

Taste

Means for green beans

BACK from a few days up the North-West Coast visiting my family, I reached home laden with vegetables from my elderly dad's garden.

He manages to keep most of my siblings in vegetables and those who are not often around for the fresh ones are supplied with our favorite jams, pickles, relish and chutney that mum diligently does and stores in her enormous "cellar" of preserves. At present, I have a huge pile of green beans to use.

When my children were young I had a great vegetable garden and spent many hours dealing with the prolific crops of peas and beans by freezing them for winter.

Now I eat what's in season. The same vegetables may turn up on the plate quite regularly for a time but at least they're fresh and tasty and, with a little thought regarding preparation, they don't need to be boring. I'll use the green beans in a salad Nicoise and also Greek-style as well as steamed and tossed in a little butter and pepper.

Leave the lid off the saucepan when cooking beans, as it will help them retain their colour. If using them in a salad or marinade, rinse them in cold water immediately after they are cooked; this stops the cooking process and keeps them brightly coloured.

The microwave oven is quite acceptable for cooking most vegetables but I don't like beans done in it — I find them tough and "squeaky".

For a Nicoise salad I use cos lettuce. There is usually an abundance of outer leaves that are too dark and tough for the salad; use the extra leaves in a soup.



Eating in

Judith Sweet

Usually I soften an onion in a little oil or butter, then add the leaves, roughly torn, a couple of peeled and chopped potatoes, a dash of curry, a bay leaf and just cover with a chicken stock, simmer until tender and then puree. Add milk to your preferred consistency. Check for seasoning and add salt and pepper if necessary.

Green beans combine well with onion, almonds, chives, lemon, bacon, potatoes, mushrooms, tomatoes and garlic, to name just a few. Stir-fried beans with garlic and toasted almonds make a delicious side dish.

In the Mediterranean countries I have visited I've found the beans are more thoroughly cooked than the way we usually serve them. In the Greek style, the saucepan is covered to steam them thoroughly so that, even though they won't be a bright green, they will still be delicious.

Beans in the Greek style

This is based on a recipe from Margaret Fulton. I add a little red wine vinegar at the end of cooking. It is very suitable with lamb.

500g fresh green beans, topped and tailed**1 medium onion, peeled and thinly sliced****1 clove garlic, peeled and crushed****1 large ripe tomato, seeded and chopped****1 tsp fresh oregano, chopped finely****3 tbsp Italian parsley, finely chopped****¼ cup of good quality extra virgin olive oil****½ tsp sugar****½ tbsp red wine vinegar****Freshly ground pepper to taste****¼ tsp salt or to taste**

If the beans are young and small, cook them whole; if very long, cut them in



BEAN THERE: Salad Nicoise makes very good use of the seasonal bean crop.

half on the diagonal. Heat the oil to medium heat in a medium saucepan and add the onion slices. Soften a little and then add the crushed garlic. Cook until just golden. Place the beans on top of the onions, then the tomatoes, 2 tablespoons of the parsley, the oregano, salt, pepper and sugar. Cover the saucepan and cook gently for about 20-25 minutes. Check the liquid from time to time and add a little water if it seems too dry due to evaporation. At the end of cooking there should be a thick sauce in the bottom of the pan. Stir in the vinegar (optional) and serve immediately, topped with the remaining parsley.

*Salad Nicoise***1 cos lettuce (tender inner leaves, washed and dried) or soft mignonette lettuce****½ cup good quality small black olives****12 small waxy potatoes, scraped and steamed****1 cup cooked tuna, chunky****2 boiled eggs, soft yolks****2 handfuls young, whole, tender green beans, steamed and refreshed****2 ripe tomatoes, cut into sixths****2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil****1 tbsp red wine vinegar****Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

Select a serving platter. Pit the olives, if desired. Quarter the potatoes. Cut the eggs into quarters. Put the cos or mignonette leaves on the platter. In a container combine the warm beans and potatoes with the tomato pieces, tuna, oil and vinegar, salt and pepper. Tumble carefully together and fold through the lettuce. Top with cooked eggs and olives.

■ In last week's column I failed to mention that even though the salmon eggs hatched successfully at the Salmon Ponds in 1864, they did not flourish when introduced to the mountain rivers. Brown trout, which were introduced at the same time, bred well and have become a great attraction for anglers. It was in the 1980s when Atlantic salmon were successfully reared for commercial farming.

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