

REGIONAL

plate



After reading our stories about fresh produce and the producers that grow or make it, the first thing that readers ask for is recipes that use the ingredients we talk about.

However, can we offer you something we think is much more useful? That is the knowledge of how use that produce in your cooking. What are its characteristics and flavours, its season and how do you choose the best? How do you prepare it and what flavours are compatible with it? Once you've learnt these basics, you can then look at a recipe using the produce and know what's going on within it.

What we are offering here in plate is like a members only cooking school. In print we'll have preparation ideas, sources of unfamiliar ingredients and products that will make your cooking easier or enjoyable. Online at our websites we will have extra material, videos and photographs. So we're going back to school, but you can talk amongst yourselves (start on our web forum) and it's ok to have a drink or two while you read. May I introduce our teacher, Chef Jan Gundlach. *Fred Harden*

Welcome

One of my favourite quotes defines what I'll be trying to do here in plate. It really is the basis of all cooking and it comes from my culinary mentor master chef and author Gerhard Dammert who says "The art of cooking is: the knowledge of products and cooking techniques, culinary lore and science, the continuous training of skills, and precise seasoning and timing. To achieve perfection, in taste and appearance."

It's important to be aware of that 'continuous training of skills' part. That will be your homework when you enjoy your cooking at home. Experience comes with each new thing you try, and even if you don't know it, you've actually been training since as a child, you first licked the cake beaters when your mother made a cake!

One important difference to the recipe magazines, is that here we're not giving you absolutely specific sizes and quantities. We make suggestions and the photographs let you see what I think are appropriate serving sizes, but you should be able to choose that yourself to suit your dining occasion. I will also to encourage you to taste and adjust any seasoning to suit the ingredients rather than a specific 'half teaspoon' etc.

Fresh produce varies with seasons and varieties and a good cook is always tasting and adjusting.

JAN GUNDLACH

Cooking with Quail



Pan fried quail with wilted greens, mushrooms and juniper berries

Farmed quail, as most of what you will buy is nowadays, is a very tender and moist meat. It requires very little cooking time. The wild bird has a stronger game flavour, but even the farmed quail is a delicious little bird. While prepared cuts and fully deboned quail make it much easier to try quail at home, if all that are available are whole birds, it's not that hard to prepare as we'll show you (P122).

Try this is a very simple quail dish to start with, it's the accompaniment that makes it special.

Crush some juniper berries and leave to infuse in some good olive oil. A tablespoon per person. Pre-season the quail breast with salt and ground pepper.

To the pan, add some olive oil, some whole peeled cloves of garlic and thyme. A sprig of rosemary will add some aroma. Fry the quail skin side down and turn after two or three minutes. Select some leaves of baby cos, and other fresh lettuce, put them briefly into boiling water. I add a sprinkle of icing sugar to take away the bitterness. Saute some mushrooms in olive oil or butter (try the smaller exotic mushroom varieties, you'll find them pre-packed at your green grocer). Place the softened leaves of lettuce on the plate, add the mushrooms and arrange the quail pieces on top. Drizzle with the reduced stock jus and finely crushed juniper berries in olive oil. Serve immediately.



TIP BARBECUING QUAIL

Start with a high heat to brown the outside then lift the quail from the heat so that it cooks slowly. The meat can dry out quickly. You can coat quail pieces in olive oil to keep in the moisture, but the cooking process is the key. Precise timing. It's much easier to do this in a pan where you can turn the heat down.

Cooking with Quail



Seasalt cured Ocean Trout with salad and poached quail eggs

This a beautiful appetiser to go with the quail

Cure a filet of ocean trout with a sprinkle of sea salt, cover and refrigerate for 8 to 16 hours. Trim before slicing to sashimi thickness. Poach two quail eggs per person. Select small salad leaves and place beside the fish. Place the eggs onto the salad, drizzle with a lemon vinaigrette, add a sprinkle of salt flakes and a little fresh ground white pepper. A sour cream based mustard dressing would compliment this dish.

TIP POACHING (QUAIL) EGGS

This works for all eggs. Boil two pots of water, one with a dash of vinegar, the other with some salt. The vinegar keeps the egg white firm, and it is then transferred into the salted water to get rid of the vinegar taste and season it. These small eggs don't need long cooking times. The egg is then transferred to a piece of absorbent paper, where you can trim the stringy bits off to make a more attractive shape.

De-boning a Quail

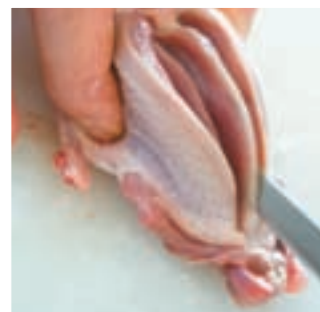


TIP

Remove the wing tips, cut at the first joint, these will burn if you're roasting, and there's no meat on them. Then remove the leg.



Cut through the pocket of skin between the leg and body, and cut through the joint.



Remove the breasts by cutting along the breast bone, as shown. Keep the carcass to make stock that you will reduce for the jus.



