

MOTHER'S DAY



STEPHEN WHEELER, commercial manager at speciality food company *Mise en Place*, now part of Cheltenham-based *Creed Foodservice*, selects a bunch of flowers for Mother's Day

MOTHER'S Day is the busiest day of the year for flower wholesalers – often bunched together with the fresh fruit and vegetable sellers in the major wholesale markets, but there's a blossoming year-round demand from top chefs for edible flowers.

Using flowers in cookery has been a hardy perennial over the centuries.

The Romans used rose petals to mask the odours of meat dishes that weren't as fresh as a daisy.

Violets were added to rustic wines to enhance their bouquet. In salads, edible flowers play an obvious decorative role complementing the colours of other ingredients.

The French 'mesclun' – a chef's mixture of baby salad leaves, often contains chrysanthemums, nasturtiums or marigold petals, but red poppies or honeysuckle would be equally fragrant and piquant.

Soon chefs will be picking wild garlic leaves from the Cotswold woods, but the delicate white flowers that follow the leaves are also edible, and make an attractive and strong addition to a salad, or melted with butter to drizzle over white fish.

The trumpet-shaped, yellow-gold courgette flowers are a good seller to restaurants in spring and summer.

Larousse Gastronomique, the chef's encyclopedia, suggests filling them with diced shallots and black truffles, steaming them and serving on a bed of baby spinach with a butter sauce and chervil.

Confectioners have always used flowers; for example in crystallised violets, forget-me-nots and primulas.

In drinks, elderflowers are being cultivated in the Cotswolds for cordials, and camomile flowers have been flavouring tea for centuries.

They are also attributed to virtually every medicinal cure from insomnia to irritable bowel syndrome. The Chinese have used jasmine in their tea for a thousand years – the Americans prefer using jasmine syrup to flavour marshmallows.

Modern pastry chefs are using borage flowers and lavender in their creations. Borage is one of the few truly blue coloured comestibles – it has a sweet, honey-like flavour and goes well with strawberries, or floating in a glass of Pimms in place of mint. A modest selection of edible roses on the Paris food market today would cost you around £50, so you may be better off tomorrow with a bunch of daffodils for Mum – but don't suggest you have them for tea – they're inedible.

Mise en Place
THE SPECIALITY FOOD COMPANY

Racing pub is on to a winner

WITH the gallops at *Jonjo O'Neil's Jackdaws Castle* on its doorstep, it's no wonder *The Plough Inn* at *Ford* is so popular with the racing set.

The 16th century inn was originally a courtroom before it was converted into a public house and has been welcoming thirsty riders and stablehands for years.

It won the coveted Racing Pub of the Year title in 2008 and is filled with photographs of winning jockeys and horses.

Behind the bar is *Craig Brown* and his partner *Rebecca* who were at the *Halfway House* in *Kineton* for two years before moving to *The Plough* eight years ago.

It's easy to see why the place so popular. The Cotswold stone inn is virtually unchanged in parts with beamed ceilings, fireplaces and hops hanging from the bar. There is even a cell where sheep rustlers used to be locked up and the old hay loft has been turned into guest accommodation.

Nowadays *The Plough* is a cosy spot to escape the elements with different rooms to tuck yourself away in and beer on tap from the local *Donnington Brewery*.

There is a good choice of food too including *Gloucester Old Spot* roast loin of pork with sage and onion stuffing and cranberry sauce, grilled fillet of seabass with *Morecombe Bay* shrimp risotto and crispy half roasted duck served with a traditional orange sauce.

There is a blackboard menu which greets you as soon as you walk in with daily specials, it also does baguettes and can organise shooting lunches.

We called in one Sunday and it was buzzing with people enjoying a drink at the bar and others meeting up with friends for a Sunday roast.

Waitresses were darting in and out of the kitchen and we were soon spotted loitering in the entrance.

Although we hadn't booked, they found us a table near the bar which had rustic wooden tables and chairs and wasn't needed until later.

There is also a smarter restaurant area if you prefer space to rustic charm.

After a quick glance at the menu, I ordered a filo parcel filled with goats' cheese, sun blushed tomatoes and Mediterranean vegetables served with salad and chips (£11.95).

Nick opted for a traditional rustic ploughman's lunch with Cheddar, served with salad, pickles and crusty bread (£7.95). As soon as our meals arrived we were relieved we hadn't ordered any starters.

My filo parcel was substantial and came with a plateful of chips – comfort food at



Sous chef *Simon Carter* plates up the seabass



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THE PLOUGH



Address: Ford, near Temple Guiting

Food: Traditional British

Atmosphere: Friendly

Service: Good

Price: Starters from £3.95, main courses from £7.95, children's menu £4.95

Contact: 01386 584215/
www.theploughinnatford.co.uk

its best. The parcel was bursting with flavour with just the right amount of goats' cheese which was combined with juicy semi-dried tomatoes and slices of pepper and courgette.

I barely got halfway through the chips, but that's what husbands are for, aren't they? Nick thought it only fitting to have a ploughman's in *The Plough* and was also impressed with his plate which included a generous slab of cheddar, pickled onions and a huge salad. He would have preferred the Cheddar to be more mature but apart from that, it hit the spot.

For dessert, I fancied something refreshing so the raspberry meringue swung it for me while Nick ordered an iced lemon tart which was similar to cheesecake.

This is definitely food to enjoy after a long country walk or a busy day at the races when you've really worked up an appetite.

If you fancy something lighter there are snacks such as a mixed pot of olives with French bread and balsamic dressing, paté of the day with melba toast and homemade Thai crab fishcakes with a sweet chilli dipping sauce.

Craig and *Rebecca* are getting ready for Mother's Day tomorrow and *Cheltenham Festival* next week with a 150ft marquee.

On Monday night the pub is hosting a racing preview with jockeys *Warren Marston* and *Mattie Batchelor* and *Gordon Clarkson*, assistant trainer to *Richard Phillips*.

It's also cooking racing breakfasts from Tuesday onwards, lunch is accompanied by two big screens for people to watch all the festival action, and in the evening it's serving a carvery with local meats.

"We never turn anyone away," says *Craig*.
Lucy Parford