

Salad of Figs, Watercress, Goat's Cheese and Crispy Pancetta

SERVES 4

People either love figs or hate them. If you belong to the former group (of which I am a member), the sight of this freshly cut 'fruit of the gods' makes you smile and the taste makes you swoon. Although they are magnificent without adornment, adding these few ingredients allows figs to shine on a savoury platform.

1 tablespoon olive oil

4 slices pancetta, sliced
into 2cm x 4cm lengths

6 figs

1 bunch watercress
(use leaves only)

3 tablespoons marinated
goat's cheese

1 tablespoon balsamic
reduction

salt flakes, freshly ground
black pepper

- ◆ Heat oil in a sauté pan over medium heat and fry pancetta until crispy.

- ◆ Combine remaining ingredients with the fried pancetta.

- ◆ Drizzle, sparingly, with balsamic reduction. Season.

- ◆ This salad makes an elegant entrée or a beautiful accompaniment to roast meats, particularly pork or duck.



Fennel and Celeriac Soup

SERVES 4-6

This soup is easy to make and showcases two special winter vegetables: celeriac, which gives the dish an earthiness, and fennel, which lends it an aromatic twist. Many are put off by the aniseed flavour of fennel, however, this mellows when cooked and ends up tasting like cooked celery, only sweeter.

¼ cup olive oil

30g butter

1 large brown onion, finely chopped

3 garlic cloves, finely chopped

1 celeriac bulb, peeled and quartered

2 potatoes, peeled and quartered

1 fennel bulb, fronds and bottom end removed

1 litre chicken or vegetable stock

water

salt flakes, freshly ground black pepper

crème fraîche, to garnish

1 handful fresh parsley, finely chopped, to garnish

- ◆ Heat olive oil and butter in a heavy-based saucepan over medium heat and sauté onion until translucent. Add garlic and sauté for a further minute, then add celeriac, potatoes and fennel. Pour in stock and enough water to just cover the vegetables.
- ◆ Bring soup to the boil, then reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 1½ hours. Purée using a stick blender. Check for seasoning, adjusting as required.
- ◆ Serve each bowl garnished with a tablespoon of *crème fraîche* and a sprinkle of finely chopped parsley.

For more information on fennel, see page 155.



Roast Rack of Pork

SERVES 6

Roast pork is a family favourite that we had it all the time growing up. For Mum, cooking the pork was easy—the hard part was guarding the crackling while it was resting. I remember its aroma wafting through the house while it was sitting on the kitchen bench, casting its irresistible spell and dragging the family into the room. If Mum wasn't on top of her game, the crackling would be all gone before we sat down for dinner.

This advice might go against everything preached in our health-conscious age, but when you are choosing a piece of meat for slow cooking it must have a decent amount of fat. This allows the meat to cook in its own juices and remain succulent, and with pork in particular a fatty skin means it will crackle well, which is crucial. Roast pork without crackling is like a queen without her crown.

The inclusion of apple is just as critical to this dish, as it has fresh flavour and sweetness that helps cut through the fattiness of the meat. You can use any apple, but we prefer Granny Smiths because they have good flavour without being too sweet. Growing up, we would have the pork with a spoonful of apple sauce and an orchestra of roast vegetables. While this was delightful, it was also extremely rich, so these days I like to serve the roast on a bed of celeriac and apple purée with sautéed spinach. You still get the beautiful taste of apple, but the dish is cleaner, allowing the flavour of the pork to shine.

Note: A pork rack between 2-2.5kg will serve six people, and for presentation purposes it is nice to have a rack with six large chops. Get your butcher to score the fat of the pork, as this will facilitate the crackling of the skin. It is important that your pork is dry (pat the fat with a paper towel) and at room temperature before you start to cook it, as this stops the muscle of the meat from contracting too much and making the meat tough. You should allow about 30 minutes cooking time for every 500g of meat.

Pork

2kg scored pork rack

olive oil

salt flakes

Celeriac and apple purée

1 medium celeriac, peeled and roughly chopped into pieces approx. 3cm x 3cm

2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and cut into quarters

½ cup water

salt flakes, freshly ground black pepper

20g butter

1 tablespoon pouring cream

- ◆ Remove pork from the refrigerator approximately 1 hour before you need it (it should be room temperature before you cook it).
- ◆ Preheat oven to 250°C (480°F).
- ◆ Pat pork dry with a paper towel, then rub skin with olive oil and a generous amount of salt. Place skin-side up on a baking tray and roast for 30 minutes.
- ◆ Turn oven down to 150°C (300°F) and cook for a further 1.5 hours. Remove pork from oven and cover loosely with aluminium foil. Allow to rest for 20 minutes before serving.

To make the celeriac and apple purée

- ◆ With 15 minutes of the cooking time remaining, combine celeriac, apple and water in a small saucepan. Bring to the boil, then reduce heat and simmer for approximately 20 minutes, or until tender. Drain, then purée with butter and cream. Season.

To serve

- ◆ Serve pork on a bed of celeriac and apple purée with a side of sautéed spinach (see recipe on page 104).



