

Jamie Oliver

MY NEW BEST SALAD

(Serves 4)

Ingredients:

2 banana shallots, or 6 normal-sized ones, peeled and very finely sliced

a good vinegar (champagne, white wine or sherry vinegar)

4 large handfuls of fresh tarragon, leaves picked

1 small bunch of seedless red grapes, halved

1 small bunch of seedless green grapes, halved

6 tablespoons extra virgin

olive oil

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

200g/7oz good goat's cheese or hard salted ricotta



Method:

This salad is one of the best things that's happened to me this year. Really tasty, really clean and fresh. I haven't yet given it to anyone who didn't absolutely love it. The recipe uses tarragon instead of any other salad leaf. This is quite shocking for me, as I've always been scared of tarragon! It's a potent herb, but used aggressively and strongly like it is here it really works well. With the sweetness of the grapes and the saltiness of the goat's cheese, it's fantastic. If you can't get hold of enough tarragon, feel free to bulk the salad out with some rocket. This will be fine – but tarragon on its own is so amazing, you must try it some time.

The first job is to put the finely sliced shallots and vinegar together in a dish, making sure that the shallots are all covered by the vinegar. If the shallot slices are nice and thin they will need only about 10-15 minutes in the vinegar for the desired effect. They will be just like crunchy pickled onions when they're done.

Keep all the ingredients in the fridge until your guests are around the table. Crack open a bottle of crisp white wine for them, then get started. Throw the tarragon leaves into a bowl, add the grapes, the shallots with only 5 tablespoons of their vinegar, and the olive oil. Toss this all together, taste it and add a little seasoning if it's needed. Go easy on the salt though, as the cheese will be quite salty. Use some tongs to pick up the salad and divide it between 4 plates. Grate or crumble the goat's cheese on top of each salad and drizzle over any leftover dressing. You'll love it!



"When I was a kid the schools were never very good at recognizing dyslexia - everyone thought we were thick. But I think it's really good that this charity helps kids realise they can excel in anything."



xtraordinarypeople

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ROAST SQUASH, SAGE, CHESTNUT AND PANCETTA RISOTTO



Ingredients:

1 x basic risotto recipe (see page 118)
1 butternut squash
1 level tablespoon coriander seeds
2 small dried chillies
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
olive oil
12 slices of pancetta or dry-cured smoky bacon
100g/3 1/2oz chestnuts (vac-packed are fine)
a bunch of fresh sage, leaves picked
optional: 6 heaped tablespoons mascarpone cheese

Method:

Preheat your oven to 190°C/375°F/gas 5. Carefully cut your butternut squash in half and scoop out the seeds. Put these to one side. Cut the squash lengthways into 0.5cm/1/4 inch slices. Bash up your coriander and chillies with a pinch of salt and pepper in a pestle and mortar (or use a metal bowl and the end of a rolling pin). Dust this over your squash with a tablespoon of olive oil. Toss around until completely coated. Line up snugly in a roasting tray and bake for around 30 minutes until the flesh and skin are soft to the touch. Now get all your ingredients ready and start making your basic risotto.

Remove the squash from the oven and lay your pancetta over it. Mix the squash seeds, chestnuts and sage leaves with a little olive oil, salt and pepper. Sprinkle over the squash and pancetta and place back in the oven for about 5—10 minutes until the pancetta is crisp.

Once the squash has cooled down a little, shake off the pancetta and chestnuts and finely chop the squash — it will be quite mushy but that's fine. I go for half of it fine and half chunky. Add this to the risotto at the end of Stage 3. Carry on as normal through the basic recipe,

season to taste and serve with the pancetta, chestnuts, sage leaves and squash seeds sprinkled over the top. Lovely served with a big dollop of mascarpone cheese on the side.

Try this: Place a grater and a block of Parmesan cheese in the middle of the table so that everyone can help themselves.



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ROAST SQUASH, SAGE, CHESTNUT AND PANCETTA RISOTTO (Cont)



Ingredients:

Basic Risotto

Approx. 1 litre/2 pints stock

1 tablespoon olive oil

3 finely chopped shallots or 2 medium onions

1/2 a head of celery, finely chopped (discard any tough outer sticks)

Maldon sea salt and black pepper

2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

400g/14oz risotto rice

100ml/3fl oz dry white vermouth (dry Martini or Noilly Prat) or dry white wine

70g/2oz butter

85-100g/3-3 1/2oz freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Method:

I think this is the best basic risotto recipe you will come across - it's really easy. I assure you that once you've got the knack you'll carry on making it all the time and it won't let you down. You can so easily enhance it by adding different seasonal ingredients.

