

PANKO CRUSTED STUFFED SQUASH BLOSSOMS

Towards the end of each summer, I race to the greenmarket in time to beat the crowds before all the squash blossoms are gone for the season. These delicate zucchini flowers are great for stuffing and frying. But you have to handle them ever so gingerly. It's way too easy to get a split in a leaf that will cause your stuffing to ooze out—and not in a good way. To clean them, I gently blow them open, carefully remove the stamen and then lightly shake them to remove any dirt.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup ricotta

1 tablespoon fresh chopped chives

1 tablespoon fresh chopped basil

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garlic powder

salt and pepper to taste

zest of one lemon

1 dozen squash blossoms

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour

2 eggs, beaten

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup panko

canola oil for frying

PREPARATION

Combine the ricotta, chives, basil, garlic powder, salt, pepper and lemon zest in a bowl. Using a Ziploc bag, spoon the

mixture inside, pushing it all down into one bottom corner. Twist the bag (as if it were a pastry bag), and cut off the corner with a scissor, about $\frac{1}{2}$ " opening.

Gently squeeze out about one to two tablespoons of the ricotta mixture into each squash blossom. This is where things can go very wrong. If you over stuff them, the sides will split, so be careful. Lightly twist the top petals to close. (*NOTE: if any do split, fry those last—why waste? The cheese mixture will ooze out into the oil and make a bit of a mess, but they still taste good even if they don't look that good.*)

In separate bowls, lay out the flour, egg, and panko. Season each with salt and pepper. Dip each blossom first into the flour, then the egg, then the panko, gently rolling them to cover.

Pour about 2" of oil into a medium sized pot. (The oil should not fill more than half the pot). Heat the oil to 350 degrees. Gently place the squash blossoms into the oil. Do not over crowd. You may have to do this in a few batches depending upon the size of your pot.

Fry for about two to three minutes until panko has browned, turning each once midway. Drain onto paper towels and lightly season with salt.