

Culinary News

Spring 2007 Edition

Dear friend of *flavours*

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In Season

The Humble Leek

Cultivated for thousands of years, leeks were prized by the Romans and Greeks for being beneficial for the voice. In Britain in the 17th Century the Welsh used to wear leeks in their hats during battles to distinguish them from their enemies, the Saxons. The leek is now the Welsh national emblem.



Leeks are part of the Allium family which includes onions, shallots, chives and garlic. They have a milder flavor and are sweeter than onions. Generally they are available the whole year round but the prime season in Australia is July and August, the Southern winter.

Leeks are an excellent source of manganese and a good source of potassium, vitamin B6 and C, magnesium, iron and folate.

Like onions and garlic, they are known to reduce the bad cholesterol levels and raise the good cholesterol levels, so are useful in the prevention of atherosclerosis. They are also known to reduce high blood pressure. Eating leeks, garlic and onions regularly is said to reduce the risk of prostate and colon cancer. They also assist the body to dispose of uric acid and so are beneficial to those who suffer from arthritis.

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When purchasing leeks they should be firm and straight with dark green leaves and white necks. Store unwashed and untrimmed in plastic wrap or container in the refrigerator, where they will keep fresh for up to two weeks.

As soil often gets caught in the layers of leaves it is important to rinse them very well. They are excellent in soups and stews and can also be steamed or braised as they are very tasty on their own.

Leeks are a very useful addition to your daily vegetables.

Select leeks with a clean white slender bulb, at least two to three inches of white, and firm, tightly-rolled dark green tops. The base should be at least 1/2 inch in diameter, although most are much larger, usually 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 inches. The younger the leek, the more delicate the flavor and texture. Look for the slim, cylindrical ones rather than those that are large and bulbous.

Leeks are unfortunately not a good candidate for freezing or canning unless you plan on using them in soups or other recipes rather than as a main dish. Freezing tends to turn them to mush and lends a bitter taste.

Check the center of the leek for a seed stalk (the hard stalk can sometimes be felt with a gentle squeeze) and avoid any you find. Those with a seed stalk beginning will have a tough, woody center. If the leek is limp at all, reject it.

Leek Velouté

Ingredients

20g Butter, Unsalted

30g Flour

1L Chicken Stock

2 Leeks, Washed & Trimmed

20g Butter, Unsalted

Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Lemon Juice

Sea-Salt Flakes

Method

Sauté the leeks, in butter and olive oil until softened. Begin the velouté base by melting the butter and adding the flour. Saute for 2 minutes to cook the dextrin from the flour. Whisk in the hot stock and bring to simmer whilst whisking. Puree the leeks in a kitchen blender using some of the velouté base. Once smooth, strain and add the velouté. Season to taste with salt, lemon juice, extra virgin olive oil and butter. Ladle into service bowls and drizzle with more extra virgin olive oil and fresh peppercorn to your preference.

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Taking the Lid off Culinary Secrets

Gelatine

Gelatine is the most widely used agent to set or to achieve a jelly-like consistency that is utilised in many different foods from fruit jellies, custards and terrines. It is derived from the bones and cartilage of animals particularly beef and veal. Generally colourless and odourless it is available in both a leaf form and a powder. Both are acceptable though it is generally recommended to use the leaves as they are higher quality and are easier to work with. They are also a standard weight which is published on the packet. A non-animal setting agent is also available derived from seaweeds called agar-agar.

Gelatine can be a volatile and unpredictable product to work with, so we recommend a few basic rules to follow, to ensure success. We only work with leaf gelatine and it always needs to be softened in cold water for approximately 3-5 minutes. If left too long in the water or soaked in hot water, the gelatine will dissolve away. Read the packet carefully to find the weight of each individual leaves. It is best to work with recipes that give the quantity of gelatine in grams rather than individual leaves. There are different qualities of gelatine available, good quality brands are available from delicatessens. Gelatine after soaking should be squeezed to remove excess water and then added to a hot (over 80°C) liquid. It should be whisked in to dissolve it and incorporate it. It is imperative that anything containing gelatine be strained before being refrigerated. The amount of gelatine added to a recipe will depend on the amount of set required.

Culinary Terms Defined

Puree and Cream Soups What's the difference?

Puree – a puree is a creamy preparation obtained by pressing and serving cooked foods or by using a blender or a food processor. Purees can be used as a garnish, or in this case, as a **soup** usually diluted with a liquid.



