

Roses on the table



Rose
recipes
and lore

'I'd rather have roses on my table than diamonds on my neck'

Emma Goldman



As a herbalist/forager/story teller, I have been quite lucky to work with roses on a number of occasions. Somehow these 'flower queens' never cease to inspire people. Lately I worked for a while in the International Rose Garden here in Belgium where I live. I even got special permission to pick some of the roses to turn them into some fabulous drink and food. A lot of people told me "Wow, you must feel like walking around in a fairy tale". And I did.

But fairy tales are not always a bed of roses and here's the confession I have to make: no matter how old and special and unique the many varieties of roses in a botanical rose garden, for me there is nothing like the wild rose. Her aroma is by far superior, her wind-loving strength is in a league of its own. Once you get to know her you know she's the better version of all garden roses. And she's her royal self without any concessions.

What follows is a short introduction to the essence of Queen Rosa. Not even half complete, but it's a start.



"An old Hindu story tells of the gods Brahma and Vishnu disagreeing about what would be the most beautiful flower on earth. Vishnu claims it's the rose, while Brahma thinks it must be the lotus.

They try to convince each other with words until Vishnu goes out to pick a rose and gives it to Brahma. Brahma changes his opinion immediately and is so impressed that he offers Vishnu a gift: out of 108 large and 1008 small rose petals Brahma creates him a wife, the goddess Lakshmi".

How to gather roses for using them in the kitchen

Ok, maybe this is new for you. Maybe you never thought of roses as being edible. Flowers are for vases, right? Or maybe for perfume. But eating them?

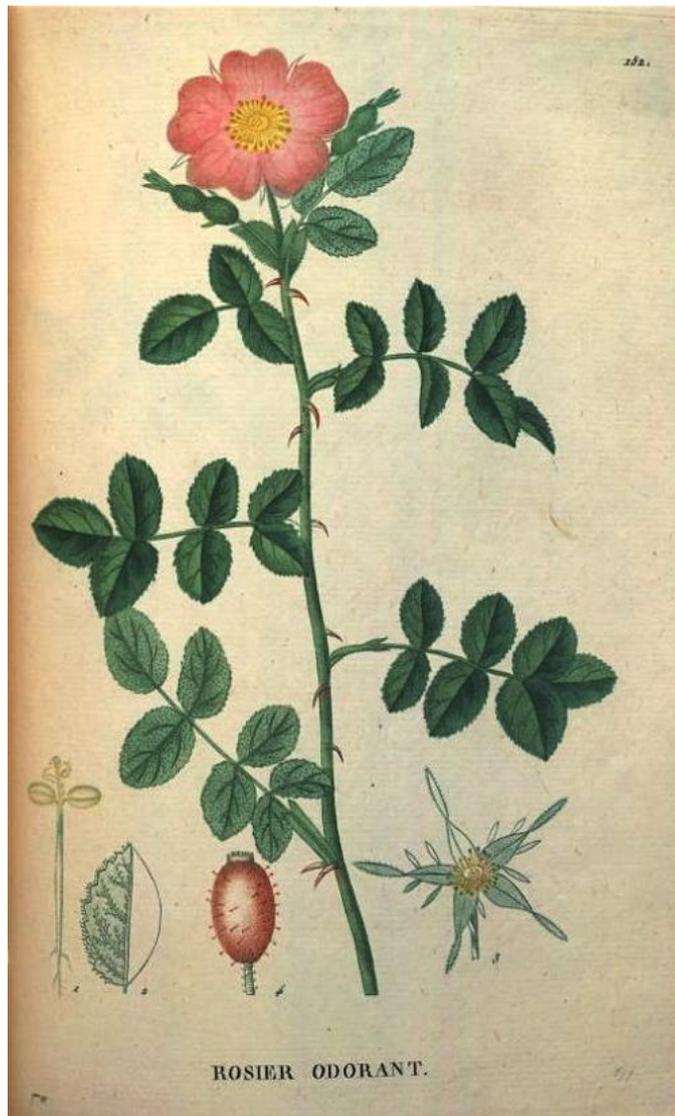
But surely you have taken the time to smell the roses. What if I tell you they taste exactly like that?

Today we still see roses as a love symbol. In ancient Greek times, the rose belonged to Aphrodite, goddess of fertility, love and eternal beauty. She was so pretty that neither people or gods could resist her.

