



Using her background as a medical technologist, Williams developed a method of preparing candied flowers that can be made ahead of time and frozen until ready to use in garnishing.

Edible Blossoms Lend Elegance To Special Occasions

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff
HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) —

Edible flowers might not be everyone's cup of tea—that is, until they see the elegant flowers that grace Jill Ann Williams' wedding cakes.

Dainty, elegant blossoms shimmer with her secret candy coating. Although the flowers appear fragile, Williams' method makes them durable. In fact, the blossoms will not shatter even if thrown on the floor, not that anyone would want to throw away the beautiful blooms that maintain their original shapes and bright colors.

Williams' said her intrigue with edible flowers began when as a child she lined up all her dolls and teddies for a tea party.

"I only did that often enough to become memorable," she said. "It's the same way with edible flowers. They aren't something you serve everyday—just on memorable occasions."

Williams demonstrated making edible flowers at the State Horticulture Association meeting held recently in Hershey.

She encouraged those in the flower business to consider the side business that can be developed with edible flowers.

Her own experimentation with edible flowers came as the result of paying an exorbitant price for some that were pale and crumbled when touched.

Her background as a medical technologist helped Williams develop a method of preparing edible flowers that do not violate the chemical principles.

Her technique includes immersing blossoms in water 15 minutes in order "to dilute off sprays" on flowers. Flowers are then thoroughly dried by patting with a tea towel. If the blossoms are put into a ziplock bag and refrigerated at this point, they will keep up to two weeks until ready to be prepared for eating.

After the flowers are covered with Williams' mixture that includes Silica Jel and sugar, the edible flowers will keep up to one year in the freezer. This makes it easy to prepare flowers ahead of time and garnish the food when ready to serve.

Williams is insistent that the flowers should not be haphazardly placed on food, but that they should be artfully arranged following flowering arranging principles using odd numbers and harmonizing colors.

She suggested using the leaves of violets as a base in food or block of cream cheese. She incorporated other plants such as ruby leaf lettuce and a heart-shaped beet cut-out to garnish food. She stuffed apricot halves with cream cheese and topped with a purple pansy.

While pansies and violets are the most popular for edible purposes, many others are equally flavorful.

A wedding cake using the candied blossoms shows the elegance that edible flowers can lend to the occasion.

Williams said that she knows a man who grows four acres of dandelions for edible flower use.

Elegant edible flower candying assemblage kit is available for \$18 plus \$4 for shipping and handling. The kit contains complete four-step instructions and reusable material to candy edible blossoms and herbs with long-lasting results. Included is candying gel for 175 blossoms.

For more information, write to Sudden Elegance, Ltd., 3724 Cedar Drive, Baltimore, MD 21207. Or, phone (410) 944-5547.



Jill Ann Williams puts the finishing touch on the elegant blossoms that shimmer from her candy-coating method.

Flower Fields Is Blooming Success

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff
HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) —

Nellie Call operates a blooming business called Flower Fields near Buffalo, N.Y. She sells flowers from May through November in a rustic-looking barn surrounded by three acres of flowers.

Through trial and error, Call has learned what works and what doesn't in growing and retailing flowers. She shared her insights at the State Horticultural Association's annual meeting held recently in Hershey.

Call grows a wide variety of flowers on three acres surrounding her shop, which is located in a non-populated area along a main road.

In addition to growing perennials, annuals, and bulbs in hundreds of varieties, Call also collects wildflowers to sell.

Call said that although she loves retailing, she grew sick of customers because they always wanted to talk, and she couldn't get her work done.

That gave her the idea to go self-service.

"People like to select their own bouquets," she said.

Call makes this convenient by placing different varieties in plastic sleeves and placing the flowers in buckets of water.

Her shop is filled with a profuse selection of flowers—another marketing technique.

"Inside the shop, you need lots of signs," Call warned, "because people can't seem to read only one sign."

In addition, she tells customers that she is busy, and if they want to talk, they can follow her around. She's found that people love to watch her work.

"The key to success in retailing flowers is to make sure the flowers

last 7 to 10 days," Call said. To maintain this life span, flowers must be conditioned.

"Do not sell flowers that aren't conditioned. They won't last," Call warned potential growers.

Freshly picked flowers are stripped of leaves and placed in a conditioning solution. A general mixture of 2 tablespoons vinegar, 3-4 teaspoons sugar, and 1 tablespoon household bleach to a 5-gallon bucket of warm water is used.

