

ROAST JERUSALEM ARTICHOKES

Jerusalem artichokes are a wonderful winter vegetable. In appearance they are somewhat similar to potatoes but with knobby bits which are rather tedious to peel. They make an excellent soup and puree and pair particularly well with shellfish, especially mussels and scallops. They are also great with pork, duck, goose, pheasant and venison.

Here they are simply roasted with olive oil and salt and pepper. The olive oil can be replaced with duck, goose or pork fat. I strongly advise using a sheet of parchment paper under the artichokes when roasting, as otherwise the crispy cooked skin sticks to the roasting pan and will not end up on your plate which is where you want that golden deliciousness.

Ingredients

Serves 4

8 artichokes, allowing 2 artichokes per person

2 tablespoons olive oil or duck, pork or goose fat

Sea salt and pepper

The artichokes when really freshly harvested do not have to be peeled. This is ideal because most of the vitamins are just under the skin, but if they are a couple of days old, you will definitely have to make that slightly purgatorial journey. "Offer it up", as the saying goes, and if you don't know what that expression means, just disregard my rantings as those of an older generation.

The choice of fat here is yours, but whichever you choose, use just enough to glaze the vegetables lightly

Method

Preheat oven to 200c / 400f / gas 6

Scrub or if necessary, peel the artichokes and cut each one in half lengthways. Dry with a towel and place in a bowl. Add the oil or fat and toss well. Season with sea salt and pepper.

Line a baking tray with parchment paper and add the artichokes in a single layer and if possible not touching, as this encourages the skins to colour and caramelize..

Place in the preheated oven and roast for 30-50 minutes until the vegetables are tender and very well coloured. The tips can be as dark as hazelnut skins. If the artichokes are not colouring properly, turn up the oven by 20 degrees for the last 10 minutes of cooking. By now they will not look pretty in the conventional sense of the word, but it is amazing when something tastes good how ones eye looks at these things in a different way.

Serve immediately.

Variation

ROAST JERUSALEM ARTICHOKES WITH ROAST HAZELNUTS AND ROCKET LEAVES

Add 2 tablespoons of roasted, skinned and chopped hazelnuts to the cooked artichokes and fold in a handful of rocket leaves and allow to wilt into the hot cooked vegetables.

SWEDE TURNIP PUREE WITH OLIVE OIL AND PARMESAN

This flavoursome puree of the inexpensive root couldn't be simpler and is delicious as an accompanying vegetable with lamb, pork or duck.

Don't forget to save some of the cooking water for adding to the puree.

The puree can be prepared ahead of time and reheated later, in which case a little more of the cooking water can be added if necessary, but do not add the olive oil and parmesan until the very last minute.

Serves 4

Ingredients

660g of swede turnip, weighed after peeling and cut into 2cm cubes

500ml cold water

Pinch of salt

25g butter

3 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, finely grated

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

Freshly ground black pepper

Method

Place the turnips in a saucepan and cover with the cold water and add a pinch of salt. Cook for c 30 minutes or until the turnips are completely tender. If the turnips are not tender, the puree will be lumpy.

Strain off the remaining cooking water, reserving a little for softening the puree. Blend the turnip with the butter and enough of the cooking water to achieve a smooth puree. Taste and correct seasoning.

Serve hot in a heated shallow serving dish so that the puree is no thicker than 2 cm in the dish. Drizzle with the olive oil and sprinkle with the parmesan and serve immediately.

GRATIN OF SWEDE TURNIPS AND POTATOES WITH THYME LEAVES, SMOKED BACON AND PARMESAN

This is a robust warming gratin made with one of my favourite winter vegetables, the cheap and cheerful swede turnip. This brassica, the least glamorous of the turnip family brings back happy childhood memories. I remember as a child going to our nearest farm owned by Bill and Mary Walsh and grabbing the raw sliced turnips from the slicer before they were taken out the fields to be spread as winter feeding for the sheep when the grass had become scarce. We would dip the slightly muddy shards of turnip in the nearest churn of water, so cold it turned our little hands purple, give them a cursory rinse and then munch away with relish. That sweet and peppery flavour has stayed with me and I still think that this purple skinned and golden fleshed root is a thing of beauty.

