with beaten egg white, dip in icing sugar and allow to dry. Keep them in an airtight box.

Sweet Cicely tastes of aniseed, nasturtiums are peppery, and thyme flowers can be used to top a simple dish of large mushrooms baked with breadcrumbs and cheese inside. Marjoram flowers enhance pizza or Welsh rarebit, and evening primrose flowers are edible. Don't try to eat French lavender - it tastes of disinfectant! Hemerocallis tastes like mange tout, and runner bean flowers are edible and pretty, if you have a glut. Hosta flowers are edible too and the leaves can be cooked like spinach, and all mint flowers are edible too. Add lavender to a lemon drizzle by adding a sprig or two to the sugar syrup and boil for a minute before removing. Kathy had some of her wonderful recipes on cards for sale, and we all left having realised we had been ignoring a wonderful source of flavour and decoration for our food. More info at www.kathybrownsgarden.com