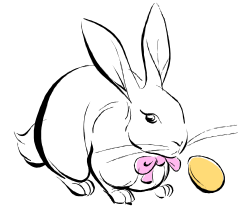


News For April

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Good food; great cooking; healthy eating

Debbie Pryer

April arrives with the promise of Easter holidays, time at home and the possibility of a meal outside for the first time this year. I've invited the family around for dinner on Easter Sunday but first they will be working up an appetite on our allotment. There's a lot to do at this time of year, and I want to get planting new seasons salad crops and potatoes.

I've include my Easter menu in case you need some ideas and I'm pleased to report back on my visit to Whitstable Farmers market. I also have news of another market, some fruity pud recipes, ideas on what to cook with the children over the holidays and the usual articles on what's in season and what to eat to keep you happy and healthy.

Debbie



Whitstable Farmers Market

We travelled to Whitstable to visit the new market, which is held every other Saturday, and I'm pleased to say there was plenty on sale, a good variety of foods and it was busy. On the down side, it is held inside a hall which makes it difficult to move around and I'm not sure that some of the suppliers should be at a Farmers Market, for example, does making cakes make you a local supplier, even if you buy your ingredients from Tesco. I don't think so. I was also concerned about the close range of some of these foods to children's sneezes and fingers!

We did buy two lovely goats cheeses. I served one crumbled over a tomato pasta dish and the other torn over a leek tart. The acidic flavour was just right over the sweetness of the leeks and the buttery crumble of the pastry.

There were plenty of organic veg and we came away with fresh green savoy cabbage for Sunday lunch and a kohlrabi which I made into coleslaw, a nice change from white cabbage. I also bought local smoked mackerel which I used in a kedgeree and some pretty blue duck eggs that I used to make a sticky lemon cake.

Food for April - Light, fresh and green.

It's time to put away the food of winter. I've had enough of casseroles and root veg. I want young, new, and fresh. Baby broad beans, finger size carrots and earthy new potatoes, juicy roast lamb, sweet pink rhubarb flavoured with honey, salmon with watercress, chicken roasted with new season garlic and light and lovely puds.

Purple sprouting broccoli, I have to say the best I have tasted has been the bunch that I picked fresh from my allotment. Serve lightly steamed with your Sunday lunch or serve on its own dressed with a hollandaise sauce.

Look for hard, tightly packed, creamy white **cauliflowers**. I love them served with a creamy cheese sauce and they make a lovely velvety soup.

Spinach Packed full of vitamins and iron, young leaves are great in salads. Older leaves can be mixed into many dishes including pasta and lentil dishes.

Spring lamb the traditional roast to serve on Easter Day. Spring lamb has pink, flesh that is tender and subtle and makes your mouth water. Cook with the new season's garlic or some sprigs of rosemary.

Watercress One of my favourite vegetables. I love it as a salad veg with smoked mackerel and oranges or whizzed with stock and cream to make a vibrant and delicious soup. It goes great in sandwiches or served with crusty bread and pate.

And last but not least **rhubarb**. This should be coming down in price now as the main crop starts to arrive. Go for it with rhubarb crumble, tart and pies, all served with lashings of creamy custard, or mix with cream to make fools mousses, crèmes. I love making it into the prettiest pink jam.

The Linton's Farmers Market will be held at the **Bull Inn** on the **first Saturday** on each month. The first one is this week. The people at the Bull prefer to use local produce and have taken this one step further and have decided to hold a farmers market. I'll be going along to see what's on offer and will report back to you next month. If you want to find out more click on this link. www.lintonbull.co.uk

Tropical Fruit Treats

Forget the starchy puds of winter, let's bring out those taste bud tingling tropical fruits to make come colourful desserts that celebrate the fruit and help us to stay healthy.

Pineapple, make the most of these sweet juicy fruits now while there's not a lot else around. To find out if a pineapple is ripe give it a sniff, you should get a real hit of pineapple plus it should feel heavy for its size. You can try pulling a leaf from the crown, if it's easy to do, it should be ripe.



You don't have to do a lot to a pineapple to make it really interesting. It goes well with alcohol, try rum or cointreau sprinkled over slices pineapple or serve with other fruit such as passion fruit or oranges. Jamie Oliver serves thinly sliced ripe pineapple sprinkled with sugar that has been bashed together with fresh mint.



