



Deep-fried Zucchini Flowers

The best deep-fried zucchini flowers I've ever tasted were served at Buon Ricordo. They weren't filled, just coated in a very light yeasted batter, deep-fried in olive oil and well salted! I used to drive chef-patron Armando Percuoco crazy by asking for them out of season. "Yes, Roberta," he said one night, "I'll go and ask God to make some zucchinis bloom just for you!" Well spring is the season for beautiful zucchini flowers ... the male ones with the thin stem, and the female ones with the baby zucchini attached, and both are perfect for this recipe. They're quick and easy to prepare without a filling, and the bonus is you can eat more of them this way! The bubbling yeast makes me think of sparkling wine, and a glass of Lo Sparviere Franciacorta Rosé Monique makes a fine accompaniment to these delicious snacks.

Serves 4 as an entrée

INGREDIENTS

- 1.25g (¼ teaspoon) instant dried yeast
- ¾ cup lukewarm water
- 100g plain flour
- 12 zucchini flowers
- Olive oil, for deep-frying
- Salt flakes, to taste

Frying in olive oil may seem indulgent, but it gives a great taste. If you only have extra virgin olive oil on hand, you can fry in a blend of that and neutral vegetable oil. Strain cooled oil through a clean cloth or paper filter and store in a sealed container in the fridge to use again a couple of times within a month or so.

This recipe makes more batter than you need, but it's tricky measuring anything less than ¼ teaspoon of yeast. Store leftover batter covered in the fridge for up to a week and buy more flowers or use it to make bread: add enough plain flour to form a dough, knead for a few minutes until smooth, shape into a loaf or rolls and bake at 180°C for 20-30 minutes, until well coloured.

METHOD

1. Combine yeast and water and set aside for 5-10 minutes, until yeast starts to froth.
2. Sift in flour and combine to form a thin batter.
3. Cover with a clean, dry cloth and set aside in a warm spot for 30-60 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, gently open petals and pinch out the stamen from the centre of the flowers.
5. Heat oil in a deep-sided frying pan or wok.
6. Working in batches so as not to overcrowd the oil, hold each flower by the end of the zucchini or stem, swirl through the batter, drain off the excess and lower into the oil.
7. Fry for a couple of minutes, until crisp, then drain on paper towel.
8. When all flowers are cooked, pile onto a platter, sprinkle generously with salt and eat immediately.