

Main course

Trout al Cartoccio with Fennel, Almonds and Apple

Serves 2

2 trouts, cleaned, descaled and head removed (these are very easy to find at your supermarkets or fishmongers)

1 onion, 1 small bulb of fennel, 1 apple,

1 sprig of rosemary

Apple juice

Olive oil

Silver foil

- Slice the onion and the fennel and cook gently in olive oil until they are soft, then add half a glass of apple juice and a sprig of rosemary.
- Season the inside of the fish.
- Prepare two good sized pieces of foil by lightly brushing one side with olive oil and then add a knob of butter.
- Place the cooked onion and fennel on each sheet of the foil and put a fish on top of this and cover with 4 or 5 slices of sliced apple.
- Add one more sprig of rosemary and season.
- Fold the edges of the foil over the fish and seal it
- Then place in a heated oven and bake for 25 minutes at 180C/350F/Gas Mark 4.
- Open the parcels at the table for added dramatic effect and enjoy!

Dessert

Strawberry syrup sponge

For the sponge:

5 eggs

165g caster sugar

165g plain flour,

10gr of melted butter

For the topping:

Fresh strawberries (or you can just as easily use some frozen red fruit)

[Optional] 3 or 4 mint leaves

[Optional] 3 or 4 fresh basil leaves

For the syrup:

50ml water

50g sugar

[Optional] a drop of sparkling white wine

Zest of one orange

Zest of one lemon

Vanilla extract

To make the sponge:

- Preheat your oven to 175C/ 360C/ Gas Mark 4
- Prepare a rectangular cake tin by lining it with grease proof paper
- Beat the 5 whole eggs with the sugar until creamy and white – approximately 10 minutes
- Sift the flour then slowly fold it in to the creamed eggs and sugar.
- At the end gently mix in the melted butter, gently pour the mix into the cake tin and bake for 20/25 until it is lightly golden on top and cooked through.
- Now prepare a syrup by boiling the sugar and water together in a pan. Allow it to cool a little then add the optional sparkling wine plus the lemon and orange zest.
- To serve the cake, slice it to a thickness of about 2cm. Place some strawberries or frozen red fruit on top then drizzle with the syrup. Add the fresh leaves if you are using them then top with some whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Venetta Leyland

Starter

Feta and Pea Bruschetta

Serves 2

This is a lovely light, fresh starter. If you are trying to impress your valentine, it pairs beautifully with a cold glass of bubbly!

Half garlic clove, crushed

Pinch sea salt

1tbs fresh or dried dill

75g frozen peas, boiled for a few minutes and refreshed in iced water (or by all means use fresh peas when in season and locally produced - no need to cook them at all!)

35ml olive oil

50g feta cheese, crumbled
10g grated parmesan
Half lemon, juiced
Pepper
2 slices sourdough bread

- Put the garlic, salt, dill, peas and olive oil in a blender, pulse a few times until it looks like a rough paste
- Transfer the paste to a bowl and mix in the feta, parmesan and lemon juice, season with pepper to taste
- Toast the sourdough on a griddle pan, then top with the pea mix and serve.

Main course

Lentil Bolognese

Using mainly store cupboard ingredients and lentils instead of minced beef, this is a cheap and very filling meal that I promise will wow your friends whether they are vegetarian or not! It freezes really well or you can use any leftovers as a sandwich filling the next day.

Small glass of red wine (optional)
900ml vegetable stock
2 shallots, finely diced
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
100g pitted black olives, roughly chopped
Half jar sun dried tomatoes, roughly chopped
1 tsp dried chilli (or 1 fresh red chilli finely chopped)
1tsp dried mixed herbs
250 brown lentils, rinsed in cold water
2 x 400g tinned tomatoes
Salt and Pepper to taste

- Put the shallots, garlic, olives, sun dried tomatoes, chill, and herbs in a large saucepan. Pour over the wine and 300ml of the stock, bring to the boil and then let almost all of the liquid simmer off.
- Add the lentils, tinned tomatoes and remaining 600ml stock to the pan, and simmer until the sauce is thick and the lentils are cooked, normally around an hour. Check for seasoning at this stage.
- Using a stick blender, whizz some of the sauce until, you reach a consistency that you like. I tend to whizz for about 10 seconds and then stir to mix everything together.
- Serve with any pasta, or rice or a jacket potato.

