

Easy-to-prepare meals and accompanying drinks

Salmon en Croûte

BY RACHEL WALKER



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Some of my favourite dishes are the ones that require little effort to cook, but create a big impact. This is one of them. A salmon en croûte is a real centrepiece, but is deceptively easy to make. For me, it has as much pomp and grandeur as a beef Wellington, and is a beautiful dish to serve hot or cold at a spring or summer lunch.

As for getting the perfect pastry, it's tempting to keep peeking in the oven to try to catch it at that beautifully puffed, golden point. But the key with puff is to show your mettle: each time the oven door opens, the temperature will drop, which isn't good news. So make sure the oven is well up to temperature before the pastry goes in—and as difficult as it might seem, ensure the door stays shut during cooking.

Serves 4

- 125g frozen spinach
- 125g cream cheese
- ½tsp nutmeg
- ½tsp orange zest
- 320g puff-pastry sheet
- 500g half salmon side, skinned
- 1 egg yolk

To serve: buttery new potatoes and dressed salad leaves

1. Preheat the oven to 200C.
2. Defrost the frozen spinach—either

by leaving it at room temperature or popping it in the microwave. Squeeze out all the water by pressing the spinach against the side of a sieve.

3. Transfer the spinach to a mixing bowl and use a fork to whisk it with the cream cheese, orange zest and grated nutmeg.

4. Now prepare the salmon. Make sure the skin has been removed and there are no pin bones left. Cut it in half, lengthways.

5. Lightly dust a non-stick surface



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with plain flour and roll out the puff-pastry sheet.

6. Place one of the salmon fillets towards an edge of the puff-pastry rectangle and then spread the spinach mixture over it. Place the other salmon half on top, like a sandwich.

7. Fold the pastry over the salmon to make a parcel. Use your fingers to crimp together the edge of the pastry and then cut away any excess. Leftover pastry can be rolled into shapes to decorate the outside—an eye and a dorsal fin always look impressive.

8. Brush the parcel with an egg yolk to glaze. Move it onto a non-stick tray and transfer to the preheated oven to cook for 20–25 minutes, until the pastry is puffed up and golden.

9. While the salmon is cooking, boil some new potatoes and toss in butter, and prepare a green-leaf salad to serve with it.

TRY THIS...

Experiment with the flavours. For example, some people might prefer lemon zest over orange zest. Also, try substituting the cream cheese for quark, sour cream or even herb-flavoured Philadelphia.

Gooseberry Galettes

Like many, I've concluded that life's too short to make puff pastry from scratch. There's little need anyway, when shop-bought puff pastry is so delicious.

With a recipe like the salmon en croûte though, you'll probably find that you have pastry left over, as the packs are usually 320g. You can freeze puff pastry, but it's far more fun to put the leftovers to work as mini tarts. Simply roll them into rectangles or circles and start dreaming up the topping: slices of apple, chocolate spread, tomato, red onion and goats' cheese...or gooseberries.

Serves 4

- 100g puff pastry
- 2tbsp apricot jam
- 150g gooseberries, washed
- 4tsp brown sugar
- To serve: clotted cream

1. Preheat the oven to 200C.
2. Lightly dust a non-stick surface with plain flour, roll out the puff pastry and cut into four squares or rectangles.
3. Use a knife to draw a border



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about 2cm in from the edge of the pastry. Don't press too hard—just lightly score the pastry with the tip of a paring knife.

4. If needed, heat the apricot jam to make it more spreadable and then brush over the pastry inside the border.
5. Split the gooseberries between the four squares of pastry, arrange on top of the apricot jam and sprinkle a teaspoon of sugar over each.
6. Transfer onto a non-stick tray and bake for 20 minutes until the pastry is puffed-up and golden. Serve with a dollop of clotted cream.

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Acting Cordially

THE SIGHT OF HEDGEROWS

erupting with blossoms fills the cook with joy. An urban park near where I live has elderflowers dotting its perimeter. As the flowers start blooming, I dash out and fill a plastic bag with enough heads to concoct a big batch of cordial.

It's very simple to do—and there are lots of recipes online that show the alchemy that comes from 20 elderflower heads, 2kg of sugar, 2 litres of water, a packet of citric acid and a little patience. For those lacking the latter, there are lots of elderflower cordials on supermarket shelves too.

In celebration of spring, there are few better accompaniments to salmon en croûte than a jug of elderflower cordial and fizzy water, clinking with ice cubes. Except, perhaps, the addition of a sparkling wine or champagne. A shot of elderflower cordial topped-up with fizz makes a simple but sensational cocktail. For even more decadence, switch to an elderflower liqueur. ■

■ **Belvoir Elderflower Cordial**, Sainsburys, £3/500ml

■ **Crémant du Jura Brut**, The Wine Society, £12.50/750ml

■ **St-Germain Elderflower Liqueur**, Waitrose, £18.99/500ml



BOOK



The Natural Cook: Eating the Seasons from Root to Fruit by Diana Henry, Amazon, £16.

BARGAIN



Citric Acid, *Sous Chef*, £3/100g. The very cheap, but critical ingredient for making cordials and jams.

BLOW-OUT



Scandinavian Midsummer Feast, June 20–21, Somerset, £200. A midsummer festival for foodies.

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