



WHAT'S IN SEASON //

## Blossom Buddies

Beautiful and delicate, zucchini blossoms will grace your garden, and then your table.

**A**h, the garden gifts of July: dahlias, lilies, my beloved hydrangeas. Still, those are simply pretty. A few steps away, in the vegetable patch, others are simply delicious. Bell-shaped, vivid as sunset, zucchini blossoms are waiting to be stuffed, sliced, or wilted, to grace a plate as those hydrangeas do a vase.

Delicate, with a milder taste than their fruit (zucchini, like cucumbers and squash, are botanically a fruit), the blossoms herald the nascent fruit in female plants, so, if you're growing them yourself, choose the long-stemmed, fertilization-purposed male flowers. And pick them in the morning, when they're open; they'll close up tight come mid-afternoon, becoming stuffing-challenged. Whether from your garden or a farmer's, give them a gentle rinse, remove the stamen or pistil growing from the base, and put them to work. Go classic Italian: Fill with ricotta and basil or mozzarella and anchovies, then lightly batter and fry. Or slice, give them a quick sauté, and add to risotto; maybe pair with goat cheese on pizzas or frittatas. If the season has you labor-averse, a minute with a knife will yield an instant colorful salad.

At **Meritage** (1505 Weaver St, Scarsdale 914-472-8484; [meritagrestaurant.net](http://meritagrestaurant.net)), Chef Chris Vergara exults in all the options, and to his heart's content, since he can source the blossoms from two very convenient gardens: his mom's, and his Dobbs Ferry restaurant's, Harper's. "We'll put them in salads with corn, cucumber, heirloom tomatoes, and basil, or stuff them with ricotta and tomato confit," he says. But his hands-down favorite? "My Mexican cooks' quesadillas. They fry the flowers, and then add cheese, epizote, salsa verde, and crema. We snack on them while we're working." It may be a snack to them; sounds like a menu crush to me.

### Three-Cheese Zucchini Blossoms

Courtesy of Chris Vergara, Meritage

Serves 6-8

2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil  
 3 oz fresh goat cheese, softened  
 3 oz fresh ricotta  
 1 Tbsp Parmesan, grated  
 1/2 cup red onion, 1/4-inch dice  
 1/2 cup yellow squash, 1/4-inch dice  
 1/2 cup eggplant, 1/4-inch dice  
 1/2 cup mixed red and yellow bell pepper, 1/4-inch dice  
 1/2 cup tomatoes, peeled, seeded, finely chopped (canned is fine)  
 1 Tbsp garlic, minced  
 2 Tbsp mixed herbs like basil, parsley, chive, minced  
 12 medium to large zucchini blossoms, cleaned, stamens/pistils removed  
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
 Batter (see below\*)  
 Vegetable oil, for frying

In a large bowl, mix cheeses until well combined. In medium pan, heat olive oil over a low-medium flame.

Add vegetables and sauté until softened, but not browned. Add garlic and cook another 2 minutes. Stir in herbs and season to taste with salt and pepper. Gently fold vegetable mixture into cheeses, check for seasoning. With a small spoon or piping bag, carefully stuff blossoms 3/4 full.

\*FOR BATTER: Use your favorite, or prepare by combining 2 beaten egg yolks with 1 cup ice water or club soda. Add 1 cup flour and 1/4 tsp salt, mixing constantly until it's the consistency of heavy cream.

In large heavy-bottom pan over medium-high flame, heat 3 to 4 inches of vegetable oil until shimmering (375 F). Dip stuffed blossoms, one at a time, into batter, remove excess batter, and carefully fry, turning until golden brown. Remove onto paper towels, season with salt, and serve immediately.

// Diane Weintraub Pohl

COFFEE WITH THE CHEF //

## Marc Lippman

Castle Hotel & Spa  
 (formerly Castle on the Hudson)  
 400 Benedict Ave, Tarrytown  
 (914-524-6366  
[castlehotelandspa.com](http://castlehotelandspa.com))



**Name Five Items in Your Home Refrigerator...**

Green- tea chocolates [Duty Free shop in Tokyo Airport]; lots of yogurts [for the kids' lunchboxes]; really good Champagne [obviously]; Diet Coke [boring but true]; and hummus [Sabra—supremely spicy, yum!]

**Favorite Cuisine...**I haven't met a food I didn't like.

**Culinary Hero...**'Hero' is a strong word, but the chef I worked for that influenced me the most is David Bouley.

**Last Book Read...***Fifty Shades of Gray*. Shhh, don't tell.

**On a Day Off, I'd Likely Be...**with my boys

**Favorite TV Show...**Who has time for TV?

**Shoes I Wear in the Kitchen Are...**Bragard Kitchen Shoes. I haven't changed the style in 20 years.

**The Worst Kitchen Accident Was...**I cut my thumb on a band saw while butchering a haunch of venison at Windows on the World. FYI: I still have both my thumbs.

**What Does a Kitchen Have to Have for You to Work in It?...**A \$160,000 Jade Range in a 116-year-old castle.

**My Eating Disorder Is...**ongoing.

**The Most I've Paid for a Meal...**\$650, and I was by myself. It was Joël Robuchon Restaurant in Las Vegas.

**Favorite Late-Night Snack...**Reserva de la Familia tequila.

**My Favorite Cookbook...**That is a difficult question considering I own more than 1,000. Jeremiah Tower's *New American Classics* was one of the first cookbooks I can remember purchasing and I still reference it from time to time. It is pure and timeless.

**My Favorite Website...**I don't think I can answer that—my kids my read this.

**Food Trend I Hate the Most...**This whole molecular gastronomy thing is getting out of hand.

// John Bruno Turiano

## Top Toppings

According to county ice cream shops, what do Westchesterites most prefer atop their scoops?



- Sprinkles
- Hot Fudge/Chocolate Sauce
- Fresh Fruit
- Oreo's
- Nuts
- Other

// JBT with Keren Leshem