

Email received direct from the Food Standards Agency, UK

Sent: Friday, July 28, 2023

To: bronya@daisycakecompany.co.uk

Dear Bronya

Your enquiry has been passed to myself as I specialise in food contact materials at the Food Standards Agency.

The use of flowers on foods such as wedding and Christmas cakes is well established, however when used in this context the flowers, foliage and accoutrements such as cake picks, are all food contact materials and have to be treated with respect to ensure they are safe and comply with regulations on food safety.

Not all plants are safe to use as decorations, and the onus is on the food business to ensure that the materials used do not contravene the legislation or endanger the consumer. It cannot be assumed that a florist or supplier will necessarily know whether a plant is potentially harmful, and thus it is important that checks are made before any plant is used to decorate food. For the purpose of due diligence, it is prudent as a food business to ensure such checks are documented.

Factors which may have to be considered are:

- The flowers, foliage, berries or sap may be toxic or may elicit an allergic reaction in susceptible people.
- The flowers and foliage may have been treated with pesticides, even organically produced flowers can have harmful residues of some pesticides, such as nicotine.
- Children may be unaware of the inedible nature of such decoration and may attempt consumption. Children are more at risk from such poisonings and choking hazards.
- The plant may harbour insects, spiders, slugs or other undesirable animals which could contaminate the food directly or with their droppings.
- The plant matter may attract undesirable animals to the food, such as flies.
- Use of crystallized flowers (preserved in sugar) will eliminate some problems associated with fresh flowers but will not detoxify them.
- Some decorative plants have thorns or prickles.
- The stems of any flowers, if penetrating the food, need to be behind a barrier. Florist wire is not appropriate for penetration into the food.
- As added decoration glitter on flowers is permitted, however care needs to be taken to ensure that it is a food contact type, and that the adhesives used are compliant if there is expected or likely food contact.

The Royal Horticultural Society has advice on edible garden plants :

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=764>

For information about particular risks presented by potentially harmful plants the Plant Poisons Information is available from the Centre for Economic Botany at Kew Gardens, [Kew Science staff | Kew](#)

Alternative strategies to avoid problems with floral decorations on foods are:

- Use edible species of flowers or foliage (see guidance on this below)
- Use sugar or other food based artificial flowers.
- Use cold porcelain flowers, though this includes foodstuffs (such as cornflower) in its manufacture, the use of adhesives means it is a food contact material and so the materials used will have to be compliant with Regulation 1935/2004 if in direct contact with the food.
- Use food contact compliant artificial flowers, made from plastic or silk for example. These are reusable, but make sure you properly clean them after use.
- Use a spacer between the floral matter and the food that is food contact compliant, such as cake picks. Be careful that any sap will not leak into or onto the food.
- Use a decorated dummy display cake, which is not edible, with the actual cake being separate.

The use of edible flowers as decorations is not without potential problems, and it is advised that careful research is undertaken before adding such flowers to food. There needs to be careful identification to ensure safe use, for example, jasmine is edible but the very similar false jasmine is poisonous, edible pea flowers can be consumed but sweet pea should not. It cannot be assumed that the flowers of plants that produce food are themselves edible, for example, some species of poppy have edible seed, but poppy flowers themselves are toxic. Some flowers may present a hazard to particular groups of people, some people can have allergic reactions to some flowers (tulips and daisies for example), whilst others with medical conditions may react badly to the chemicals in flowers (for example begonia can aggravate gout).

The user of edible flowers for decoration should be mindful they are a potential food, thus there still needs to be consideration of the issues of pesticide residues, infestations, general hygiene and such like. If the edible flowers are dried, the drying materials should be considered as food contact and be compliant accordingly. Thus sand and silica gel drying will need to use food compliant materials, as will molecular sieves (aluminium silicate drying agents). Glycerin uptake and paraffin wax coating preservation methods would make the flowers inedible, and then would constitute food contact materials if used for decoration.

The person who introduces the flowers and accoutrements to the cake and then puts it on the market is the person responsible for abiding to The Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (England) Regulations, the onus being on them to ensure safety is maintained. The legislation is to be found at: [Food contact materials regulations | Food Standards Agency](#).

If the florist sells food contact materials in the form of vegetation, they will need to give documentary assurances that the materials are suitable for food contact use, they cannot assume a material is safe without confirmation that is so, as with any other associated materials such as cake boards. In the absence of such documentary evidence the onus reverts back to the cake retailer/provider.

Local authority enforcement officials (Trading Standards or Environmental Health) have the right to ask to see what assurances have been given that such food decoration, if placed on the market, is compliant with the legislation. A decorated cake does not need to be sold to be “placed on the market,” even if given away for free, if it is a form of commercial transaction, the requirements apply. Decorated cakes only for personal consumption are not, however, implicated in these requirements.

In the eventuality a florist provides vegetation that is either harmful, adversely changes the composition of the food, or affects its desirability (the organoleptic qualities that make the cake desirable - its taste, aroma, texture and colour), they may be liable under the food contact materials legislation. But if there has been a lack of due diligence on the part of the cake retailer/provider, they may also be liable under the general food safety requirements.

I hope this proves of use to you.

Regards

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