

## Flower Power

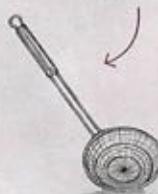
Want to master summer's crispiest, most delicious starter? Here's how, from simple to sophisticated

→ **IN ITALY, FRIED ZUCCHINI** blossoms are the jalapeño poppers of the jet set. Crunchy, salty, and utterly addictive, they go perfectly with an *aperitivo*, from a Bellini to a Negroni.

Of course, you don't need to be in Tuscany or Rome to enjoy them—they're easy enough to come by stateside. I buy fresh blossoms at the Union Square Greenmarket in New York City and dredge them in the simplest of batters—just flour, salt, and beer.

You'll want to try all three of the versions shown at right, because when you pull these puffy, golden-brown pillows from a pot of bubbling oil and serve them to guests with a sprinkle of sea salt, you'll get nothing but raves. Just don't forget to pour some ice-cold Prosecco first. —ADAM RAPOORT

A Chinese skimmer, or "spider" in chef-speak, is a favorite tool of the BA Test Kitchen for retrieving pasta, vegetables, and fried foods from the pot.



### FRIED ZUCCHINI BLOSSOMS

Vegetable oil (for frying)  
1½ cups all-purpose flour  
1 tsp. kosher salt  
12 oz. chilled Pilsner, lager-style beer, or club soda  
Zucchini blossoms (stamens removed; about 2 dozen)  
Sea salt

**INGREDIENT INFO:** Zucchini blossoms are sold at farmers' markets, better supermarkets, and melissas.com.

In a large pot, heat about 2" oil over medium heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Combine flour and salt in a medium bowl, then whisk in beer until almost smooth (some small lumps are welcome—don't overwhisk or you'll deflate the batter). One by one, dredge the blossoms in batter, shaking off the excess; gently lay them in the oil, without crowding the pan. Cook, flipping once with a slotted spoon, until golden brown, 2–3 minutes total. Transfer to paper towels to drain. Sprinkle with sea salt and devour while hot.

**VARIATION #1:** For an even lighter, crispier crust (like the zucchini blossoms pictured here), fold 3 stiffly beaten egg whites into batter and proceed as above.

**VARIATION #2:** Stuffed blossoms are a favorite in Italy. To fill about 16, combine 1 cup ricotta, 1 Tbsp. freshly chopped mint, and ½ tsp. finely grated lemon zest in a bowl. Season with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper. Using a spoon, fill each blossom with about 1 Tbsp. ricotta mixture, then dip in batter and fry as above.