Beautiful bananas always in the fruit dish, easy to cook and great to eat. Put under the grill or in the oven, without peeling. When they have turned black, peel open and serve with cream, passion fruit, yoghurt and honey or chocolate sauce and don't forget banana custard but perhaps that's back to winter comfort pud.

A delicious dish of tropical fruits Try serving papaya, mango and pineapple all drippingly ripe, together on a plate and letting people help themselves. For added decadence you could add a dish of melted chocolate for people to dip their fruit into.

Lemons the fresh zingy taste is a real wake up call for your taste buds and I love making puds with this fruit. Cookery writer, Nigel Slater has a fab quick recipe. Mix 4 tablespoons of lemon curd with 2 tablespoons of Greek yoghurt and 2 tablespoons crème fraiche. Spoon into tiny serving dishes and chill. You could decorate with a piece of crystallised lemon. Delicious.





An

Easter

Menu.

As I'm not going to be around much on the day, much of my menu is going to be prepared on Saturday. I'm not going to worry about a starter as a sit down course but I will put out some nibbles. Not sure what yet but it will involve veggies, savoury pastry things and olives.

If you want to make an easy but popular starter I recommend a prawn cocktail, now back in fashion and a perfect start to your meal. I spike my mayo with a squeeze of lime.

The main course is free range chicken. I'm going to cook a couple the day before and chill them overnight in the fridge. When I'm ready to serve I'll carve the breast meat and leave the legs and thighs whole. I'll be serving the chickens cold with a selection of dressings and salads, including a green salad of little gems and cucumber, a potato salad made with new potatoes and dressed with chives and crème fraiche and a roasted tomato salad dressed with a honey, olive oil and white wine vinegar. I may include a bean salad as I like the added flavour and depth beans bring to a meal. Opening a can is fine, as long as you drain away the brine. I'm also going to make a coronation style dressing for the chicken as it's a family favourite, easily made by mixing a good curry paste with mayo.

For dessert it will be a choice of homemade chocolate cake, probably a sticky, gooey type affair or tropical fruit salad, spiked with lime juice. Both served with whipped cream.

Don't add dressings till just before serving and don't whip the cream too early as you will just have to do it again. Happy Easter.

Relax and enjoy yourself.

Studies have shown that people, who set themselves strict eating regimes, get less pleasure from their food and have more problems with their weight. This is no surprise to me and the British Dietetic Association advice is to put the pleasure back into eating especially when trying to lose weight.



5 things to make with the kids in the holidays

Cooking is a great pastime. Not only does it teach life skills it also helps children to organise, prepare and most importantly, gives them the satisfaction of sharing food they have prepared with people they love. Of course they will need help with the hot oven and watching as they chop!



Wicked Wedges take large potatoes and cut into wedge shapes. Place olive oil, salt and pepper and a pinch of paprika or chilli powder in a bowl and mix together then rub over the potatoes. Put in a baking dish and put into a hot oven (220oC/gas mark 7) Turn after about 20 mins then give them another 10 - 15 mins. They are cooked once soft inside and crisp outside. Serve with the sticky chicken, sweet corn and salad.

Sticky Chicken, take 8 skinless free range chicken thighs or drumsticks. Mix together 3 tablespoons sunflower oil, 2 tablespoons runny honey, 2 tablespoons soy sauce, and a pinch of cayenne pepper. Rub sauce into the chicken and leave for an hour. Put in a baking dish in the oven at 200oC/gas mark 6 for about 15 mins. Turn and then cook for another 15 mins. Check they are cooked by piercing the flesh and making sure the juices run clear.

Fabulous Fruity salad, this is good if you have a few children to entertain. Buy a large selection of fruit; maybe try some fruits that you haven't used before such as dragon fruit or Sharon fruit. Prepare each fruit and place in a large fruit bowl; add fruit juice such as pineapple or orange juice, stir and serve.

