

Cookery corner

Pearl barley, butternut squash and mushroom risotto

Replacing rice with pearl barley gives the risotto, served with roasted cauliflower, a lovely texture in this delicious autumnal recipe from Dani, one of our lovely Snapdragons chefs. Squash, mushrooms and sage are all in season and they work so well together you'd almost think they were married, and the roasted turmeric cauliflower adds a burst of autumn sunshine to cheer up the shortening days.



Ingredients

Serves 10 children

- ✓ 20g butter ✓ 1 large onion ✓ 2 cloves of garlic
- ✓ 2 bay leaves ✓ 1 small butternut squash
- ✓ 200g chestnut mushrooms ✓ 200g pearl barley
- ✓ 1 low-salt vegetable stock cube
- ✓ Handful of fresh sage leaves ✓ Half a large cauliflower
- ✓ 2tsp turmeric ✓ 2tsp ground cumin
- ✓ 2tbsp mascarpone (optional) ✓ Rapeseed oil

Method

- ✓ Start by preheating your oven to 200°C. Chop the onion and garlic and soften in a pan with some rapeseed oil. As they begin to turn translucent, add the mushrooms and sage, roughly chopped. While this is cooking, make your stock with 750ml boiling water.
- ✓ When the mushrooms have completely softened, add the bay leaves and pearl barley and pour over the stock. Bring this to a boil, then turn down the heat and leave to simmer with a lid on. Pearl barley takes around 45 minutes to cook.
- ✓ Peel the squash, discard the seeds and cut the flesh into bite-size cubes and set aside. Cut the cauliflower into florets and lay out on a baking tray. Drizzle with a little rapeseed oil, turmeric and cumin and place in the oven to roast for about 30 minutes, or until you can easily push a knife through the stalks.
- ✓ When the risotto has been cooking for 15 minutes, remove the lid and add the squash. Keep the barley simmering and top up with water if it looks a little dry.
- ✓ Just before the risotto has finished cooking, stir through the mascarpone, if using. Serve with the cauliflower and a little black pepper.



Brains and bodies

The right fats and oils are essential components of a healthy diet, explains *Mary Llewellyn*

The UK is getting fatter by the day, with around two-thirds of our population classed as overweight or obese. We are bombarded with advice from experts, but many people without the facilities or skills to cook are left at the mercy of the food industry, which makes often confusing claims about its products.

If you are trying to lose weight, it's tempting to opt for items billed as low-fat, but with processed food the reduction of fat often means a higher sugar content because fat adds flavour and is a preservative, so something has to replace it. Fat often gets a bad press, but we need it for our brains and bodies to function effectively; it's all a matter of balance.

WHY DO WE NEED FAT?

We need fat to support nerve and brain function: our brains contain a large amount of fat, and nerve cells are coated in a fatty substance called myelin which enables them to transmit electrical messages. In fact, the cell membranes that surround all of the cells in our bodies contain fats. They transport fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K; provide energy; facilitate hormone production, and protect the heart.

Not all the fat we need has to come from our diet because our clever bodies can make fat from other energy sources, but some, known as essential fatty acids, must come from our diets. So, what kinds of fat are there and where do we find them in our diets?

KINDS OF FAT

Trans fats

Trans fats (or trans fatty acids) occur naturally in small amounts in dairy products and meat, and if consumed at low levels are unlikely to have an adverse effect. However, they are commonly seen as the baddies when found in processed foods or when cooking with oil at high temperatures.

They are oils that have been changed to make solid fat for use in cakes, biscuits and other manufactured foods. They are also referred to as hydrogenated fat and have been linked to diabetes, cancer, heart disease and stroke.

As a result of these health concerns, many manufacturers have reduced the amounts of trans fats in processed foods, such as margarine. But identifying how much trans fats occur in food is hard, for while they must appear on food labels in the USA, there is no such legal requirement in the UK and Europe.

Partially hydrogenated fats or oils on ingredients lists means a food will almost certainly contain trans fats, but checking for this alone isn't fool-proof. Far better is to always opt for healthy choices and avoid the cakes and other processed foods.

Saturated fats

For years we were warned away from saturated fats, but now we are told they are fine in moderation because they contain other nutrients that are



There are 'good' and 'bad' fats



Oily fish, avocados, seeds and nuts provide us with healthy fats

very beneficial to us. These are the fats that are solid at room temperature like butter, cheese, meat, palm oil and coconut oil. Personally, I've always thought that a bit of butter in moderation was bound to be better than a factory-produced margarine.