Dessert

Treacle Tart

My version of this British classic is perhaps darker and richer than others you might have made before. This is because I personally love to add a good dose of black treacle to the mix and I use wholewheat bread crumbs instead of white. I find these contrasts beautifully with the cool clotted cream. You can, of course, go for a paler mix using white bread crumbs and omitting the black treacle and using a total of 475g golden syrup instead, if that's to your taste.

1 packet pre made shortcrust pastry

425g golden syrup

50g black treacle

Knob unsalted butter

150g fine breadcrumbs - I use wholewheat but you can also use white for a finer mix

1 lemon - zest and juice

1 egg - beaten

- Pre heat the oven to 180 degrees C. Roll the pastry out thinly and line a 22cm tart tin with it. Prick the base with a fork and pop in the fridge for half an hour or so
- Gently heat the syrup, treacle and butter together in a saucepan. Once the butter has melted, remove from the heat and cool a little. Stir in the breadcrumbs, lemon zest and juice and beaten egg
- Take the pastry out of the fridge and remove the excess, and blind bake for 12 minutes, then remove the baking beans and bake for a further 8 minutes until cooked through
- Pour the filling in to the pastry case, and bake for 25 minutes until slightly risen all over and slightly wobbly in the centre. Cool on a rack. Serve warm with clotted cream or ice cream.

Ben Marston

Main course

Meatloaf

750g lean minced beef

200g good quality sausage meat

1 medium onion, finely chopped

330 ml bottle of strong ale

1 large free range egg, beaten

100g breadcrumbs
1 large garlic clove, finely chopped
1 tsp. dried sage
1 fresh bay leaf
1 tablespoon grain mustard
1 heaped tablespoon tomato purée
1/2 tsp. smoked paprika
Salt and plenty of freshly ground black pepper

- The day before, place the mince and bay leaf in a suitable bowl and cover with the ale. Place in the fridge.
- When you are ready to assemble the loaf drain the beer from the mince using a sieve. Collect the beer as you can add it to some beef stock to make wonderful gravy.
- Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas Mark 4.
- Place the mince and all the other ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Time to get your hands messy, as it needs to be thoroughly mixed.
- Place the mixture in a 900g loaf tin and gently push down so that all the corners are filled. 6. Ensure the top is flat and even. Place a piece of buttered greaseproof paper on the top and bake in the oven for 90 minutes or until cooked through.
- Remove from the oven and leave to stand for 15 minutes before turning out. Slice and serve with fluffy mashed potato, plenty of gravy and seasonal vegetables.
- Any leftovers can be re-heated (thoroughly) or served thinly sliced and cold.

Main course

Glorious Ale Stew

3 tbsp plain flour
1/2tsp ground cinnamon
1 tsp smoked paprika
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Olive oil
Butter
1kg/2lb 3oz diced stewing steak (or shin)
2 sticks celery
2 large carrots
2 medium sized red onions (or white)
3 cloves garlic
200–300g button or Portobello mushrooms
2 heaped tsp tomato purée
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

500ml dark ale
200ml Beef stock
2 bay leaves
500g Baby new potatoes
Fresh crusty white loaf

- Mix together the flour, cinnamon, smoked paprika and generous amount of black pepper and salt in a large bowl. Toss in the diced meat and ensure it gets fully coated in the flour mix.
- Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas mark 4
- Heat a large casserole on the hob. Add some of the olive oil and a knob of butter. Once the butter has melted and the oil is hot, add enough beef to cover the base of the pan in a single layer and heat until browned on all sides. When browned, remove the beef to a bowl, Repeat until all the meat is browned.
- If there is a coating on the bottom of the pan add a splash of water to deglaze and pour into the bowl along with the browned meat.
- Roughly chop the celery, carrots and onions and finely slice or mash the garlic
- Place a little more oil in the casserole and heat. First add the onions. Once they start to brown add the celery, carrot and onion and button mushrooms. Cook on a high heat for 2 minutes, stirring throughout.
- Now add the tomato purée and stir, then add the ale, beef stock and bay leaves
- Bring the contents to a simmer, return the browned beef to the casserole and stir everything together.
- Place a lid on the casserole dish and place in the middle shelf of the oven.
- Chop the baby new potatoes in half (skins on), then after 1 hour of cooking the casserole, add the potatoes, ensuring they are covered by the stock. Cook for another 1 1/2 hours.
- Check every 1/2 hour to check the dish is not drying out. You can always top up with a little more beer.
- Serving piping hot, in a bowl along, with a slice of good quality crusty, white bread.