



# Passport and Plate 2015

Recipes from around the world



Crepe-Fried Flowers / Dokmai

# A different kind of Valentine

## Asia Nichols in Thailand

The flower festival had the city coated in colors, from the tangy orange of bougainvilleas to the sugary blossoms of pink petunias. Chiang Mai, Thailand is a place so known for its exotic flowers that it is called the “Rose of the North”.

In Februaries, the air carries a sweet aroma, marking the time of year when flowers are in full bloom. But if you follow your nose six kilometers north of the city moat, you’ll come to an organic garden where flora are taken by the forkful.

Saimok Kab Dokmai (“Flowers and Mist” in Thai) is a cozy, rustic restaurant that specializes in floral cuisine. As folk music plays in the background, Ms. Potiwat, the restaurant owner, snips flowers from her private garden to serve venturesome patrons an assortment of

vibrant dishes: spicy rose petal salads, spring rolls stuffed with begonias and pansies, and crepe-fried platters of roses, hibiscus, banana flowers and frangipanis. Close your eyes for a moment, as I had, to bask in this olfactory world.

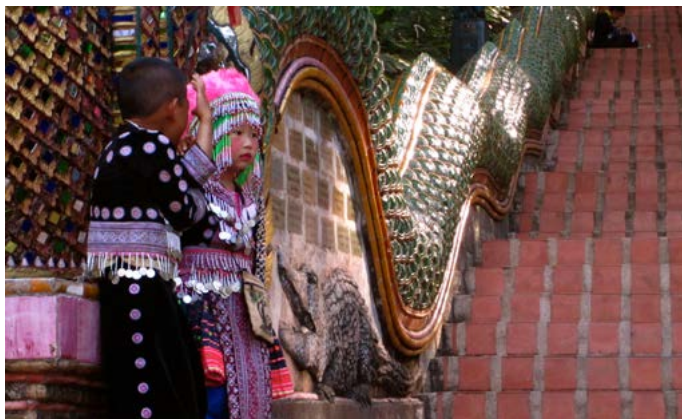
In the Western world where I grew up, February is the time when lovers buy bouquets to celebrate romance, to put on windowsills, never to eat. But there I was, on the other side of the globe, stuffing a crispy frangipani in my mouth on a dinner date with my husband.



I never would’ve known I was eating a flower. They taste like warm chips. Some flowers even have health benefits, according to Ms. Potiwat. (e.g. “Roses are good for the heart.”) Despite the abundance of tropical flowers in Thailand, floral food doesn’t lure all locals.

“Some still think it’s too crazy,” said Ms. Potiwat. “They think flowers should be for decoration only, that flowers are good for the eyes, not for the stomach.”

Also, she cautioned, some flowers are toxic. Getting farmers to stop using pesticides has been an ongoing movement, with Ms. Potiwat at the forefront. Considering I just washed down my last rose petal with a butterfly pea flower drink, I say it’s safe to pass on this delicate dish to Mother.



# Crepe-Fried Flowers / Dokmai

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## Recipe: Asia Nichols

Serves: 2 | Cooking time: 15 mins | Preparation time: 20 mins

## Ingredients

1 cup flour	<b>Organic flowers</b>
1 tablespoon cornstarch	Roses
1 1/2 cups water	Hibiscus
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper	Banana flowers
1/2 teaspoon paprika	Frangipanis
Salt and Pepper	
Vegetable oil for frying	

## Method

1. Heat one inch of oil in a large frying pan. In a medium bowl, whisk together all ingredients for tempura batter until smooth. Season with salt and pepper to taste then set aside bowl.
2. Snip stems from flowers, leaving just enough to grasp. Check to see if the oil is hot enough by splashing a few droplets of water into the pan. If oil crackles instantly, it's good to go.
3. Gently dip flowers into tempura batter then place directly in hot oil. Rotate flowers until evenly fried on each side--this should take about five minutes or until golden brown. Place on platter lined with an oil catcher (such as paper towel) and season with salt.
4. During the last minute, drizzle a few extra petals on top and serve right away with sweet and sour sauce (or your favorite sweet dipping sauce) and a side of ginger.

\* Platters may vary, depending on flowers available at the time of year. Make sure you don't use flowers that bloom from chemical pesticides (e.g. a store-bought bouquet from an unwanted admirer). Cooking the flowers will not make them safe to eat. You can find fresh pesticide-free flowers at local farmers markets, organic gardens or specialty grocery stores.