

Wild Garlic and Nettles

Very good for you and being fresh at this time of year are at their best.
The flowers are equally delicious and look gorgeous in a spring salad.

Wild Garlic has a wonderful, subtle heady scent of spring onion and garlic and when you taste it there are more complex notes, so useful in all aspects of food preparation, hot or cold.

Chew a raw leaf with your eyes closed, meditate (do not do this with the nettle tips).

Wild Garlic and Nettletip soup

makes 2 good portions.

Ingredients

- A good handful of Wild Garlic leaves, rinsed and stems separated from leaves.
- From the growing tips of stinging nettles pick 8-12 tips, with usual care.
- A fistful of potatoes, perhaps remaining from last year's crop of Potato Day spuds, scrubbed. Skins can be left on or peeled if you prefer.
- Stock, about 1-1 1/2 pints (500 ml). I use homemade veg stock or a cube.
- Butter or Oil
- Seasoning

Method

Cut the Wild Garlic stems into manageable lengths about 1" - 2".

In a saucepan sauté the stems in oil or butter, very gently to soften but not caramelize.

Dice potatoes fairly small and add them to the stems.

Stir the potatoes to cover with the yummy stems.

When the potatoes are warmed through add the stock and simmer about 20 mins.

While the potatoes are cooking rinse the nettle tips well in a colander and snip the tips into smaller pieces.

When the potatoes are well cooked add the nettle tips to the pan and stir into the soup.

Replace the lid and leave to warm through and only lightly cook for a minute or two.

If left to cook for too long the colour of the soup becomes an unappetising shade of mud.

Meanwhile snip or tear the WG leaves roughly.

Add these to the pan and stir in, until wilted.

Bring back to simmer just briefly, then remove from the heat.

Blend the soup or mash if you prefer a chunky soup.

Season as you like - enjoy with home made bread.

Suggestions for garnishing

Swirl in your favourite cream.

Stir in chili sauce or sprinkle chili flakes

Croutons

Toasted 'oats and crushed hazelnuts'

Roast Rhubarb and Honey

Rhubarb is the opening for spring and is at its best right now.

Using this method the Rhubarb retains its structure and the blended flavours are scrumptious.

Sweet cicely has a lovely fragrant sweet anise flavour, cutting through the acidity of the Rhubarb and as a 'sugar saver' you would need less honey in this dish.

Ingredients

- 2-3 sticks of Rhubarb,
- Honey

Method

Clean and trim the Rhubarb.

Cut into 1-1 1/2 " lengths.

Place the chunks in an ovenproof pie or flan dish.

If using sweet cicely add them here.

If you have set honey, warm a couple of tablespoons until runny.

Carefully drizzle honey over the chunks to ensure each chunk has a little.

There is no need to add water to this dish.

Cover. I use a baking sheet slightly bigger than the dish, turned over.

Place in a very low oven for about an hour.

Serve hot or cold.

Since the Rhubarb retains its shape, and the pieces remain bite-size, it manages ice-cream , cream, custards and sorbets very well.

Save the juice. It is delicious stirred into yogurts, or drizzled over ice-cream.

Come the summer it's great in a punch, in sparkling water or in wine.

Variations

English summer: add halved or sliced strawberries and vanilla.

Oriental: add ginger, finely grated or chopped, root, crystalline or a sprinkling of ground ginger, even a pinch of chili, maybe a star anise.

Sprinkle over a topping of granola or toasted oats, nuts etc.

Serve the Rhubarb chunks with Brie, Camembert, mackerel or roast pork.



Hot Cross Buns spell Easter and Spring

Makes about 12

Ingredients

- 400g strong white flour
- 3 x 2.5 ml mixed spice
- 1 x 2.5 ml ground cinnamon
- 1 x 2.5 ml ground nutmeg
- 5ml spoon sugar
- 125ml milk
- 75 ml water, tepid
- 25g fresh yeast or 15ml spoon dried yeast
- 5ml spoon salt
- 50g butter
- 50g caster sugar
- 100g currants
- 50g chopped mixed peel (optional)
- 1 egg
- Oil or butter for greasing
- Beaten egg for glazing

Method

Add the spices to the flour.

Sift about 75g flour and the 5ml spoon of sugar into a large bowl.

Warm the milk to hand-hot.

Add the water to the milk and blend in the fresh yeast or sprinkle on the dried yeast.

Pour the yeast liquid into the flour and sugar and beat well.

Leave the bowl in a warm place for 20 mins.

Sift the rest of the flour and salt into a bowl.

Rub-in the butter.

Add the caster sugar and currants.

Beat the egg into the frothy yeast mixture and add the flour, fat and fruit mixture.

Mix to a soft dough then turn out onto a lightly-floured surface.

Knead for about 5 mins until the dough is smooth and no longer sticky.

Place in a large bowl cover with a damp cloth and leave in a warm place for about 1 hour until almost doubled in size.

Knead again until firm.

Cut into 8 - 12 equal pieces Shape each into a round bun and flatten slightly.

Place on a floured baking sheet. Score a cross on the top of each bun with a sharp knife.

Use pastry trimmings or a stiff flour and water paste to make crosses.

Leave, covered for about 30-40 mins until the buns have roughly doubled in size.

Glaze the buns with either beaten egg or egg and milk.

Bake at 190°C Gas 5 for 16-20 mins or 220°C Gas 7 for 15-18 mins until golden brown.