

TOM AIKENS reveals some simple but effective ways to add excitement to your weekly shop—and to your menus



MARTYN GODDARD

Good-quality, fresh ingredients take centre stage at Tom's restaurants

I'M lucky—I eat at work and only have to shop at the weekend, so my fridge is very rarely fully stocked. There's nothing more I like to do at the weekend than go out and look for new tastes and foods and then take my time pottering around in the kitchen. You wouldn't think I'd find it at all relaxing, but I do.

None of us likes to do the weekly shopping, but let's take up the challenge to make it more exciting. I find shopping

with other people a real help, so why not take along your partner, children or friends and really get them involved? Most importantly, talk about what you'd like to make and eat. We've all got very different ideas for what we want from our meals. Believe me, you'll learn something from it.

On the whole, I'd say that we all shop with our eyes shut and just load the trolley from a shopping list, walk the aisles and automatically reach for

the things we get all the time, file into an orderly queue at the till, pay and walk out.

Whatever day you do your shopping on and where ever you decide to do it, there are a few key things to remember. Always spend within your budget and cook within your means and the time that you have. If you don't, you'll end up stressed and not enjoying the results.

Don't just blindly walk along—try having a browse along the aisles or stalls first. You may see something you've never used before or that inspires you. And if you're at a farmer's market, don't be afraid to ask about what's in the food and to have a taste. Our producers are so enthusiastic about what they do and can give you some great ideas and tips.

If you aren't a confident cook, but are willing to try something out for the first time, why not experiment with something straightforward, such as a homemade stew or roast? Stews can be marinated the day before and cooked very slowly, and are the best way to use a cheaper cut of meat. There's nothing better than coming home to the delicious smell of a slow-cooking stew or casserole wafting from the oven.

Once you've had your first look round, think about what you'd like to buy and build the rest of it around the main dish. If you're pressed for time, then get something that takes minutes rather than hours. For example, some fish or meat that could be lightly marinated in herbs or spices and then grilled can take minutes to prepare and cook. Just add some sautéed spring greens with a fresh salad.

Involve family and friends in the cooking—it's so much better to have people helping and you'll all learn from each other. I think it's so important



to make it fun. And there's nothing like getting everyone to share the food around a table instead of eating alone.

This month, try to think of the things that you've been too scared to try or just walked past before and give them a chance. Until you've tried them, you'll never improve or progress in the kitchen. And you could just be missing out on something delicious.

Find out what's cooking at Tom's restaurants at www.tomaikens.co.uk

FOOD IN SEASON FOR APRIL



Fresh watercress is great for soups and salads, particularly with fish. In the restaurant, we use it as a colouring and to flavour pasta. Extract the chlorophyll (the bit that gives watercress its wonderful intense green) by chopping up some watercress and mixing it with cold water. Bring this to a warm heat and watch the colour come out.

Broccoli
Purple sprouting
broccoli
Sorrel
Jersey Royal new
potatoes

Spinach
Spring onions
Little gem lettuce
St George's mushroom (from April 23)

Cockles
Morel mushrooms (just)



JOHN LAWRENCE-JONES

QUICHE WITH FRESH SPRING HERBS

Makes 12 portions or six individual quiches

INGREDIENTS SHORTCRUST PASTRY

400g plain flour
200g diced cold butter
2g salt
1 egg
Iced water
(baking beans)

METHOD

Place the flour in a bowl with the salt. Add the diced butter, put a mixing machine and mix on low for about a minute until like fine breadcrumbs. Add the egg and then a little water until the paste comes together—it shouldn't be too dry, or it'll just crumble when you roll it out. If you don't have a machine, make it by hand.

Place the dough in clingfilm and put in the fridge for 30 minutes. Roll the pastry out to 0.5cm thickness.

Grease and flour your quiche mould (12in ring, 3cm deep) and place onto a tray. Roll the pastry up on a rolling pin, then lay it over the mould and press it in, leaving a margin over for shrinkage. Place a sheet of greaseproof paper onto the

pastry and add the baking beans up to the level of the case. Place into the fridge for 20 minutes to rest, and then bake at 180°C for approximately 20 to 25 minutes.

Remove the beans. Beat another egg and brush the inside of the case with it. Rebake for another 2 to 3 minutes. Leave to chill.

INGREDIENTS

FILLING

150g grated Gruyère cheese
2 eggs and 4 egg yolks
450g baby spinach, washed
400g chopped sorrel, picked and washed (you can make up the amount with spinach if you can't get hold of sorrel)
400g chopped leeks, thinly sliced
200g onions, peeled and thinly sliced
2 bunches spring onions
120g butter
2g chopped parsley
2g chopped chives
400ml Marscapone cream
4g salt
1g milled black pepper

METHOD

Heat a pan on medium. Add the butter, and when it's melted, add the onions. Cook for 5 to 10 minutes with no colour, then add the leeks and half the salt and pepper. Cover with a lid, cook for a further 5 to 8 minutes until they're just tender, then add the spring onions and cook for no more than 2 minutes. Add half the spinach.

Remove from the stove. Stir in 200g of the sorrel and then turn out onto a tray to cool in your fridge.

Finely slice the remaining sorrel and spinach, then add this to the chilled mix along with all the fresh herbs.

Mix the cream and eggs together in a bowl, add the remaining salt and then the chilled filling mix. Pour all into the baked pastry case and bake at 170°C for 25 to 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and eat straight away or leave to chill.