Heat the stock. Then in a separate pan heat the olive oil, add the shallot or onion, celery and a pinch of salt, and sweat the vegetables for about 3 minutes. Add the garlic and after another 2 minutes, when the vegetables have softened, add the rice. Turn up the heat now. At this crucial point you can't leave the pan, and anyway, this is the best bit.

While slowly stirring, continuously, you are beginning to fry the rice. You don't want any colour at any point (so remember, you're in control, and if the temperature seems too high, turn it down a bit). You must keep the rice moving.

After 2 or 3 minutes it will begin to look translucent as it absorbs all the flavours of your base (it may crackle at this point, that's fine). Add the vermouth or wine, keeping on stirring as it hits the pan - it will smell fantastic! It will sizzle around the rice, evaporating any harsh alcohol flavours and leaving the rice with a tasty essence.

I must admit I'm a sucker for dry vermouth. When it cooks into the rice it seems to give it a really full but subtle flavour and leaves a wicked sweet-ness that works perfectly with the rice. White wine is lovely, probably more delicate and fresh. Try both - see what you think.

Once the vermouth or wine seems to have cooked into the rice, add your first ladle of hot stock and a pinch of salt (add small amounts of salt to taste while you are adding the stock). Turn down the heat to a highish simmer (the reason we don't want to boil the hell out of it is because, if we do, the outside of the rice will be cooked and fluffy and the inside will be raw).

Keep adding ladlefuls of stock, stirring and allowing each ladleful to be absorbed before adding the next. This will take about 15 minutes. Taste the rice - is it cooked? Carry on adding stock until the rice is soft but with a slight bite. Check seasoning.

Remove from the heat and add the butter and the Parmesan, saving a little of the latter to go on top if you like. Stir gently. Eat it as soon as possible while it retains its moist texture.



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BAKED PEARS STUFFED WITH ALMONDS, ORANGE AND CHOCOLATE IN FLAKY PASTRY (Serves 4)

Ingredients:

4 perfectly ripe pears
40g/1 1/2oz blanched almonds
50g/13/4oz butter
50g/13/4oz sugar
zest and juice of 1 orange
seeds from 1 vanilla pod (see page 304)
70g/2 1/2oz best-quality cooking chocolate (70% cocoa solids)
16 sheets of filo pastry, defrosted if frozen

Method:

Preheat the oven to 170°C/325°C/gas 3. Carefully peel the pears and carve out each core from the bottom. This will give you a hole about 4cm/1 1/2 inches deep. Put the pears to one side.

Put your blanched almonds into a food processor and whizz up until really fine. (You could always do this by placing them in a tea towel and bashing them with a rolling pin.) Put them in a bowl with 70g/2 1/2oz of the butter, the sugar and the zest and juice of the orange. Add the vanilla seeds to the bowl, then mix everything up until nice and smooth. Bash up the chocolate into small pieces, adding these to the mixture as well. Divide into 4 balls and put to one side.

Melt the rest of the butter in a little pan for brushing on to the filo pastry. Dampen a clean tea towel and wring it out — use this to cover the unused filo pastry so it doesn't dry out and become too brittle. Working with one piece of filo at a time — they are normally about A4 size — spread it out in front of you and brush the sheet with melted butter. Lay the next sheet of pastry on top and repeat until you have 4 brushed layers of filo pastry. Cut the layered pastry down to a 20cm x 20cm/

8 inch x 8 inch square.

Take a pear and one ball of almond mix and fill the hole in the base, packing the excess filling around the base of the pear. Place in the middle of the filo square then gather up the pastry around the stalk and pinch tight. You can leave it looking nice and rustic and flopping all over the place, as this will look really good when it's cooked. Repeat this pro-

cess with the other 3 pears then cook in the preheated oven for 25—30 minutes until the pastry is golden and crisp, and serve with fromage frais, crème fraîche or vanilla ice cream.



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