

Taste

THE BEST IN FOOD AND WINE



Heart of whiteness

WITH Tasmanian vegetable farmers battling to survive, there's no better time to support them and buy fine local produce, such as cauliflower.

Look for the place of origin when you buy a cauliflower. There should be an ample supply of wonderfully white, crisp and economically priced caulies in stores at the moment.

The history of cauliflower is obscure but it most likely originated in the Middle East. It belongs to the vegetable family of brassicas, which are acknowledged for their nutritional and health benefits.

Alan Davies in *The Oxford Companion to Food* says that cauliflower is part of the common group of cabbages in which flowers have begun to form but have stopped at the bud stage, as with broccoli:

"The thick stems under the buds act as storage organs for nutrients which would



**Eating
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have gone into the flowers and eventual fruits had their development not been aborted. All these varieties are, therefore, richer in vitamins and minerals than other brassicas."

I recall the days when cauliflower was often served as an almost pink vegetable — after it had been boiled to well past its best and was most unpalatable.

Cooked until just al dente and still white and holding its shape, it has a lot to offer as a vegetable. I really enjoy the flavour, texture and appearance. Also, I have a penchant for crisp cauliflower and green tomato pickle,

which is fabulous with cold corned meats or as a spread in a toasted cheese sandwich.

Cauliflower au gratin is one of the dishes that has passed the test of time. This cheese-sauced dish is a delicious accompaniment to roasts on cold winter days and has the advantage of being suitable to prepare ahead and finish the cooking process 20 minutes or so before the meal is to be served. Quite often I combine broccoli with the cauliflower for a more colourful and interesting dish.

Another way I enjoy cauliflower is to cook it briefly in the microwave in an oven bag, then season it and scatter the top with some tasty grated cheese, a slight grating of nutmeg and a turn or two of freshly ground pepper. It's delicious, nutritious, nourishing and low in kilojoules.

Cauliflower marries well with almost any cheese and adding a few cubes of blue cheese to piping-hot cauliflower soup immediately before serving is a great way to enhance it.

Try grating some gruyere-style cheese over the top of lightly boiled or steamed cauliflower, add a sprinkle of paprika and put it under the grill for a few minutes to melt and turn golden brown.

Lightly cooked cauliflower placed in an ovenproof casserole dish, topped with a mushroom sauce, then sprinkled with breadcrumbs and baked in a moderate oven for 15-20 minutes is very tasty and can be served alone for a light lunch or supper or with lamb or beef.

Young white cauliflower gives a great crunch in salads and is also good in stir-fries. Try to use some of the tender part of the stem to make the most of the nutrients. Wash the cauliflower well and leave it head down in some salted water for a few minutes. This will help to remove any tiny bugs that may be difficult to see.

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