Ingredients

Serves 8-10

450 g swede turnip, peeled and sliced into 4 mm slices

450g potatoes, peeled and sliced into 3mm thick slices

110 g lardons of smoked or unsmoked bacon

1 tablespoon olive oil

110 g grated parmesan

1 teaspoon thyme leaves

350ml cream or chicken stock

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 x 1.5l ovenproof gratin dish

Swede turnips need to be peeled before use. If the greens are attached, they too are edible and can be destalked, cooked and folded through the cooked root to give a really lovely earthy flavour. When buying, pick one that feels heavy for its size with an unblemished skin. Turnips will store for you in a cool place for several weeks

The smoked bacon should be from the belly and be quite fatty to ensure a succulent texture and a sweet flavour. The lardons are little strips or cubes cut not less than half of 1 cm thick

Method

Preheat the oven to 180c / 350f / gas 4

Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil and season with a good pinch of salt. Drop in the sliced turnips, bring back to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes. The turnips will have tenderized slightly but will not be fully cooked. Strain out the turnips, reserving the water for cooking the potatoes. Place the turnips on a tray lined with a tea towel.

Bring the water back to the boil and add the sliced potatoes. Bring to a simmer and cook for 1 minute only. Strain and rinse under the cold tap and place on a tray lined with a tea towel like the turnips.

Heat the 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a frying pan and add the bacon lardons. Cook stirring until the bacon is crisp and golden. Strain out the bacon and place on a piece of kitchen paper towel to drain.

To assemble the gratin, grease a 1.5litre gratin dish with a light smear of butter. Place on a layer of the turnips and potatoes, followed by a sprinkle of thyme leaves, a sprinkle of lardons of bacon and a sprinkle of the grated parmesan. Season with salt and pepper. Splash on a little of the cream. Repeat the process finishing the gratin with a final sprinkle of the cheese.

Place the gratin in a bain marie in the preheated oven and cook for 60-80 minutes. After 60 minutes, test the gratin with a skewer to see if the potatoes and turnips are tender. The skewer should go through the vegetables with no resistance and the top of the gratin should be a rich golden colour. The cooked gratin will sit happily in the oven for an hour before serving with the temperature reduced to 50c / 120f / gas ¼ .

SPICED PARSNIP AND CORIANDER LEAF PUREE

This puree is easy and has a mildly spiced flavour that is excellent with roast or grilled pork and duck. The finished puree should be smooth and with a soft but not runny consistency, like a soft mashed potato.

Ingredients

- Parsnips are at their best during the winter months when they are in season and very good value for money. They, like other root vegetables become sweeter and cook more quickly after the frosts have arrived.
- The curry powder should ideally be best quality and of a medium heat for this recipe. I roast and grind my own spices and have listed the recipe below.
- The parsnip cooking water is an essential ingredient here as it lightens and softens the puree without making it too rich

Serves 4

450g parsnips, peeled and sliced

25g butter

4 tablespoons cream

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon Curry Powder

2 tablespoons chopped coriander leaves

8 tablespoons of the parsnip cooking water

Method

Place the peeled and sliced parsnips in a saucepan and cover with cold water. Season with a pinch of salt. Bring to the boil and simmer for 15 minutes or until the parsnips are completely soft. Strain the liquid off, reserving 8 tablespoons of the cooking water. Place the strained parsnips in a blender and add the butter, curry powder and $\frac{3}{4}$ s of the cooking water. Process to a smooth puree. Add more cooking water if the puree is too dry and firm. The consistency should be soft and comforting. Add the chopped coriander and mix in briefly. Taste and correct seasoning. Serve hot. The puree can be made ahead of time and reheated later, in which case keep some more of the parsnip cooking water in case the puree dries out in the meantime.

CURRY POWDER

If you would like to make your own spice mix, here is a combination I like to use for a general purpose mix. Buy the spices whole and roast and grind yourself and the flavour will be fresh and exciting. In this blend, it is the particular flavour and aroma of the fenugreek mixed with the other spices that gives the blend its distinctive “curry powder” feel.

