

Easy-to-prepare meals and accompanying drinks

Chicken, Lemon & Fennel Traybake

BY RACHEL WALKER



Rachel Walker is a food writer for numerous national publications. Visit rachel-walker.co.uk for more details

🌀 FENNEL COMES INTO SEASON around this time of year. The roasted fennel bulb is sweet, soft and caramelised, with gentle anise flavours that liven up a chicken traybake.

Serves 4

- 2 fennel bulbs
- 1 lemon
- 600g potatoes (preferably new potatoes, though any will do)
- 2 sprigs of rosemary
- 3tbsps olive oil
- 4 large chicken thighs, (skin on, bone in)
- 2 garlic bulbs
- 2tbsps crème fraîche
- Optional serve: babyleaf herb salad

1. Preheat the oven to 180C.
2. Cut the cylinder tubers off the fennel. Pick off the green fronds and set them aside to add to the herb salad later.
3. Next, slice off the base of the fennel bulb, quarter and roughly pull apart the layers. Put them in a baking tray along with the cylindrical fennel pieces.
4. Quarter the lemon and then either half or quarter the potatoes, so that they're similar sizes to the lemon quarters. Add the potato chunks to the tray along with the lemon quarters and rosemary, then use your hands to toss with 2tbsps of the olive oil and season with a dash of salt so everything is coated.
5. Drizzle the remaining 1tbsp of olive oil over the chicken



- thighs and massage a dash more salt into the chicken skin. Nestle the thighs into the bed of vegetables. Finally, chop the garlic in half horizontally and arrange the four halves (cut side up) alongside the chicken.
6. Put the traybake in the oven and roast for 40 minutes, until the chicken is cooked-through, the lemon and garlic are both squidgy, and the fennel is soft and slightly caramelised.
7. Plate up each portion, topping with a lemon quarter and half a garlic clove—so each diner can squeeze the sticky cloves out themselves.
8. Add the crème fraîche to the leftover juices in the roasting tray, bring to a simmer and spoon the juices over each portion of chicken and then serve.
9. Add the feathery green fennel fronds to the salad, dress (see right) and serve as a side dish.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM & ZOE HILL

TIP...

For extra flavour, why not whip up a home-made salad dressing while the traybake is in the oven? Simply combine 3tbsps olive oil, 1tbsp lemon juice and ½tsp mustard in a jam jar. Shake until well-mixed and pour over!

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Drinks In Bloom

MY MUM ALWAYS PHOTOGRAPHS the first daffodil of the year. Would you believe that this year's image was actually taken on December 9, when a confused little bud burst into blossom after an unseasonably clement spell?

I've inherited my mum's habit of chronicling the seasons—but with a bout of elderflower-making instead. At this time of year my walks get longer and more roving, as I scan the bushes for puffy, big elderflower heads. I stock up on citric acid and keep a stash of plastic bags in my pocket just in case I stumble across some blooms. It's a short season, so you have to jump into action if you see them.



If you miss the opportunity, then there are lots of delicious brands available in our supermarkets. My personal favourite is **Belvoir's** elderflower cordial (£3.15/500ml), served with fizzy water and big chunks of ice. **Cawston Press** has incorporated elderflower into its juice range with its **Apple & Elderflower** (£2.19/1 litre), which gives the apple a refined edge.

When it comes to alcoholic options, **Chase Distillery** macerates elderflower blooms with their award-winning vodka (£19.50/50cl), and **Warner Edwards** has recently brought out an elderflower-infused gin (£32.95/70cl), which is a great twist on the classic G&T. My preferred

tipple, though, is a dash of **St-Germain** elderflower liqueur (£19/50cl) in a glass of cava—a lovely springtime cocktail.

SPRINGTIME TWIST

When using elderflower in cocktails, it's best to stick with light, fragrant flavours like apples or grapes, rather than dark fruits like blackcurrant or blackberry. Try adding a splash of elderflower cordial to a glass of cava (as above), or a gin and tonic for a springtime twist on a classic. It's also delicious mixed with fizzy apple or ginger beer for virgin cocktails.

Slug
of the
Month

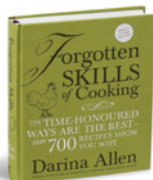


DIY Elderflower Cordial

- 1.5l water
- 1.5kg sugar
- 75g citric acid (available behind the counter at Boots)
- 30 elderflower heads, rinsed
- 2 lemons, thickly sliced

1. Bring the water to a boil in the biggest pan you have. Add the sugar and stir until it has all dissolved and thickened into a sugar syrup.
2. Remove the sugar syrup from the heat, then stir in the citric acid, elderflower heads and lemons (if your pan isn't big enough, you may have to transfer everything to a large sealable container).
3. Leave it outside or in a cool place for 24–48 hours. The syrup will darken and become loaded with elderflower aromas.
4. Double-strain and use a funnel to fill plastic water bottles with the home-made cordial. Label and then freeze until needed. ■

BOOK



Forgotten Skills of Cooking by Darina Allen, £22.75. A classic book with elderflower and cordial recipes.

BUDGET



Kilner clip-top bottle, John Lewis, £2.75. Use this glass bottle for a professional touch.

BLOW OUT



Forest square vases, reikokaneko.co.uk, £35-90. Perfect for flowers in the kitchen.