

## USE OF FLOWERS IN TRADITIONAL KASHMIRI CUISINE

Article Id: AL202184

<sup>1</sup>Bhinish Shakeel\*, <sup>2</sup>Shabeena Majid and <sup>3</sup>Rafia Munshi

<sup>1</sup>Krishi Vigyan Kendra (Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology), Ganderbal, India

<sup>2</sup>Dry-Land Agriculture Research Station (Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology), Rangreth, India

<sup>3</sup>Krishi Vigyan Kendra (Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology), Budgam, India

Email: [bhinishshakeel@rediffmail.com](mailto:bhinishshakeel@rediffmail.com)

Flowers or inflorescence are the reproductive part of a plant. Since the oldest of times, these have been used in beautification of places and people to uplift spirits and visual décor. As garlands in weddings, wreaths on graves, and often as offerings in religious places like temples and *dargahs*, flowers find a place in prosperity and adversity – both. However, talking about the edible portion of a plant, rarely do flowers feature in this discourse as against the fact that culinary use of flowers has been witnessed in many cultures. There is reportage of usage of roses and violets in dishes and use of lavender in sauces in Ancient Rome. Similarly, the Chinese incorporated flowers as a major ingredient in a wide range of recipes. In recent times, there has been an impetus in use of flowers in diet for nutritive benefits.

The Chinese and Japanese have been known to use edible flowers for thousands of years. Many are used to garnish food and or use in cocktails. Traditionally, the use of flowers has also been witnessed in Kashmiri cuisine. Flowers like Cockscomb, Rose, Viola, Poppy, and Squash have been used for their color, aroma, seeds, and medicinal benefits. Inflorescence of Cockscomb is used as a natural food colorant in Traditional Kashmiri Cuisine called *Waazwan*. Similarly, the stigma of the Saffron flower is used for its aroma in *Waazwan* and *Kehwa* – the traditional beverage which is used for its aroma. The petals of rose and viola are crushed to make a paste that is traditionally known to have medicinal value and is used to maintain optimal health. Seeds of Poppy or *Khashkhash* are used in the traditional bakery to enhance texture and visual appeal.

### Cockscomb or *Celosia cristata*

Cockscomb flowers have been traditionally used for their infusion to be used as a food colorant. The flower is cut and allowed to steep in hot water (not over flame), covered with a lid, and allowed to stand for an 1-2 hours. This results in a vibrant hued infusion that is used in traditional Kashmiri Cuisine, *Waazwan*, which is a banquet meal course having about 20 dishes consisting of mutton, vegetables, and chicken. Most of these dishes have a typical red color that is due to the addition of *Mowal* infusion, saffron infusion, and other spices and condiments. Traditionally, *Waaza* or the traditional chef prepares the infusion at the time of cooking these elaborate meals. *Waazwan* is rather special meals that are cooked and served when the expected number of guests is large, i.e., weddings, funerals, baby showers, housewarming etc. It has immense socio-cultural importance and is always cooked and served with perfection.

The use of cockscomb is endorsed safe as a food colorant and is used profusely in traditional cuisine. It is natural, preservative free and easily cultivable in the courtyard requiring minimal inputs. Infact, flowers like Chrysanthemum, Viola or Dianthus are found to have highest levels of mineral elements – the most abundant element being potassium recording a value ranging from 1842.61 – 3964.84 mg/kg of Fresh Mass (Rop *et. al.*, 2015)

### *Crocus sativus L.* or Saffron

Saffron or *Zaafraan* as it is colloquially called in Kashmiri are a spice grown in warm sub-tropical climate. The use of the flower of Saffron, for its stigma has been traditionally used for color and aroma in food. The purple colored flower, inactive in summer, blossoms only in autumn. The part of the flower which is principally used are the stigmas which are handpicked and dried. Only a few strands are steeped in hot water - allowed to stand in it for one-two hours till the color of stigma is infused into it. A golden extract is then derived which is then added to the traditional foods like *Kehwa* and *Waazwan*. *Kehwa* is a Traditional Kashmiri Beverage that is a concoction of cardamom and sugar to which saffron infusion is added to render it a delightful golden hue and a typical aroma. Saffron infusion is also profusely used in *Waazwan*.

