

Simple food

Gnudi with pumpkin, burnt butter and sage



One of my cooking resolutions for this coming summer is to learn how to make pasta. It's been on my to-do list for a couple of years and now is the time. Over summer our busy life slows down a little and I usually have a holiday break. Relaxation, and relaxed cooking and eating is more the norm and there's more time to potter in the kitchen, experimenting and trying out new recipes. Market research is underway for a good, but not too expensive pasta maker to make the resolution a reality. In the meantime, however, I am experimenting with gnocchi and gnudi, and having a ball. Gnudi, until recently, was unknown to me. After seeing a recipe in a magazine I did a little research and discovered gnudi is Italian for 'nude' and describes a very soft pillow of ricotta, a little flour and some subtle flavourings that would normally be wrapped in pasta to form ravioli or tortellini, hence the 'nude-ness'. Very quick and easy to make, and joyfully nostalgic of pudding with play-doh when my children were small, gnudi are also just delicious. The gnudi recipe is just slightly adapted from the one in *delicious* (September 2014 issue) and the pumpkin and burnt butter a classic combination, but a gorgeously nutty and sweetly appropriate accompaniment.

Serves 4

Gnudi:

400g fresh ricotta cheese
100g plain flour
1 egg, lightly beaten
40g finely grated parmesan cheese
finely grated zest of 1/2 lemon
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
pinch white pepper

Pumpkin and burnt butter sauce:

600g pumpkin cut into 1 cm cubes
olive oil
2 tablespoons pine nuts
a handful of fresh sage leaves
100g butter
1 teaspoon lemon juice
sea salt and black pepper

In a medium sized bowl combine all the ingredients for the gnudi until mixed together. Turn out onto a lightly floured board or bench top and knead very lightly for a minute until a soft dough is formed. Do not over-knead or else the gnudi will become very tough and rubbery. Divide the dough into 4 portions and roll each portion out into a sausage shape, about 1 cm in diameter. Using a sharp knife cut each sausage into 2 cm pieces. Press down the top of each gnudi with a fork to leave little indentations in the top. Place the gnudi in a single layer on a lightly floured tray in the freezer for about 15 minutes to let them firm up a little. (While they are resting, get the pumpkin and burnt butter sauce cooking – see below) When the pumpkin is ready cook the gnudi. Bring a large pan of slightly salted water to the boil and then drop the gnudi into the boiling water in 2 or three batches. They will be cooked when they rise to the top and float on the surface of the water and will only take a couple of minutes. Gently remove with a slotted spoon and keep warm until they are all cooked. To serve, divide the pumpkin into 4 serving bowls, gently add the gnudi and then sprinkle over the pine nuts and sage. Last of all drizzle over the burnt butter sauce. Goes very well with a glass of verdelho or pinot gris.

To make the pumpkin and burnt butter sauce, place the pumpkin in a shallow roasting tray with a little olive oil, season well with salt and pepper, and roast at 180C for about 20 minutes, or until soft and a little caramelised around the edges. In a medium frying pan heat 1 tablespoon of oil until hot and quickly fry the sage leaves until bright green and crisp. Drain on paper towel and set aside. Then add the pine nuts to the oil and cook until light brown. Do not take your eyes off them. A non-watched pine nut will always, but always, burn! Drain the nuts on another piece of paper towel and set aside. Wipe out the pan and then add the butter, over medium heat, until it starts to go a lovely nutty brown. Add the lemon juice and it's done.

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