- 2 tablespoons whole coriander seeds
- 1 tablespoon whole cumin seeds
- 2 teaspoons whole black peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon brown mustard seeds
- 4 whole cloves
- 1 dessertspoons chilli flakes (add more if you want a hotter mix)
- 1 teaspoon of whole fenugreek seeds
- 1 teaspoon turmeric powder

Place a heavy frying pan over a medium heat and when it is hot add in all of the spices except the fenugreek and turmeric. Cook stirring until the spices start to release their aroma, change colour lightly and smell lightly roasted. Add the fenugreek and turmeric and cook for a further 10 seconds. Remove from the pan immediately and allow to cool before grinding to a fine powder in a clean coffee grinder or spice grinder. Store the spices in a clean sealed container such as a jam jar. Keep them in a cool dark place.

SALAD OF SHAVED CAULIFLOWER AND BRUSSELS SPROUTS WITH RED ONION, RAISINS AND PARMESAN

This is a refreshing salad that can be served as a light starter or as part of a selection of salads. It goes particularly well with cold ham or cured meats such as salamis and chorizos. I also like it with spiced beef or coarse terrines. It makes a wonderful vehicle for pieces of cold ham and cold turkey after Christmas.

Serves 6 – 8

Ingredients

50g raisins soaked on boiling water for 1 hour

1 small cauliflower

12 Brussels sprouts peeled

225g red onion

2-4 tablespoons of olive oil

8 tablespoons Caesar Dressing

50g grated parmesan

50g roasted, peeled and chopped hazelnuts

salt and pepper

2 tablespoons of pomegranate seeds optional

Method

Trim the outside leaves and tough stalk off the cauliflower and discard or reserve for a vegetable stock. Break or cut the flower it into florets. Slice the cauliflower florets thinly, about ½ cm by hand or with a mandolin and place in a large bowl. Slice the peeled red onion and sprouts even more thinly and add to the cauliflower. Drain the soaking water off the raisins and add to the cauliflower. Dress the salad with half of the olive oil and the Caesar dressing and toss thoroughly but gently. Add in 3/4 of the grated parmesan and mix again. Taste and correct seasoning add salt and pepper as necessary. Spread out in a large shallow bowl or plate and sprinkle on the hazelnuts and pomegranate seeds if using.

A final drizzle of oil and the remaining parmesan sprinkled over the salad and it is ready to serve.

The salad will sit for an hour before serving.

ROAST SQUASH, BRUSSELS SPROUT AND PUMPKIN PRALINE WITH HONEY AND CRÈME FRAICHE

Serves 8 as a starter or as a side with roast shoulder of lamb or pork

Ingredients

750gr squash or pumpkin

2 tablespoons olive oil

250g Brussels sprouts

15gr sugar

25gr pumpkin Seed

200gr crème fraiche

1tsp honey

C 2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 200c

Method

Half the squash carefully and scoop out the seeds and soft flesh with a spoon.

Cut the halved squash into 8 equal wedges with the skin still on. Pop into a bowl and toss well in 2tblsp of olive oil, freshly cracked black pepper and sea salt. Ensure each wedge is coated in the oil and position each sitting upright like little boats on a parchment lined baking tray. Place in the pre-heated oven to roast for c 30 minutes or until nearly tender. Keep the oiled bowl for the Brussels sprouts.

While the pumpkin is roasting, prepare the Brussel sprouts by removing any tough outer skins, then slice thinly and add and toss in the pumpkin oiled bowl.

After 30 mins of roasting your pumpkin remove the tray and scatter your glistening Brussels sprouts in and around your pumpkin, pop back into the oven for a further 10 minutes or until tender.

To make the praline, in a small low sided sauce pan place the sugar and pumpkin seeds. Line a small baking tray with a piece of parchment. Pop the saucepan on a medium heat and watch carefully, as the sugar melts it will quickly turn to a rich caramel colour. You will probably need to stir the saucepan. Ensure all pumpkin seeds are fully coated in caramel before quickly turning out on your parchment lined tray. Spread out a little so it isn't a cluster. Allow to cool completely.

In a bowl gently mix the crème fraiche and honey.

Once the pumpkin wedges are fully cooked and tender, remove from oven and place on a warmed large serving plate. Scatter the sprouts around and on top of the pumpkin. Now place a generous spoon of crème fraiche onto each pumpkin wedge retaining the rest of the crème fraiche to serve as extra at the table. Drizzle with pomegranate molasses. Finish by breaking the pumpkin praline coarsely over the entire dish and serve as soon as possible.