Honeycomb, this is great fun but make sure the kids stay well back. Get ready by greasing a tin really well. Put 200g of sugar with 4 tablespoons golden syrup in a big heavy pan. Heat until it's thick and bubbly. Take off the heat and this is the magic bit, whisk in 1 tablespoon bicarb of soda. It will foam up like magic into a big cloud. Pour into your tin and then wait till it sets. This takes a while. When set turn out of the tin and break into chunks. You can dip it into melted chocolate and let it set or mix into some good vanilla ice cream for a fab dessert.



Fun with FOOD



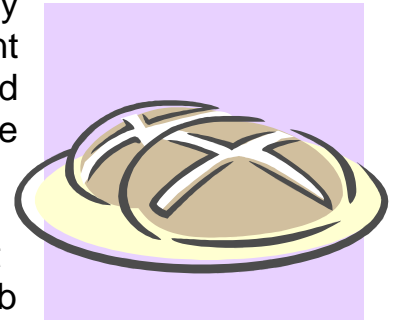
Harry Crofts enjoying playing with food.

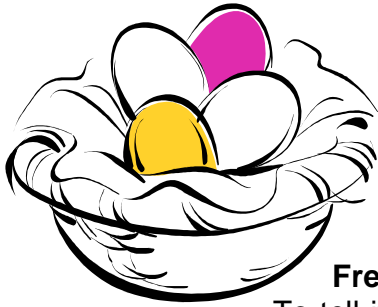
One of my favourite jobs is going into schools and presenting my **Fun with Food workshops**. They are focused on fruit and veg and I try to take away any worries children might have and help them to enjoy new foods. They get to see, touch, smell and taste if they want, in a safe and fun environment. Most of the children love it and go home and demand their mums buy the new fruit or vegetables they have tasted. I have had one complaint from a mum as her son asked for fruit for breakfast instead of his usual sugary cereal. Another mum said her children had got very adventurous with their food and she was having trouble finding new things for them to try! Without doubt every class has a child who does not want to taste, touch or take part, which I find very sad, but what's really encouraging is 99% leave having tried something new and feeling good.

My workshops are advertised in the 'Festival for Schools' booklet produced by KCC and I also have a leaflet that I can email you if you would like to let your child's school know about my workshops. Just let me know. deb@freshlands.me.uk

Hot and Cross

Traditional for Good Friday, these buns are lovely warmed and buttered. The cross is said to represent the crucifixion but the Saxons also ate buns marked with a cross to honour their goddess Eostre. There are lots of tales around hot cross buns but the saddest is about a widow who expected her sailor son home and baked him a bun. When he didn't return, she baked him a bun every Easter. The pub 'The Widow's Son' in Bow, East London, is said to stand on the widow's house and still honours this tradition by adding a bun every year. There are now over 200 hanging from the ceiling.





Go to work on an egg.

Do you remember that advert on TV. It must have been in the sixties which dates me, but the fact remains that eggs are good for us. They are a cheap source of good protein; they are low in saturate fats and have plenty of vitamin A and D which you need in your diet. They are the original fast food.

Fresh or Not

To tell if an egg is fresh, place in a bowl of water. If it floats it's not fresh as the air sack in one end of the egg expands the older the egg gets.

Free Range please

Always buy Free Range eggs. Those marked Barn eggs mean the hens are kept indoors, whereas Free Range means they are free to wander outside. Organic eggs are reared the same way as Free Range but they are feed with certified feed. Everything else in the supermarket will be battery eggs from hens kept permanently in cages.

Colour and taste

It doesn't matter what colour they are, brown white or blue. However, if you can buy from a local farmer or supplier you will find eggs that are fresher and yolks that are a deeper yellow and tastes more eggy.

The perfect boiled egg

To cook the perfect boiled egg for you Easter breakfast, place your egg in a small pan and cover with cold water. Boil for 4 mins for dippy eggs.

New Product

Ok I know it's not food but I'm so pleased with it. Tesco has a new natural cleaning range made from plant extracts that includes a washing up liquid. I bought it because I find that the usual ones make my hands sore. This one is lovely and gently, no sore hands, the perfume is lovely and lemony and it works on the washing up.

I'm really pleased to send you my newsletter and I hope you find the news and info interesting and useful. If you are no longer interested in receiving this type of information or have received it in error, please let me know and I will remove you from my list. I would also like to spread the word, so please feel free to pass this newsletter on to anyone who you feel would be interested in food news.