Baby Brussels Sprouts with Garlic, Parsley and Verjuice

SERVES 6

I defy any Brussels sprouts-hater to try this recipe and not be converted. While I am cheating slightly, by using the new baby variety available these days, which is sweeter than its big brother, the trick with sprouts of any size is not to overcook them.

If baby Brussels sprouts are unavailable you can use the regular size, but you will need to trim the bottoms first. I also like to cut bigger ones in half before adding them to the pan, as that way more of their surface gets coated in the delicious sauce.

1kg baby Brussels sprouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cook sprouts, uncovered, in a saucepan of boiling water until just tender. Drain and set aside. ◆ While sprouts are cooking, melt butter in a sauté pan over medium heat until it starts to foam and sauté garlic for a minute. Add chopped parsley. ◆ Deglaze pan with verjuice, then add sprouts and stir to coat with sauce. Remove from heat and season.
30g butter	
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped	
2 teaspoons finely chopped parsley	
¼ cup verjuice	
salt flakes, freshly ground black pepper	

Sautéed Spinach with Lemon and Garlic

SERVES 4

Spinach is best when lightly sautéed. Boiling the leaves can lead to a soggy mess and much of its flavour and nutrition is lost in the process.

For convenience, baby spinach can be used for this recipe, but it won't have quite the texture of the larger version. You can also replace the spinach with silver beet. As well as making it more rustic and less refined, this is an economical way of bulking up the dish.

Sautéed spinach makes a lovely accompaniment to roast pork, duck or quail.

¼ cup olive oil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Heat olive oil in a heavy-based sauté pan over medium heat and sauté garlic for a few minutes (it should sizzle but not burn). ◆ Add spinach and sauté until just starting to wilt. Season. ◆ Serve with a squeeze of lemon.
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped	
1 bunch spinach, carefully washed	
salt flakes, freshly ground black pepper	
squeeze of lemon juice	

Chargrilled Broccoli with Garlic, Chilli and Anchovies

SERVES 4

One of the great things that my ancestors and other European immigrants have shown us is that the barbecue is not just for chops and sausages. While the thought might trouble some, the barbecue can be used for cooking a variety of vegetables—corn on the cob, mushrooms and eggplant all come to mind. One of my favourites, however, is chargrilled broccoli—the caramelisation that takes place gives it an enchanting, smoky flavour.

1kg broccoli, stalks removed and separated into florets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Blanch broccoli in a saucepan of boiling water for 2 minutes. Refresh immediately by plunging under cold water. Pat dry. ◆ Brush each floret with some of the olive oil. Season. ◆ Chargrill broccoli on the barbecue (or a grill plate on the stove) until just tender and black stripes are visible, indicating that it has caramelised. ◆ While broccoli is cooking, heat remaining oil in a saucepan and sauté garlic, anchovies and chilli until just simmering. Remove from heat. ◆ When broccoli is cooked, arrange on a serving plate and drizzle with the garlic, chilli and anchovy oil. ◆ Serve garnished with fresh basil leaves and a squeeze of lemon juice.
½ cup olive oil, for brushing and frying	
salt flakes, freshly ground black pepper	
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped	
4 anchovies	
1 red chilli, finely chopped	
1 handful fresh basil leaves, finely shredded	
squeeze of lemon juice	

Medley of Roast Vegetables

SERVES 6-8

This easy vegetable side can be made from myriads of vegetables and I just tend to use whatever I have on hand. Other vegetables you may wish to consider are potatoes, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, parsnips, turnips, swedes, asparagus, artichoke hearts and celeriac, to name just a few.

When chopping your vegetables it is best to cut those that cook slowly into smaller pieces than those that cook quickly, otherwise you will need to stagger the times you add them to the baking dish.

For this recipe I have used shredded fresh basil as a garnish, but if you want to make it that bit fancier scatter marinated goat's cheese or marinated feta over the top before serving.

10 baby Brussels sprouts,
halved

1 red capsicum, sliced
into 2cm lengths

1 bunch baby carrots,
scrubbed and trimmed

1 bunch baby beetroot,
scrubbed and trimmed
(leave a tiny bit of the stem
attached, otherwise the
beetroot will bleed)

1 small eggplant,
cut into small wedges

2 small zucchini,
cut into long quarters

1 fennel bulb, tough outer
layer removed and inner
heart quartered

6 garlic cloves, unpeeled

½-¾ cup olive oil

salt flakes, freshly
ground black pepper

shredded fresh basil, to serve

drizzle of balsamic reduction,
to serve

◆ Preheat oven to 200°C (400°F).

◆ Place vegetables in a large heavy-based baking dish. Drizzle vegetables with olive oil and sprinkle with seasoning, and use your hands to ensure they are well coated with both.

◆ Arrange vegetables in the dish in a single layer, avoiding any overlap.

◆ Bake in the oven for 30-45 minutes, or until vegetables are tender and caramelised.

◆ Serve warm or cold, garnished with shredded basil and a drizzle of balsamic reduction.

Note: You may want to peel the baby beetroot when serving, but I tend not to bother as I find the skin gives them a more rustic flavour. If you don't have much time, you can turn the oven up to 250°C (480°F) and roast the vegetables for 20-30 minutes.

