

Relish roasted hazelnuts



Eating in

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THE flavour of hazelnuts, as with most nuts, is much improved by roasting them in the oven, where it's easier to get even toasting than in a pan on a hotplate. It's not essential to remove the skins, although they'll start to come off with roasting.

If you want to completely remove the skins, roll the nuts vigorously in a tea towel while they're still hot from the oven. If you want to remove the skins without roasting the nuts, blanch them in boiling water for a few minutes to make the task easier.

The fresh nuts of autumn in their natural state are quite milky and juicy with a hint of sharpness unlike the sweet nut that develops after they've been ripened for a few months.

Take advantage of the fresh season's nuts. Hazelnuts, as with most nuts, have a high proportion of oil, which turns rancid with age or incorrect storing. It's wise to taste-check if you're in any doubt.

Keep the nuts in a cool, dark, airy place. Hazelnuts are better keepers than most other nuts.

Hazelnuts are mostly used in confections, cakes and biscuits but also have a place in savoury dishes. Hazelnut oil is quite delicate and should be bought in small volumes because it deteriorates with keeping.

I make delicious pumpkin ravioli sauced with hazelnut butter. I also make a savoury butter roll by combining finely chopped toasted hazelnuts, chopped chives, salt and pepper and slightly softened butter. Form the mixture into a 2.5cm diameter log, wrap it in foil and freeze. Slice it thinly and put onto the top of a bowl of roasted pumpkin soup or stir through a simple pasta dish with zucchini, peas or blue cheese.

Hazelnut cake

Don't be tempted to use self-raising flour instead of baking powder — it won't work.

1 tbsp baking powder

3 large eggs, separated

200g caster sugar

125g butter, melted gently

200g hazelnuts, without skins, coarsely chopped and toasted

finely grated rind of 1 lemon

4 tbsp milk

pinch salt

Prepare a 20cm round tin by greasing thoroughly and then coating with flour. Tap to remove any excess flour.

Preheat the oven to 180C.

Choose a mixing bowl large enough to hold all the ingredients.

Add the egg yolks and beat in the baking powder, then add the sugar, butter, flour, hazelnuts and milk.

Mix thoroughly.

In a perfectly clean glass bowl beat the egg whites and salt until they are stiff.

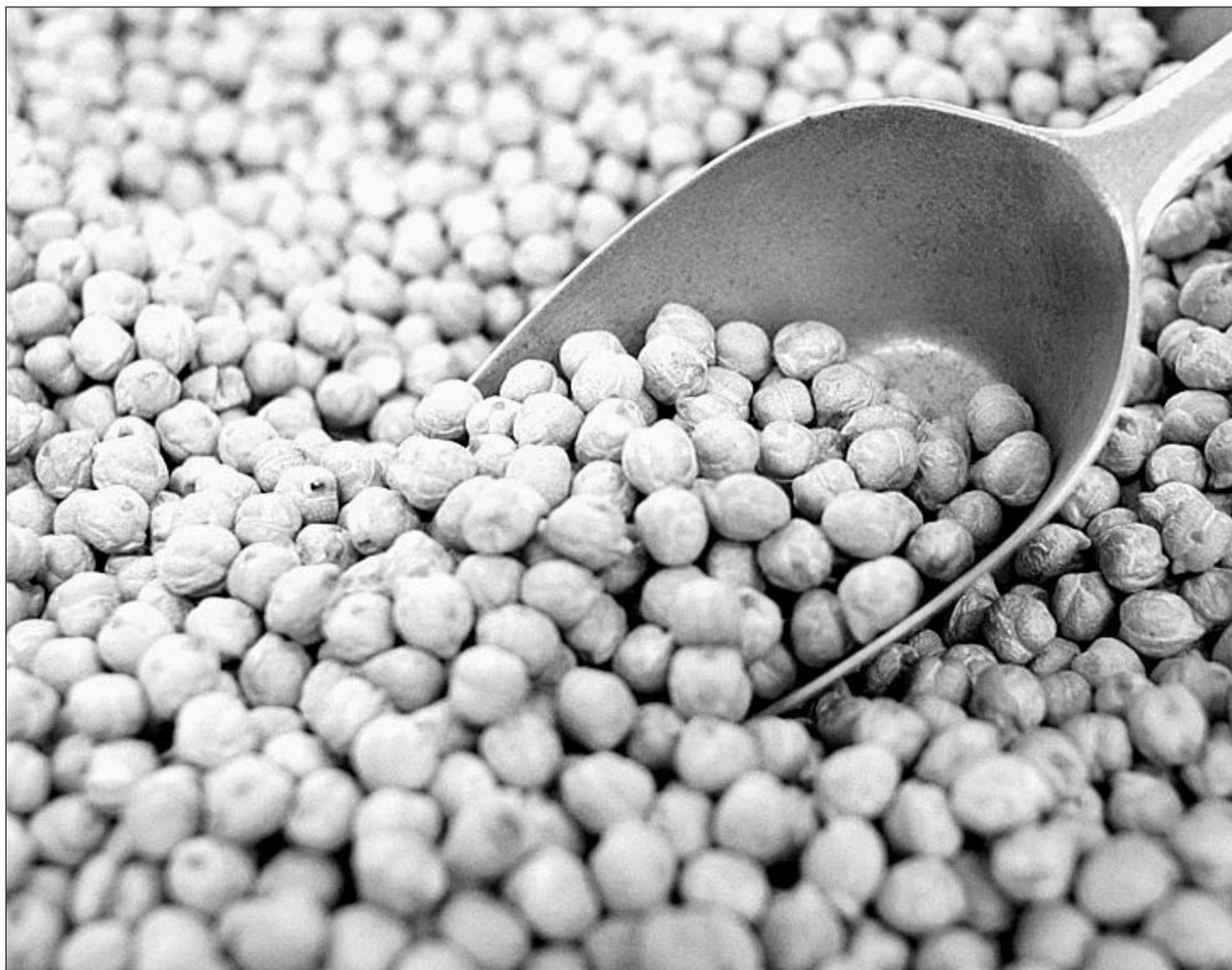
With a large metal spoon fold in one-third of the egg whites.