Now, if that's not an argument for eating roses I don't know what is.

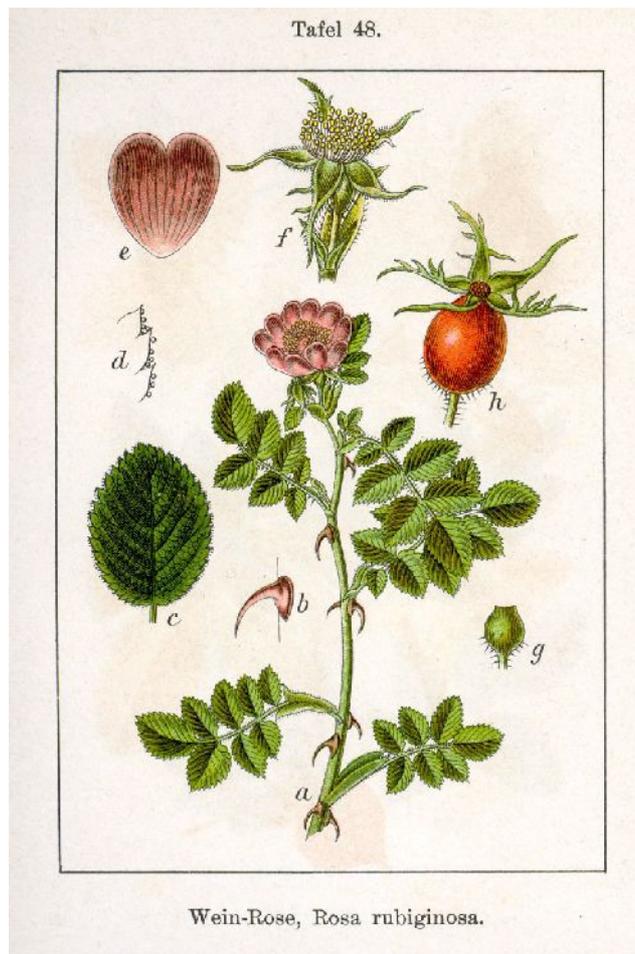
You can gather rose petals and rose hips for the recipes in this e-booklet in the wild or in your garden, and yes: you can use any rose variety. There aren't any toxic ones. But there are a few things you need to know.

- Some rose varieties are selected because they have a unique colour, because their flowers keep long in a vase, or because the flower for a long period of time. No scent = no aroma = no flavour.
- Don't use roses you got from the flower shop. They are sprayed with hair spray to keep them look good for a longer time. I guess I don't need to convince you that hair spray in your food is not a good idea.
- In the same category: don't use roses from your garden if you spray them. Have aphids? Use stinging nettle infusion to remove them. Mildew? Spray it away with field horsetail. Yes, rose lovers: those noxious weeds can save your roses bushes' life (and yours too, by the way).
- Pick roses after 24 hours of sunny weather, after the morning dew has gone. This will give maximum aroma and taste.
- Process them straight away, to ensure a maximum amount of volatile oils and flavour.



"After having eaten from the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were chased away from the garden of Eden. It is said that Eve asked if she could take just one souvenir from the garden as a remembrance to the perfect world they now had lost.

Eve picked a rose. She planted it later, but when it rooted in the world outside, the rose got thorns. Otherwise it would have been too perfect for the mortal world."

Wein-Rose, *Rosa rubiginosa*.

Rose hips: how to use them

Rose hips are exceptionally high in vitamin C, which makes them an excellent food source, especially in winter. Rose hips also contain vitamins A, B-3, D and E as well as bioflavonoids, citric acid, flavonoids, fructose, malic acid, tannins and zinc. When stored in a dry and cool place, these compact fruits have a rather long shelf life.

Did you know that during the second world war, British dietitians encouraged people to gather wild-grown rose hips to make a vitamin C syrup for children? Citrus fruits from the tropics were too hard to import as German submarines were sinking many commercial ships. That being said, rose hips also contain far more vitamin C than any citrus fruit.

The only thing you have to keep in mind is that their seeds come with tiny hairs that can irritate your throat – in fact you could say they are like thorns on a micro level. So you'll need to remove them.

