

Baked Gnocchi

With Blue Cheese And Spinach

This comforting January dish is made all the better by using up nub ends of the Christmas cheeseboard. A white sauce is an excellent vehicle for leftover stilton, just grate hard cheeses so they melt into the sauce

Serves 4

- 50g butter
- 50g plain flour
- 500ml milk
- 50g blue cheese, crumbled
- 50g hard cheese (cheddar, pecorino), grated (plus extra for sprinkling)
- ½ tsp fresh grated nutmeg
- 500g supermarket gnocchi
- 200g fresh spinach
- 50g walnuts

To serve:

- Italian salad (ideally bitter red leaves, eg radicchio)
- 2L baking dish, greased with butter
- ½ lemon, squeezed



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

1. Start by making the sauce. Melt the butter in a pan and when it starts to foam add the flour and use a wooden spoon to mix it into a thick, walnut-sized paste. Cook this until it turns a golden-straw colour and gives off nutty aromas.

2. Take the pan off the heat as you add the first slosh of milk and whisk it until combined. Keep adding the milk bit by bit, until it has all been used up and then return the sauce to the heat, stirring until it's silky-thick. Take the pan off the heat, add the cheese and let it melt in the hot sauce, add the nutmeg and then set to one side.

3. Next, bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Add the gnocchi and cook for 2 minutes. Use a slotted spoon or sieve to remove the gnocchi from the water and transfer to a colander. Next, add the fresh spinach to the water and simmer for 45 seconds until it wilts. Drain and then stir the gnocchi and spinach into the cheese sauce. Transfer into a greased baking dish, top with a little extra grated cheese. Put the baking dish in an oven (200C) cook for 10-12 minutes until bubbling and golden round the edges.

4. Sprinkle walnuts over the baked gnocchi and serve with a simply-dressed Italian salad.



Drinks Tip...

A robust red goes brilliantly with the blue cheese sauce. Berry Bro's & Rudds' Good Ordinary Claret is excellent and it comes in a half bottle size, ideal for exercising a modicum of restraint after the Christmas excess

WINTER FRUIT SALAD



I don't know about you, but round this time of year I'm done with indulgent desserts... And bright, exotic fruits—mango, kiwi, pineapple—seem too summery for the winter months. There is a lot of elegance in poached or dried fruit, spiked with winter spices. Keep this winter fruit salad in the fridge and serve with a good (stem ginger) ice cream or mascarpone for dessert, or with yogurt and granola for breakfast.

1. Put the prune juice, honey and water in a small saucepan.
2. Add the dried fruit and then all the botanicals (it's not mandatory to use all the above—pick and choose a combination if you don't have them in your pantry shelves).
3. Bring to a rolling simmer for 15 minutes, add the lemon juice and then leave to cool to room temperature.
4. Add the prunes and then refrigerate.
5. Either serve cold with mascarpone and crumbled ginger biscuits, or warm gently and serve with ice cream.

SERVES 4

- 3tbsp prune juice (from tin of prunes in fruit juice)
- 1tbsp honey
- 200ml water
- 200g dried apricots, dried figs, sultanas
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 star anise
- 2 cardamom pods, crushed
- 2 strips of orange zest
- ½ lemon, juiced
- 175g pitted prunes (from tin)