Fold in the remaining egg whites.

Pour the mixture into the prepared tin and cook for around 35 minutes or until browned and an inserted skewer comes out almost dry. Turn onto a cooling tray.

Dust with icing sugar to serve.

The pumpkin ravioli dish takes quite some time to make but is worth it, especially if you make your own tender pasta. The filling can



be made the day before you plan to use it. It's a good dish to make when you have a willing helper in the kitchen.

You'll need to make a fresh pasta mixture using around 500g of flour for this dish or buy some ready-made fresh sheets. A layered dish using lasagne sheets would also be delicious with this filling.

For vegetarians the prosciutto can be omitted. You'll need to have a large pot of boiling salted water ready for cooking the pasta and some warmed plates for serving.

This recipe is based on one from American cooking teacher and author Joanne Weir.

Pumpkin ravioli with roasted hazelnut butter and prosciutto.

FILLING

1kg butternut pumpkin

3 tbsp butter

1 small onion, finely diced

5 tbsp fresh breadcrumbs

2 tbsp finely grated parmesan

2 tsp honey

½ tsp finely chopped rosemary or thyme

1 tsp fine zest of an orange

1 egg yolk

orange juice to taste

¼ tsp freshly grated nutmeg

salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

75g very finely sliced prosciutto, cut into julienne strips

1 tbsp olive oil

1 tbsp butter

SAUCE

2 tbsp hazelnuts, chopped

2 tsp hazelnut oil (not essential)

3 tbsp extra grated parmesan cheese

150g extra butter

pinch sugar

fine semolina for the pasta

Preheat the oven to 175C.

Cut the pumpkin in half lengthwise and rub with olive oil. Place it on a baking tray and cook for around 1 hour or until a skewer when inserted comes out easily. Remove the pulp and puree in a food processor — you'll need almost two cups of puree in a mixing bowl. Melt the butter for the filling and cook the diced onion over a low heat until it is soft. Add the crumbs and continue to cook, stirring for two minutes.

Add this mixture to the puree along with the honey, parmesan, herb, nutmeg, orange zest and egg yolk. Season to taste with salt and pepper and a little orange juice.

Heat the olive oil and 1 tbsp butter in a fry pan and add the prosciutto strips and cook until they are golden. Remove and drain.

Heat the hazelnut oil or mildly flavoured olive oil and add the hazelnuts, a little salt and pepper and pinch of sugar. Cook until golden.

Just before you're ready to serve, heat the 150g butter until it just begins to smoke and

smell nutty. Remove from the heat immediately.

To make the ravioli shapes.

Have long strips of pasta about 12cm wide.

Place about 1 tbsp of filling on each strip not quite in the centre and about 2.5cm apart.

Dampen or spray lightly with cold water.

Fold the pasta sheet over lengthwise then press with two fingers flat in between each two fillings, then press around the bump.

Try not to wrinkle or to keep too much air inside — the air bubbles will burst when the ravioli is cooked and make a mess.

Use a sharp knife and cut down the long side and then in between.

Cover a tray with semolina and carefully place the ravioli, sprinkled with semolina, on the tray while waiting to cook the ravioli.

Place a few pieces of ravioli at a time into the boiling salted water.

When they float remove with a slotted spoon.

To assemble

Gently toss the cooked ravioli in the browned butter and place on a warmed serving platter.

Scatter the golden hazelnuts and prosciutto over the top and finish with the extra parmesan cheese.

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