Cream Soup

A cream soup is made with a veloute base (usually a roux or béchamel sauce) and is thickened with flour, cornflour or similar and finished with fresh cream or possibly egg yolks, which gives it the characteristic creamy consistency.

Ingredients in the soup can be pureed (see above) to enhance consistency and appearance.

Many dining destinations write on their menu 'Cream of Pumpkin Soup' and what arrives from the kitchen is a puree soup with the addition of cream. This is a misuse of culinary terms as the soup must contain a velouté base with pumpkin and cream otherwise the soup is simply a pumpkin puree soup with the addition of cream.

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On Gastronomy

Flavour

Flavour is a term that is often used to describe the taste of food and is sometimes misunderstood. There is much more to the simple term than one would expect. Flavour is the combination of olfactory sense, gustatory perception and chemesthesis (mouth-feel / tactile) or to put it more simply, it is the interaction of aroma, taste and touch.

When we consider olfaction, or sense of smell, it is important to realise that many of the sensations we describe as taste are actually aromas; think for a moment about how the distinct smells of food, wine or other beverages influence our perception of what we are eating.

While some fragrances like vanilla, lime, hazelnut, freshly baked bread or just brewed coffee are readily identifiable other aromas combine to form what is known as a bouquet. This term is commonly used to describe wines; hence we may have a wine in which the bouquet is described as fruity, floral or earthy.

For us to experience aroma it is necessary for the flavour packed molecules or etheric oils, to travel, in the form of vapour, to an olfactory zone in the nasal passage. Here a concentration of flavour sensitive nerve cells transmits the information to the brain. Heating and movement increases the release of flavour molecules – this explains why we experience a more intense aroma from hot food than we do from cold. And why it is necessary for a wine taster to swirl the wine in a glass before inhaling; movement creates heat, which helps to

vaporize the wine thus releasing more flavour molecules.

Closely aligned to our sense of smell is taste. The average person is equipped with some 10,000 taste buds. Connoisseurs of fine food or wine tasters don't necessarily have more taste buds than people less experienced in food and wine matters - it is their training that makes all the difference.

There are five basic taste sensations; the more common ones are sweet, sour, bitter and salty. The one that is less well known but which is very important is umami - this taste, not only allows us to experience the savoury characteristics of food, it also plays an important role in wine and food matching.

While taste is often associated with our sense of pleasure it has to be remembered that tastes are primarily the sensory signals that stimulate the body to prepare it for the arrival of nutrients. Thus stimulated appropriate physiological and biochemical reactions occur which foster the digestive and metabolic processes.

While some cultures classify astringency as one of the taste sensations the writer sees it more closely linked to touch and perception. Astringency, pungency, spiciness and the bubbles in champagne provide sensations that are experienced physically, through the mucous membrane as well as the taste buds, and are commonly referred to as touch or mouth feel. This form of stimulation is known as chemesthesis.

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While it is important to realise that our sense of smell and taste is subjective and is related closely to our past experiences it is also related to our present physiological state. A sense of well-being and adventure will greatly enhance our enjoyment of good food and wine.

Flavour of the Month

Tuber Menosplorum



flavours have recently been exploring the elusive Perigord black truffle (tuber Menosplorum). We teamed up at two events with the Australian Truffle Growers Association. Truffles for many thousands of years have been a mysterious product and with their unique flavour and aroma capturing the imagination and appetite of gourmands this mystery continues.

For those who are unfamiliar with the truffle, they are a fungus and a relative of the mushroom family. They are grown underground and can be found attached to the roots of particular oak or hazelnut trees infected with their spores. They are most famously found in France in the Perigord region and for many years have

been wild products that are 'sniffed' out by pigs or trained dogs.

Agricultural research has found that they can be cultivated and farmed to achieve a more consistent product in terms of quality and harvest. In the past two decades, the truffle has been farmed in Australia; after climatic research found that specific regions of Australia are ideal for growing truffles. It takes a tree infected with truffle spores approximately seven years to bear a crop. Australia's first truffles were harvested in Tasmania in 1999 and since then, suitable areas in most states have been identified with truffle plantings taking place even in the Canberra District. Success has been varied with Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT starting to harvest some truffles, with other areas patiently and nervously waiting to see if their investment rewards them.



For those who have never had the pleasure of enjoying truffles, their aroma and taste is very distinct. It has been described as lightly sweet and musty, with an aroma of mushrooms and deep earthy aromas.

