Bee Mimic orchids in the Rinard Orchid Greenhouse.

Many are terrestrial orchids from the Mediterranean region and ‘bee mimics’, with flowers that resemble female bees or wasps. Pollination occurs in these plants when male bees attempt to mate with the flowers. Below is some interesting reading about these orchids as they are used for food, as well as some associated conservation concerns.

Some of these are new acquisitions and bloomed for the first time in December – January, 2014/5

Above: Ophrys reinholdii, left, in bloom in BSU collection; Anacamptis laxiflora (not in BSU collection)

In Turkey, Iran, and throughout the countries of the eastern Mediterranean, salep has a long been enjoyed as a wintertime beverage—milk boiled with sugar and a very small amount of powdered orchid tuber known as salep. Usually identified as Orchis mascula (Syn. Anacamptis laxiflora) and other species, though many other terrestrial orchid roots have very similar qualities, salep contains the polysaccharide, bassorin, which swells and thickens a heated liquid in the same fashion as arrowroot or cornstarch. When the hot milk-salep mixture reaches the consistency of a thin potato purée, it is served in cups. Each serving is traditionally dusted with ground cinnamon.

What is Salep: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salep
Why salep: http://hollychase.com/orchid-aphrodisiac/
Turkish ice cream: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/01/dining/01curi.html?_r=0
Turkish ice cream and orchid conservation: http://zesterdaily.com/world/orchids-under-threat-fromturkish-ice-cream/
In Greece this type of ice cream is called “kaimaki” and it very typical of 1960’s style confectionery shops selling baklava and kataifi as well as other other types of -usually syrupy-sweets, but the recipe is based on Diana Abu-Jaber’s book *The Language of Baklava*, which was the previous Cook the Books pick. It is very often served in silver-style bowls and often eaten after big meals with the family over ekmek kataifi or with *ravani*.

The taste is due to a very interesting ingredient: sahlep (called salepi in Greek). Sahlep comes from the root of an orchid and apart from its interesting taste it is also a very strong thickening agent, so very little goes a long way (which is fortunate as it costs 98 euro per kilo!). The most interesting attribute of sahlep, however, is that it gives the ice cream in interesting elasticity, typical of *kaimaki*.

The recipe is perfect for those avoiding egg-based ice cream and it will keep in the freezer for longer. Serve it on its own with sour cherry syrup called *vissinada* (another traditional Greek combination) and some pistachios.

***We hope you enjoy this information. Don’t worry – we won’t be making salep from our bee-mimic orchids!***