### *Rosa damascena* or Rose

The species of rose found in Kashmir is a flowering shrub plant species of genus *Rosa* in the family *rosaceae*. Colloquially called '*Koshur Golab*' these are used for their petals to prepare '*Gulkand*.' Literally translating, '*Gul*' means flower and '*kand*' means sugar meaning '*sugared flowers*'. It is made from the indigenous rose preserved in a sugar base. Petals are removed from rose hips, checked for insect infestation and washed. For a kilogram of rose petals, one kilogram sugar is taken and these are then pounded together in a stone mortar and pestle till the rose petals are crushed. Bound with sugar granules this mixture is then transferred into clean containers and are sealed to lock out air to prevent microbial activity. In this mixture sugar acts as a preservative. The mixture is allowed to stand for about a fortnight till it ferments and is thus ready to be used. Traditionally, Kashmiri people believe that a teaspoon is consumed just before breakfast to keep immune system healthy.



**Fig. 1:** Preparation of *Gulkand*

### *Viola odorata* or Viola

*Viola odorata* is an early spring flower which belongs to *Violaceae* family. The use of *Viola* or '*Bunafsha*' is similar to the use of Rose. The flowers of *viola* are collected in early spring for preparation of *Khambeer*. The flowers are crushed along with sugar in a stone mortar and left to ferment for about a week's time. Equal quantity of *viola* petals and sugar are taken and pounded together in a stone mortar. When well crushed, the mixture is then

transferred to a clean air tight container and then left to ferment. It has cooling properties and is used to bring down high fever and bring relief to cough. It is taken half a teaspoon empty stomach to avail its therapeutic benefits.

### *Cucurbita moschata or Squash*

Various varieties of cucurbits are grown in Kashmir. Squash blossoms or pumpkins have abundant amount of water and little amount of fat. The inflorescence or flower of squash (male flower) is picked washed and cooked in yogurt when in season. Care is taken that only male flowers are picked and cooked. These are sometimes also dipped in chickpea flower batter and fried to be consumed as fritters. The fritters are consumed as snacks. They are also cooked in sweet milk broth, seasoned with fennel and salt, to be consumed with rice as meal.

### *Papaver somniferum or Poppy*

Poppy belongs to the family of Papaveraceae. Its seeds are popularly known as Khash-Khash in Kashmiri. These are invariably used in traditional bakery, confectionary and sweet dishes for the special texture that they offer to food. Among the traditional bakery, there feature *Kulcha*, *Sheermal*, *Girda*, *BakerKhaani* and *Roath* that are topped with Poppy Seeds. People also grow these around their homesteads for domestic consumption. They are also used for garnishing sweet dishes like *Halwa or Phirni* – both cooked from Semolina (*Sooji*) and sugar.

### **Conclusion**

Though the literature on use of these across cultures is rather limited, there is an increase in the renewed interest in edible flowers for research and development. There is compelling evidence about the hazards of synthetic food colorants which are believed to be carcinogenic and also stimulating hyperactivity among children. Promotion of these edible flowers and educating masses would need to be up-scaled as natural and safe food colorants coupled with their nutritive benefits.

To conclude, the promotion of edible flowers as a prospective source for the food industry, gastronomy and as a prospective agent in nutritive health cannot be undermined. At the grassroots, massive outreach to locals for encouraging cultivation on the home scale can go a long way in ensuring the availability of natural foods. The use of flowers in cuisine is also

our socio-cultural connection with the history of our land. The domain of edible flowers provides excellent entrepreneurship venues for youth who can carve a niche for themselves by making a foray into the production and processing of these forgotten treasures afresh.

### References

Rop, Otakar & Mlcek, Jiri & Jurikova, Tunde & Neugebauerová, Jarmila & Vabkova, Jindriska., (2012). Edible Flowers-A New Promising Source of Mineral Elements in Human Nutrition. *Molecules* (Basel, Switzerland). 17. 6672-83. 10.3390/molecules17066672.