Our events at *flavours* saw several different truffles from key growing areas such as Western Australia, Tasmania and even some truffles harvested at Sutton.

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Although all the truffles were the same species (*T. Mensplorum*) it was interesting to note the differences between the different growing areas whether in size, shape or aroma.

The truffle whilst still largely considered a luxury product, as it is expensive (quality Australian are approximately \$2500 per kilo) and difficult to obtain, can be used in many culinary applications, from being paired with seafood, poultry, meat, starch (pasta & risotto), eggs to even desserts. The workshops at *flavours* highlighted a number of different ways to incorporate truffles to make best use of them, along with a discussion with truffle growers, appreciators and Chef Neil Abrahams.

Up-coming Culinary Courses and Events at *flavours*

Toby's Estate Barista Course

Alvaro Sanchez from Toby's Estate Coffee and Darren Gersbach from Gershgoods invite you to learn how to extract a perfect espresso from your home machine.

They will dispel old myths and share their knowledge and passion for espresso coffee. You will also learn how to texture milk like a pro and learn the secrets of selecting and grinding coffee beans.

Saturday, October 13
10am to 1pm
\$80pp
www.tobystate.com.au

Culinary Diploma™ - Seafood Modules

A two module course that advances on the preparation and cooking of a number of different seafood dishes.

Module One

- Purchasing, storage and evaluation of quality
- Seafood handling and filleting
- Menu design and preparation for appetisers and soups
- Hands-on cooking session
- Chef's table

Module Two

- Classification of seafood
- Seafood handling and filleting
- Menu design for main courses
- Application of cookery methods, heat & timing
- Preparation of sauces
- Seafood cooking
- Chef's table

Wednesday Evenings 6pm – 9:30pm
November 13 & 20
Two Modules - \$180

Also our regular *'flavourites...'*

Culinary Diploma™ – Basic

The next Culinary Diploma commences on Tuesday evenings October 17, 24, November 7 & 14 & 21 – 6.15pm to 9.30pm. The course covers a number of culinary basics that enables you to eventually cook an unlimited number of delicious dishes! For more information on course content, please see our website.

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Whisk Management

Book Reviews

ESSENCE

by David Everett-Mathias
Absolute Press – ISBN 978-1904573524

Essence is a collection of dishes from his restaurant, Le Champignon Sauvage. Whilst the book contains recipes, it has many ideas and hints to extract full flavour from fine produce – the *essence* of those ingredients. A recent publication of one of Britain's finest, but he perhaps doesn't carry the celebrity status of some UK chefs. He prefers to spend his time in the kitchen, claiming to have not missed a service since the day it opened. Whilst some of the recipes would challenge some; there are many techniques, skills and ideas that he shares to inspire. As the market for cookery books continues to be flooded, this book is one that impresses and perhaps stands out from many others.

CHOCOLATES & CONFECTIONS

by Peter P. Grewling
John Wiley & Co.
ISBN 978-0-7645-8844-0

Certainly this must be one of the most definitive books on the art of chocolate making. The latest book published by the Culinary Institute of America, written by their Pâtissier and is the most comprehensive guide to working with chocolate and confectionary published in the last few years. At first glance, it appears to be just another 'coffee table' book, but flicking through will soon change any pre-conceived thoughts. The photography is breathtaking and many key techniques are in step-by-step photos.

The book also contains information about sugar confectionary such as nougat, marshmallows and pulled sugar candies. The most valuable point about this book is that each chapter or technique contains advice on troubleshooting. So many books just state 'do this, whisk that' but have no information on 'what happens if my chocolate sets cloudy, what did I do wrong and how do I fix it?' This book is probably designed for professionals, but would make a most valuable addition to anyone interested in the art of chocolate work.

Both are available at Paperchain Bookstore in Manuka...

www.paperchain.com.au

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About Culinary News

Culinary News is published bi-monthly. It is about sharing ideas and knowledge relating to the wonderful world of culinary - food and wine. You'll receive information on up-coming culinary events taking place at *flavours* and the surrounding region. You'll also hear about the best seasonal produce available that month (and what to do with it!) as well as tips on the best buys in the market place, ingredients, kitchenware, cookbooks and more.

If you have any suggestions on what you'd like to see in Culinary News please let us know. We also value your feedback – info@flavours.com.au

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Culinary Quotations

"Out of respect for the true flavour of things, I'm sometimes driven to compose very simple dishes made with only two ingredients accented by a single aromatic,"

Franck Cerrutti

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