

Inedible Leaf Garnishes in Japanese Cuisine

Pemberton, Robert W. (USDA-Agricultural Research Service, Invasive Plants Research, Ft. Lauderdale, FL)

Leaves of more than 25 plant species used as inedible leaf garnishes were encountered in restaurants and food markets in Japan, and in Japanese-authored illustrated cookbooks. Being inedible these leaves function only artistically and symbolically, representing seasonality, holidays, and auspiciousness. Leaf garnishes on food dishes conform to and enhance complex Japanese culinary aesthetics by helping to express aspects such as negative space. Inedible leaf garnishes may originate from leaf plates and wrappers, and religious and ceremonial use of leaves. Inedible leaf garnishes are common in Japanese cuisine, occur infrequently in other Asian cuisines, and are almost absent in Western cuisines.