

Paint it blue

Butterfly pea flower, which was once considered just an ornamental flower, is now a go-to ingredient for chefs across the world

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO



Butterfly pea flower cheesecake



Butterfly pea flower cooler by Chin Chin Chu

A warm sense of nostalgia hits you when you think about your childhood days. One such vivid memory is the garden at my home in Hyderabad. The living room of my house had two large grills that were covered with a bright blue flower. As a child, I had no clue what it was called, but the shape of the flowers and its deep hue had always fascinated me. Many years later, during a trip to Kolkata, I finally found out that the flower is called butterfly pea flower, when I sampled a tea made from the petals of this flower. The bright blue petal from the flower of the butterfly pea plant is making a statement on a variety of dishes that are contemporary and unusual across cafes and restaurants. While the ingredient has been traditionally used in herbal teas, it has now found favour among chefs and restaurateurs, courtesy its stunning blue hue that enhances the visual appeal of any dish.



Smelted rice flour dumpling
by BO-TAI



Teabox's blue amore

Flower power

The butterfly pea flowers comes from a plant in southeast Asia and it has been used for centuries to add a bright blue colour to food. But now, the application can be seen in rice dishes, soups, smoothies, shakes and desserts. Interestingly, the petals of the butterfly pea flower have no scent or flavour which makes them the perfect food colouring agent for any dish or drink. "The flower is very delicate and has to be handled with a lot of caution. It has to be dried with very low moisture content and needs to be steeped properly

in boiled water for getting the colour and essence. Apart from that, the butterfly pea flower is a neutral ingredient. It imparts a different colour depending on the citrus level of the dish or drink. You can experiment with the colours while being assured that the flavour doesn't get affected. For example, adding a dash of lime juice turns it into a purplish-red colour, while adding roselle hibiscus petals changes it to a bright red colour," says Sahil Singh, head chef, Modern Pan Asian cuisine, Massive Restaurants Pvt Ltd. Prashant Chaudhri, owner of Chin Chin Chu,

an Asian restaurant in Mumbai, says, "the unique colour that this ingredient gives out is appealing to the eye. Diners are fascinated by colour-changing dishes; hence this makes for a perfect selling point. When making a batch of the blue pea flower concoction, one must curate small batches as it loses its quality in 24 hours. This ingredient also loses its nutritional values and taste when it is overcooked or boiled, so one must refrain from doing so."

Health Factor

The butterfly pea flower acts as a

brain booster, antidepressant and a calmativ agent. One of the benefits of butterfly pea flower is that it has a lot of antioxidants. These powerful bio-compounds help the body fight free radicals which are toxic and cause premature ageing. Antioxidants in this ingredient also help the body lower risk of infections, which diabetics are prone to and it is also great for your heart health. It refreshes the brain and boosts its activity and function. The flower improves hair growth, protects the skin against premature aging, is used as an antioxidant and has anti-

inflammatory properties. This magical flower has anti-cancer, anti-tumor and anti-asthmatic properties. It is also good for hair loss, depression, weight loss; it is a natural Paracetamol that helps alleviate fever. It is good for heart health, it is full of antioxidants, has no caffeine, good for brain health and cures hypertension. Ashish Bhasin, executive chef, The Leela Ambiance Gurugram, says, "If you are under any medication, pregnant or lactating, please avoid consuming till you have consulted your doctor. It is full of antioxidants, flavonoids and peptides

and is effective for weight loss, helps in reducing fever, increases the blood flow to the capillaries of the eyes, promotes hair growth and reduces greying of hair."

Tea Tales

Primarily used as special tea rich with oxidants, butterfly pea flower is slowly entering the kitchen of professional chefs. Dishes like magic butterfly pea lemonade, butterfly pea flower ice tea, pea flower coconut muffin, blue pea flower ice cream and many more blue dishes are now part of restaurant



**Black truffle and butterfly pea
jasmine fried rice by Chin Chin Chu**

menus. And if you love your tea, this is an ingredient that adds a touch of colour to your cup. Kausshal Dugarr, Founder and CEO, Teabox says, “blue pea flowers yield a brew that is stunning in colour and that can be enjoyed cold or hot. Blue tea, made from blue pea flowers, also has a number of health benefits. One of the most prominent benefits of drinking blue tea is that it has a lot of antioxidants that are useful in lowering the risk of infection and is wonderful in keeping your heart healthy. This flower is also known to revitalise the brain. Drinking a cup daily will keep you fresh and energised for an entire day.” Butterfly pea flower is not just used for its pretty blue colour that can be used for dyeing food items but is also eaten directly as part of a dish. “It can be grown easily in the poorest of soil and has almost mystical properties such as being a memory enhancer, brain booster, anti-stress and calmative agent. Its edible parts

are its leaves, stems and flower buds. If someone has an allergy with flower pollen then we advise not to take it,” says chef Tarun Sibal, co-founder, One Fine Meal, Delhi.

Myriad interpretations

The butterfly pea flower is a versatile ingredient and has made its presence across cuisines. At BO-TAI, a restaurant in Delhi, a smelted rice flour dumpling is made using the butterfly pea flower which is a steamed rice flour dumpling stuffed with corn and chestnut, topped with chilli and tamarind reduction. At Chin Chin Chu, the black truffle and blue butterfly pea jasmine fried rice, a rice preparation made with dried blue pea flower where the black truffle enhances the flavour of the dish is a popular choice. The restaurant also makes a blue pea flower cooler, a signature cocktail that has an earthy taste to it and the distinct colour of the drink adds to its appeal. The flowers are steeped in warm water to extract the flavor

and colour for the cocktail. Varun Sudhakar, Head of Innovation and Operations - Beverage, Gourmet Investments Pvt Ltd explains, “We make a drink named ‘Graffiti’ at The Runway Project outlets (in Mumbai and Delhi) where we infuse Ketel One vodka with blue pea flower and combine it with a hint of London dry gin, citrus, tonic and garnish with an orchid flower and dehydrated olive dust. It adds a charming purple colour and hints of vegetable flavour as well.” The butterfly pea flower from Thailand has found a place in the modern Thai menu of TYGR. Chicken dimsum Thai red chilli oil made with butterfly pea is stuffed with minced chicken, onion, garlic, galangal, kaffir lime and red chilli. Butterfly pea flower is used for making jam, dumplings, glass noodle salad, cheesecake jelly with coconut milk or just simple tempura as well as an infusion in cocktails. So get ready to add a dash of blue to your plate—it is far more enriching than its deep shade. □