

# Vegetable carving



In the foyer of the Dubai hotel stood an elaborate floral arrangement. On closer inspection we discovered that the “flowers” were actually made from vegetables. A sign beneath the arrangement announced that a class on the art of vegetable carving was to be held in the hotel dining room that afternoon. A big “Welcome” sign was cut into a large watermelon.

Along with half a dozen other guests we decided to try our hands at this ancient art form, which originated in Thailand over 700 years ago.

The class was conducted by two of the hotel chefs, who made the carving look easy. It was, in fact, quite a simple process but the skill involved was something one needed to acquire.

We started on the rose—a beetroot in disguise!

To begin, the bottom was cut from a small radish and threaded onto a satay

skewer to make the base of the flower—the calyx. The rest of the radish was then cut with a series of crosscuts and placed in a bowl of water to open up. Care had to be taken not to cut to the bottom or the radish would fall apart.

Next an uncooked, peeled beetroot was finely sliced into rounds. Each slice was cut once from circumference to centre. The sides of the cut were overlapped and then the slice was threaded onto the satay skewer slightly off centre, to form a petal. This was repeated eight times, with each petal overlapping the previous one. To complete the flower, the now opened radish was placed on the top of the skewer, nestling inside the petals to form the centre, and a green section of a spring onion was slid over the bottom of the skewer to form the stalk.

Participating guests’ flowers were then stuck into a rockmelon or small watermelon with a flat base and the process was repeated until it grew into a large flower arrangement in a “vase”. Gaps were filled with spring onion stalks on skewers.

The skill is to make the fine cuts with a very sharp knife without cutting oneself.

There are many other ways to use vegetables to create table arrangements but to become an expert in this art requires practice.

*Elaine Horsfield;  
photograph by A. Horsfield*