Trim the bone on the leg back to the thigh meat, scraping with a sharp knife, cutting away the loose pieces. This makes it easier to pick up, and you will want to!



Goya -The Quail Shoot

QUAIL (*Coturnix coturnix*) are a traditional wild game bird that has been domesticated. From the same family as pheasant, they are native to all the continents and despite those tiny wings, are migratory. A single male bird can cover an area of forty kilometres looking for a mate. It's famed in biblical history, being described in Exodus as having saved the Israelites from

starvation when a vast migratory flock covered their camp. While they were regular visitors in summer in England, they ate seeds from poisonous plants like hellebore and were thought to be unsafe to consume. The Europeans were less



picky, and have always trapped and hunted them. There's a popular quail curry dish in Pakistan, and in China quail and their eggs have been eaten since the Zhou Dynasty (1150 B.C.) when in the hierarchy of food nobility, they were considered suitable food for 'Senior officials'.



Pepper and pepper grinders

I always have a choice of white and black pepper available. My favourite grinders are these Peugeot ones.

They have an adjustment that can give you a choice of fine to a very coarse grind. I use mostly white pepper, but that's just a personal choice. Quite a few cookbooks claim that black pepper is more aromatic and white pepper is spicier. I've done

dozens of taste tests and found the white to be just as aromatic.

It varies with each batch you buy, like all natural produce. The region it's grown, the microclimate, the country of origin all affect the taste. When it has been harvested makes a big difference.

Most of our pepper comes from South East Asia and the Indian pepper has a large peppercorn and is highly regarded. There they grow around 100 different cultivars. White pepper is actually black pepper with the dark outside husk removed. The peppercorn is soaked in water, rubbed to remove the outside and then dried. Black pepper is usually just sun dried. Green peppercorns are the immature fruit and are often preserved in vinegar or brine. When in dried form it can be ground just as white or black pepper.



Sorbet

The difference between a sorbet and ice cream is in that 'cream' in the name. They're made without milk products, using fruit flavours or infusions of herbs and liqueurs. I use the words sorbet and sherbert interchangeably.

The French call them sorbets, Italians sorbetti and the Spanish sorbete. (See our *The Old Foodie* section P141 for more icy history.)

You really need a commercial ice cream maker to make good sorbet. Because this is basically frozen sugar syrup, it needs to be churned until the texture is fine crystals that melt in your mouth. It's a lot harder to do without one.



Making Sorbet

It's a simple process. Take the fruit puree (or the syrup if you're just adding fruit flavours), add the syrup and churn in the ice cream maker until smooth. The sugar level slows the formation of ice crystals. It's at its best when made fresh, when you refreeze it you need more sugar to keep the smooth texture. This can overtake the fruity flavours. Make them a couple of hours in advance.

The sugar balance is the key to successful smooth sorbets. In commercial kitchen you would use a sugar scale such as is used in wine making. This is a weighted floating glass or plastic sealed tube that measures the density of the sugar in solutions. Ideally this would be to 19 baumé for sorbets, you would know then, that when frozen there would be no crystals.

Serving ideas. Individual servings, and sitting in ice, a mixed bowl of sorbet to share from for the centre of the table. The biscuit is almond tuile. Easy enough to bake yourself, or buy at a good Providore.



Some suggested sorbet flavourings



ABOVE.
DARK RED Pomegranate sorbet. A lemon sorbet base and the pomegranate seeds and juice. I left this mix sit for a couple of hours to infuse. Then you strain the seeds out but in one batch we added them back in, after the churning process, it added bit of texture.

DARK GREEN Chiso sorbet. This is again a lime sorbet, but reduced in quantity to allow the herbs to speak for themselves. I added chiso mint leaves, that's the decorative leaf you see on a sushi platter. It has a minty, peppery-fresh taste. If you don't have those leaves basil is also a favourite of mine. Even tarragon is quite beautiful. You just add abundant leaves, sugar syrup and the lime juice into a kitchen blender, blend and then strain the pulp from the mixture. Use the juice.

ORANGE Fresh mango, just the blended mango pulp and a little less sugar syrup because of the natural sweetness of the fruit. (I believe we are used to over sweetened desserts. It's a chefs responsibility to let the flavour of the product speak for itself. And today we are more conscious of the health aspects of over sweetening.)

LIGHT GREEN Lime sorbet, lime juice and sugar. You would need to add water to the lime juice, or you could add some verjuice, or a little apple juice. Taste as you add it so it doesn't start tasting of apple juice.

PINK Fresh strawberries, washed, trimmed and pureed. Find the tastiest strawberries, add some lemon or lime juice to elevate the acidity and the sugar syrup.

Sugar Syrup

This makes approximately 1 cup

- 1 cup (250ml) water
- Add ½ cup (110g) caster sugar

Place the water and sugar in a small saucepan, and stir over a low heat until the sugar dissolves.

Bring to the boil and cook for 2 minutes. Remove from heat.

Cool to room temperature.

