

Celebrate SPRING

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As the days begin to lengthen and the soil warms up, nature celebrates the new season with a blush of green – artichokes, beans, silver beet, spinach and spring onion are all at their best now. Spring is also the time for colourful red strawberries, beetroot, golden loquats, blood oranges, watermelon and honeydew melons.

These days, you can get practically all fruit and vegetables, any month of the year, but knowing what's in season is important. Eating in rhythm with nature means you're eating food that's fresh and young, not something that has been forced to grow in unnatural conditions or kept in cold storage for months. As well as being kinder on your wallet, it's also kinder on the environment. You're likely to be eating locally grown produce rather than relying on off-season fruit and veges being flown or trucked into your area. (Just think of the food miles involved in Chinese garlic.)

Most importantly, though, you'll also benefit from food that's at its nutritional peak – fresh, young and still bursting with its original vitamin and moisture content. For those of us who may sometimes struggle to eat the recommended daily amounts of fruit and veges, spring is the perfect time to spring clean your diet – perhaps making an effort to snack on a handful of delicious young strawberries, or creating a meal that combines many of the crisp young vegetables now available. Lamb too, is at its best now, but forget the heavy gravy and spuds soaked in oil. Eat sparingly, however tempting the roast may be, but remember that protein is also important for your body's health.

The acknowledged Queen of Spring is, of course, asparagus, whose spears herald the arrival of the warmer months. Packed full of vitamins A, C and E, and folate, it's quick and easy to prepare and a great way to boost your vegetable intake. Choose tender young spears with compact tips, and store in the vegetable crisper compartment of your fridge. There's no need for a heavy buttery sauce either – fresh young asparagus is just as delicious simply brushed with olive oil and grilled or barbecued for several minutes over a very high heat and topped with a squeeze of lemon, fresh cracked pepper and sea salt. You can also top with an egg, for added protein.

Think too about how you can preserve spring's other bounty for future months. Freeze the juice or zest of lemons and oranges in ice-cube trays for a convenient source, or layer the quartered fruit with sea salt in an airtight jar to create a preserve that adds flavour to everything from fish to salad dressing. Watermelon and berries can be turned into preserves and jam. They also freeze well, making it easy to whip up an icy breakfast smoothie in just a few seconds, so you can celebrate the healthy joys of spring year round.

🥕 CARBOHYDRATES 🥛 DAIRY 🌱 MISC 🥑 FATS & OILS 🥩 PROTEIN 🌿 VEGIES

TORTA PASQUALINA

Literally meaning 'Easter Tart', Torta Pasqualina is a Ligurian dish from Italy, made of ricotta, spinach, artichokes and parmesan cheese, all wrapped in pastry. One characteristic of this tart is that instead of beating the eggs into the filling, eggs are cracked into it whole. Rainbow chard can also be used instead of spinach.

- 300g flour, plus extra to dust
- Pinch of salt
- 4 tablespoons oil
- 150ml warm water
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 6 roasted artichokes in oil (140 grams when drained), roughly chopped
- 400g spinach leaves, washed
- Large handful breadleaf parsley, roughly chopped
- 450g ricotta, drained
- ½ cup parmesan, grated
- 6 large eggs
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

- To make the pastry, mix the flour and a pinch of salt in a bowl. Add 2 tablespoons oil and 150ml warm water and mix to a smooth dough. Knead for 5 minutes on a floured surface, until soft and elastic. Cover with cling film and set aside for 15 minutes.
- Meanwhile, make the filling. Heat the remaining oil in a large pan over a medium heat and fry the onion for 6 to 8 minutes, stirring it occasionally with a wooden spoon. Toss in the artichokes and stir for a few minutes longer. Pile on the spinach (or chard) and wilt over a gentle heat. Set aside to cool slightly.
- Preheat the oven to 220°C. Put the filling mixture in a food processor with the parsley, cheeses and 1 egg. Season well, pulse and set aside.
- Take about two-thirds of the pastry and roll out on a floured surface to a 38cm circle. Use to line the base and sides of a deep, 24cm base-bottomed cake tin.
- Spoon the filling into the shell, smooth, then make 4 deep indents. Crack an egg into each of these. (These look very pretty when you cut into the pie.)
- Roll out the remaining pastry to a 24cm circle and place on top, twist the edges of the top and sides to seal. Beat the remaining egg, brush over the pastry top and sprinkle with sea salt. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes or until lightly golden. Slice and serve.

FERNWOOD FOOD COACHING ANALYSIS

SERVES 6 | 3 🥕 2 🥛 2 🌱 1 🥑 2
PER SERVING: energy 2423kJ



LEMON BAKED FISH WITH CRISPY POTATO CUBES

For a standout celebration of spring, these zingy fish parcels are just the ticket. Pop your choice of fish fillet on a verdant mix of baby spinach leaves and spring onion rings, top with lemon rind and coriander, then wrap in foil and bake. The fish, spinach and tomatoes cook in the steam trapped inside the packet. The contrast between the crispy cubes of potato and sweet white flesh of the fish is brilliant.

FOR THE CRISPY POTATO CUBES:

- Four large potatoes, chopped into cubes or chunks about 2cm square
- 1 large onion, peeled and roughly chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon dried mixed herbs
- Sea salt

FOR THE FISH PARCELS:

- 250g baby spinach leaves
- 3 spring onions, trimmed and thinly sliced
- 4 white fish fillets
- ½ bunch coriander, washed and finely chopped
- 1 long red chilli, de-seeded and finely chopped
- Handful of cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Juice and finely grated rind of one lemon

- Preheat oven to 200°C.
- Cut four 40cm squares of baking paper and four 40cm squares of foil. Place 1 paper square on top of 1 foil square.
- Divide the baby spinach between the four prepared squares, sprinkle with the spring onions and place a fish fillet on top. Strew each fillet with the coriander, chilli and tomatoes.
- Season with salt and pepper, scatter the lemon rind over, put a knob of butter on the centre of each, then sprinkle with the juice.
- Fold up to enclose filling. Place onto a large baking sheet (or two small ones) and set aside while you prepare and cook the potatoes.
- In a large baking dish, toss the chopped potatoes and onion with the olive oil and herbs. Season and bake for about 40 minutes, until the potato is becoming crisp and golden and the onion is just starting to blacken around the edges.
- Move the potato dish to a lower shelf and put the prepared tray of fish packets on the top shelf. Bake for 15 minutes.
- To serve, share the potato cubes between four plates, then pop a fish parcel on each. Half the fun of this dish is letting each diner open their own packet to release the fragrant steam and discover the layers of flavour hiding under the fish.

FERNWOOD FOOD COACHING ANALYSIS

SERVES 4 | 1 🥕 2 🥛 1 ½ 2 🌱
PER SERVING: energy 1437kJ

From Celebrate! by Victoria Heywood (The Slattery Media Group).