"The water used during conditioning must be warm," Call said. "Cold water is a shock to flowers."

The flowers are submerged in the mixture for 4 to 5 hours while placed in a dark area.

One of Call's biggest income makers is arranging flowers for weddings. "Decorating cakes with fresh flowers is my signature," she said.

Call never advertises but has found that word spreads.

"Think of all those guests at a wedding as potential customers," Call said of weddings.

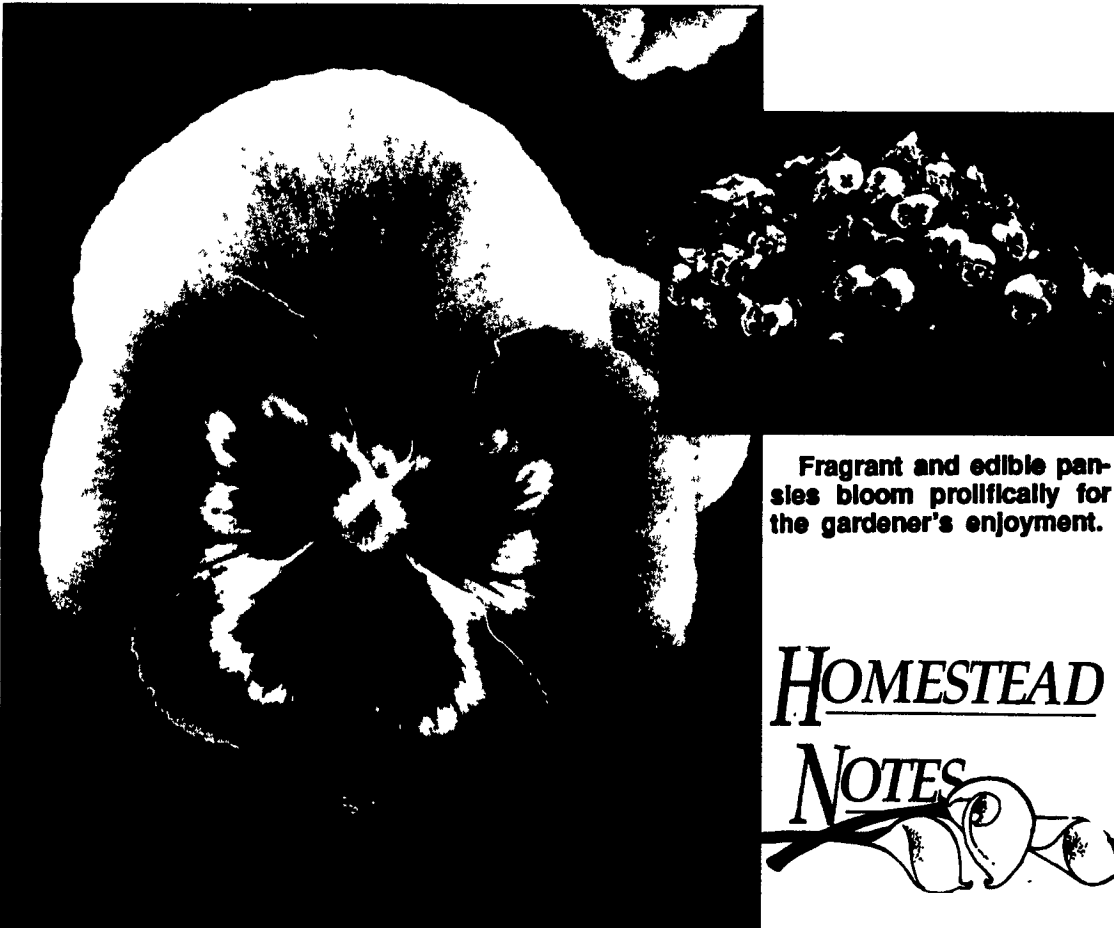
In addition, she can charge three to four times more for bridal arrangements and still be much more economical than flower shops.

"Anything Martha Stewart (guru of current trends in food, garden, and home fashions) is doing is in demand," Call said.

Nothing goes to waste in Call's operation. She keeps her prices lower than anyone else around her and is able to make a profitable living. She harvests every flower and intersperses smaller ones in bouquets that people seem to love.

Although she mostly retails, she also sells to a marketer who collects 20 percent of what he sells for her.

She also has a special arrange-



Fragrant and edible pansies bloom prolifically for the gardener's enjoyment.

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