Then there are the unsaturated fats which can help to lower 'bad' cholesterol. Just to complicate things, they are broken down into two groups.

Monounsaturated fats

Nuts, seeds and fruits such as olives and avocados provide monounsaturated fats and these make up part of a healthy diet, eaten in their whole and natural state or extracted as oil and used for dressings or for low-temperature cooking.

Polyunsaturated fats

These are found in nuts and seeds such as flaxseed, linseed and rapeseed, and in soya bean products, but also in meat and milk from grass-fed animals and oily fish. Polyunsaturated fats have the essential fatty acids Omega-3 and Omega-6 that we need to get from our diets as our bodies can't make them from other sources.

Omega-6 is relatively easy to find in vegetable oils, but the best source of Omega-3 is from oily fish such as salmon, mackerel and sardines, and we should try to include at least two portions of these a week. Interestingly, I read this week that farmed Atlantic salmon used to have the highest amount of Omega-3 of any fish, providing 100 per cent of your week's need in just one portion, because the pellets fed to the salmon contained 90 per cent anchovy. With the wide availability of rapeseed oil, this has

replaced the anchovy, but it doesn't contain as much Omega-3 so now two portions are needed. Children's brain development and function is enhanced by these essential fats so this is an important part of their diets.

BALANCED DIET

As with all things in life, it is important to balance things out. We need fat in our diets, but fat is high in calories – and it is excess calories, not excess fat, that causes obesity.

The calories we do not burn off are converted into fat cells, known as adipose tissue, and stored for future use – and we all know what that looks like!

The Government's Eatwell Plate and the Children's Food Trust website can both help you get an idea of how much fat you should include, but remember that those Omega-3s are the main ones to track down for healthy, happy children. ■

Mary Llewellyn is operations manager at Snapdragons. Snapdragons Keynsham has the Food For Life Partnership Gold Catering Mark and was winner of the Nursery World Nursery Food Award in 2012 and 2014.



MORE INFORMATION

- www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/theeatwellplate.pdf
- www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk
- www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nigel-denby/keeping-the-bigger-nutrit_b_7897040.html
- www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/TransFats.pdf

GROW YOUR OWN

Hard to keep up

Despite a bumper harvest, now is not the time to rest on your laurels in the garden

It's been a glorious harvest time with nature in full flow, filling gardens, fields and hedgerows with a bountiful supply of produce, both cultivated and wild.

At this time of year, it's easy to start dreaming of a life of self-sufficiency. When you can walk through your garden picking raspberries, apples, blackberries and pulling up sweet and crunchy beetroot; when you can snip off fresh salad leaves and flavour everything with aromatic herbs, it makes you feel at one with nature, a sort of healthier, worthier, more rooted version of yourself!

In fact, nature is so generous at this time of year, it can be hard to keep up with it. Luckily, at nursery there are always lots of hungry mouths to feed and it's wonderful to see the children making the connection between growing and eating.

We have just harvested our corn on the cob with the help of the children and, unfortunately, some unwanted help from squirrels. It was a reminder that timely harvesting is necessary if you want to get there before the pests.

To do list

- In milder areas there's another week or two to sow 'green manure' to enrich the soil and lock in the nutrients.
- Have another purge on slugs and snails lurking in plants and their round, translucent eggs which lie in clumps in and around planting beds.
- Keep weeding around vegetables so that they don't need to fight for nutrients, which are sparser in the winter.
- Dig up withering tomato plants and harvest any remaining unripe fruits, placing them in a paper bag with a banana which helps them to ripen by releasing ethylene gas. Save the tomato compost for potting other plants or spread it over your beds.
- There's still time for onion sets and garlic to go in, but make sure the bulbs are firm and mould free, not past their prime.
- Remove the tops of old pea and bean plants and add them to your compost, then dig the roots back into the soil to retain their natural nitrogen fertiliser.
- Tidy up established strawberry plants, removing discoloured leaves and remaining runners, allowing the remaining plants to conserve energy.
- Sow overwintering broad beans in their eventual position, covering with fleece or cloches if you are in a colder region. Milder areas can still support the sowing of carrots and peas in cold frames.
- Order new fruit trees and cane fruits and prepare the ground for their arrival.
- Sow basil seeds in pots for growing inside on a sunny windowsill. Dig up and pot clumps of mint and parsley in fresh pots, bringing them inside for a winter supply.

More information

The Royal Horticultural Society, www.rhs.org.uk