In general there are two kinds of rose hips: there's the fleshier variety, like the kind *Rosa rugosa* has. It looks a bit like a cherry tomato. I like them for freezing, pureeing, adding them to juices. You can even make a rose hip soup: think tomato soup but replace the tomatoes with rose hips.

And then there are the harder, smaller ones, like the rose hips of *Rosa canina*. The smaller ones are very easy to dry. They are most suitable for herbal tea and infusions.

Here's what I think is the most simple way to dry small rosehips:

- Pick the rose hips when ripe.
- Spread them out evenly on a piece of cardboard or in an open cardboard box.
- Place in a well ventilated area.
- In a few weeks they'll be wrinkly, harder and darker in colour.
- If you're still in doubt, place some of the rose hips in a glass jar and screw on the lid very tightly. Let stand for 24 hours on room temperature. If moist appears on the glass they're not fully dry yet.
- To remove the hairy seeds, grind the rose hips up a bit in the food processor. Then shake the batch in a sieve, the hairs will fall loose.
- You can now store them in an airtight container (preferably glass). Always store in a cool and dry place.



But there's another Christian story that tells of how the rose got its thorns. The devil got bored a bit and wanted to visit heaven to have some rice porridge. (This is a Belgian folk belief – we say here that when you go to heaven you get to eat rice porridge with golden spoons.) He was looking for a way to climb into the clouds and reach heaven.

He spotted a rose and put a magic spell on it. It now became a climbing rose, reaching high into the clouds. The devil tried to climb on it but all attempts failed as he was gliding down all the time.

So he used another magic spell, giving the rose long and sturdy steps to put his feet on. This time he managed quite well and came higher and higher.

The one thing he overlooked is that God sees everything. One snap of God's fingers and the steps on the rose transformed into short and sharp thorns. The devil came down in such a painful way that he never tried again.

Rose recipes



Rose petal pesto

- ½ cup of cashew nuts, walnuts or pine nuts
- 1 cup of basil
- 1 cup of fresh fragrant rose petals
- 2 medium sized garlic cloves, minced
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- some mild olive oil

Combine all ingredients in a blender or food processor with the exception of the olive oil. Pulse a few times. Then slowly add the olive oil in a constant stream while the food processor is on. Scrape down the sides with a spatula and continue until the mixture is even.

Extra tips:

- Serve a small portion of this pesto on a single rose petal as an appetizer.
- The kind of olive oil you use is crucial for this recipe. If you choose a very strong, fruity one, the flavour will overwhelm the aroma of the roses.



Rose petal nut balls

- 1 cup of dried apricots (apricots are in the rose family as well, did you know?)
- 1 cup of almonds (and yes, almonds are as well)
- 2 cups fresh fragrant rose petals

Soak the dried apricots a few hours ahead. Strain but keep the liquid (see tips below). Put almonds, apricots and rose petals in a food process and mix until you get the right consistency to roll balls.

Extra tips:

- I like to work with different colours of roses here: white, orange, pink, yellow, purple. This way you'll get a confetti effect which is wonderful.
- If the mixture is too dry, add some of the apricot soaking water and mix again.



Rose smoothie

- 1 liter/4 cups of water (if you want to make this really good, you can replace some of the water with rose hydrosol, also known as rose water, but make sure you use food grade)
- 2 cups of strawberries, green crowns removed – rose is queen here!
- 2 packed cups of fresh fragrant rose petals

Place all ingredients in a blender and blend.

Some extra tips:

- For those who like an extra sweet touch, add some honey to taste. Or add a ripe banana to the mixture.
- On very hot days, I use less water for blending. After the smoothie is finished, I pour some in a glass and dilute with ice cold sparkling water.



Rose salt

- 1 cup sea salt
- 1 cup fresh fragrant rose petals

In a food processor or blender, mix both ingredients. This works great in rice dishes or any vegetable dish. For maximum aroma, add just before serving.

Extra tips:

- I'm not much of a sugar lover, but if you are, you could replace the salt with some good quality cane sugar and use it as a basis for making cakes, cookies,...
- Did you know that in North Africa there's a spice blend called ras-el-hanout? Though there are many different blends, it usually exists of cardamom, turmeric, black pepper, coriander, fenugreek, clove, and... dried rose buds.
- For this recipe I prefer pink or red roses – the colour effect is not so special when you use white roses.