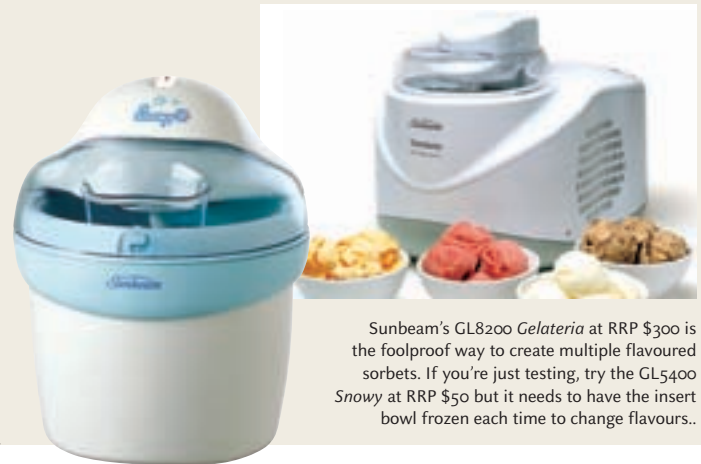
Refrigerate so that it gets quite cold, for several hours or overnight.

If you make a bigger quantity it will keep for weeks in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

Almond Tuiles

- 1 cup powdered almonds
- ½ cup caster sugar
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 2 egg whites, 1 egg
- 1 ½ ounces melted butter

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine the almonds, sugar, and flour in a bowl. Mix until smooth. Add the egg whites, egg, and melted butter. Stir well. The mixture should have an easily spreadable consistency. Grease a baking tray, and spoon the batter onto the cookie sheet, the equivalent of a teaspoon, spacing the mixture 3 inches apart. Bake for about 10 minutes or until golden brown. Cut them into strips when warm, they become crisp as they cool.



Sunbeam's GL8200 *Gelateria* at RRP \$300 is the foolproof way to create multiple flavoured sorbets. If you're just testing, try the GL5400 *Snowy* at RRP \$50 but it needs to have the insert bowl frozen each time to change flavours..

Almonds & Olives



While I use olive oil every day, and can talk for hours about selecting and tasting olive oil (maybe we'll do that in a future Plate), I almost never use table olives in my cooking. There's a classic recipe, Chicken al Cacciatore (you'll find it on the website) here that recalls their Mediterranean origins, the 'al cacciatore' in the title means in 'the style of hunters' who probably had just picked the mushrooms for the pot, and used ripe olives direct from the tree. This is a slow cooked chicken with olives added at the end for their strong salty flavour. They quickly take over the dish.

For me, table olives are ideally used as part of an antipasto plate. Of course you couldn't have Salad Nicoise without olives, and you'd miss them on a pizza.

Devilled almonds

You can choose them blanched or leave the skin on. In a heavy frypan (non-stick is ok) spread the almonds out so they're all being heated and shake or stir them over a low heat until they start to brown in patches. Add a few teaspoons of some good quality olive oil. They should just be oily enough to make the seasoning stick. Add the seasoning and toss them. Serve warm.

For seasoning, try a mix of peppers - szechuan pepper and sansho (a Japanese pepper).

Another blend is peppercorns, mustard seeds, chopped tarragon, lemon zest and some salt flakes.

Togarashi This is a prepared Japanese seven-spice mixture that is a blend of red peppers, sansho pepper, roasted orange peel, black and white sesame seeds, seaweed, and ginger. (Also known as Shichimi Togarashi.)



Green Raisins

Iranian green raisins, known as *keshmesh* in Farsi, are less sweet and more fruity than ordinary raisins. They're green because the grapes are dried in the shade, not in the sun. The taste has been described as having hints of pineapple, lemon and nutmeg-tinged green apple. You can buy them online at www.pariya.com, with delivery generally within two days to Australian capital cities and three to five days to other areas within Australia.

Table olives are selected as green or black, and sometimes dried as in the Coriole sundried ones. Start with a good quality grower, and if they've managed the pickling process carefully their olives retain the flavours of the different varieties. If you eat a green olive from the tree, you'll taste the bitterness. A black olive that has ripened has a more intense flavour, but for table olives they're picked before they go soft, at the purple black stage.



Commercially produced green olives are usually treated in an alkali bath that neutralises the acid (*oleopigrine*). Traditionally

this was done with a wood ash paste, but now it's replaced by caustic soda in solution. This covers the olives for around twenty four hours and they are rinsed and soaked in clean water. Some smaller producers make cuts in the skin or roll them to bruise the skin which means they can avoid the caustic process. They are then treated much like the riper olives are. Fermentation also produces a superior tasting olive without alkalis, but takes a lot longer time.

The process is a continuous one of covering with salt brine, with a weight on the barrels to keep the floating olives submerged away from the air, and monitoring the pH so no bacteria can grow. This solution is changed often and after the salt has reached the stone, they're soaked in water and for sale, put into a milder salt solution and flavourings such as oregano, garlic, capsicum and lemon can be added.

If you've got a supermarket jar of olives that are all a consistent black colour, they've probably been imported and darkened by oxidation. Give them a miss and support your local olive grower instead. It's ok to have variations in the colour of the fruit.