

Sauteed Zucchini Blossoms

One of the most popular ways to serve these gorgeous flowers, in both Italy and Mexico, is to dip them in all-enveloping batter and fry them. You hardly know that you're eating a flower, so I rebel by rolling them in light breadcrumbs and sautéing instead of deep frying. It is best to use the blossoms the day they are picked from your garden or purchased at a farmers' market.

INGREDIENTS:

- 12 zucchini blossoms (the male blossoms on stems or the smaller females)
- 3 eggs
- ¼ cup ice water
- 2 cups panko crumbs (found in Asian section of market)
- 3 ounces fresh mild goat cheese
- 1 tablespoon minced sweet basil (optional)
- ½ cup mild olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS: Trim off stems and reach into the flower and pull out the center pistil. Gently flatten the blossom at the stem end.

Beat eggs with the ice water. Lay out a 15-inch piece of wax paper and spread out the panko crumbs.

Hold each blossom open and stuff with 2-3 teaspoons of cheese mixed with basil. Press the blossom so the cheese spreads. Extend the petals so the flower shape is evident. Dip each blossom into the egg batter, coating both sides, and then press into the crumbs. Sprinkle more crumbs on top. Don't worry about covering the flower too thickly; you want it to still look like a flower. Continue coating all of the flowers.

Heat oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Fry four blossoms at a time, turning once. Cook until golden on both sides. Drain on paper towels. Continue frying all the blossoms. If at any time the oil becomes congested with crumbs, remove burnt crumbs with spoon and reheat fresh oil.

Serves 4-6 as antipasti

PER SERVING: 150 calories, 7 g protein, 12 g carbohydrate, 8 g fat (3 g saturated), 113 mg cholesterol, 107 mg sodium, 1 g fiber.