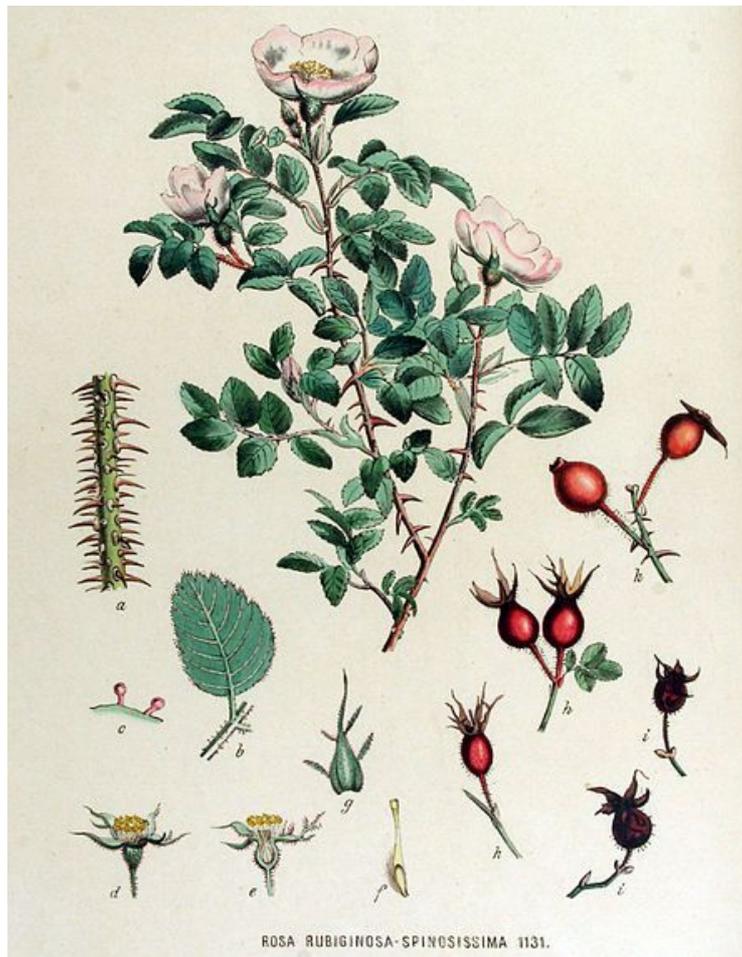
Rose hip tea

- one teaspoon of dried rosehips
- some slices of orange (organic oranges will allow you to use the zest as well)
- 1 cup of hot water

Bring the water to a boil and pour over the rosehips and orange slices. Cover and let steep for about 10 minutes. Strain and sweeten with honey if needed.

Extra tips:

- Most people who try home made rosehip tea are utterly surprised. The colour is a lot more pale than they anticipated and the flavour is less acidic than they expected. Here's why: store bought rose hip tea sachets are mixed with calyces of roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*), overwhelming the subtle colour and flavour of the rose hips. So don't worry, you didn't do anything wrong, you've just never tried real rose hip tea.
- This makes a great iced tea as well.



Rose elixir

This elixir combines both flower and fruit of the rose plant to enjoy the full spectrum of plant powers available.

First, you make a rosehip vinegar:

- ½ liter/ 2 cups of apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup of fresh large fleshy rose hips, seeds removed

In a large jar, place the rose hips and cover with apple cider vinegar. Use a jar with non-metal lid, as vinegar is corrosive, remember?

Let steep for 6 weeks. Strain. Use the pickled rose hips as a condiment in a salad or in soup.

This vinegar can be used on any vegetable, or you can combine it with rose petal honey for the elixir:

Rose petal honey:

- 1 cup raw, unheated honey
- 1 cup fresh fragrant rose petals

Place the flower petals in a clean, dry glass jar. Cover with honey. (If your honey is too crystallized, place the honey in the sunlight or near your stove, but never warm it above 40°C/ 104°F). Use chopsticks to remove any air bubbles. Let steep for 4 to 6 weeks, stirring regularly. Make sure all petals are covered with honey all the time.

After 6 weeks, your rose petal honey is ready. You can use it as a sweetener for herbal tea or

other things, or you can use it to make your rose elixir:

Rose elixir:

- 1 tablespoon of rose hip vinegar
- 1 tablespoon of rose petal honey
- 1 cup of water
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Combine the three ingredients and stir well. Best if ingested on an empty stomach.



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