


Taste

THE BEST IN FOOD AND WINE



It's often overlooked, but this versatile root vegetable can be baked, used in salads or made into chips.

Consider celeriac

CELERIAN is an obscure vegetable and not one that is high on the popularity list of vegetables. Celeriac has a long history going back to at least the 1500s. It is used much more frequently in Europe than in Britain or Australia even though it grows quite readily in our temperate climates.

Celeriac is a root vegetable, rather like a round turnip or a parsnip colour with untidy looking roots hanging from it. It is so named as it has a flavour similar to celery, but more subtle and it is sweeter.

It is available throughout autumn and winter and is versatile in that it can be roasted, braised, pureed or used raw in salads.

Look for the smoothest one when purchasing so that there will be less waste and it will be easier to manage when you peel off the tough outer skin and the raggedy roots. In Italy the green tops of the celeriac are used as a herb in soups and salads.

Celeriac will discolour when it is peeled so,

if you plan to use it in a salad, you will need to place the cut vegetable into acidulated water — which just means water with lemon juice or vinegar in it — to prevent browning.

Celeriac is a flavour that teams well with game meats. In my restaurant days I used to serve a julienne of celeriac and potato with hare and occasionally as a mash with venison or pheasant.

Apple also combines well with celeriac and a tasty and crunchy salad can be made by combining fine julienne strips of raw celeriac and apple, tossed in lemon juice and topped with roughly chopped roasted walnuts.

Cook celeriac just as you would boiled



**Eating
in**

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potatoes or carrots — peel and cut into even sized dice and add to boiling salted water or chicken stock and simmer until tender. The cooking time will depend on the size of the dice but allow around 15 to 20 minutes. Drain then toss in butter chopped flat parsley and season with freshly ground pepper.

It is also great as a roasted vegetable to serve with a mix such as the favourites like pumpkin, potato, parsnip and onion.

Celeriac chips make a great change from potato. Slice the celeriac finely and cut into chips. Place in acidulated water for five or 10 minutes then dry well and deep fry as you would for potato chips.

Grated celeriac combined with grated potato makes a very pleasant rosti or potato cake.

I have chosen a recipe for a hearty pie, brilliant for these chilly nights and the aroma is tantalising as it cooks. You could speed up the process by using a bought cooked chicken and using pre-made shortcrust or puff pastry.

Chicken and celeriac pie

450g cooked chicken

35g butter

1 small onion, finely chopped

1 small carrot, finely diced (about half a cup)

35g plain flour

300ml chicken or game stock

225ml milk

1 tbsp dijon mustard

375g cubed, cooked celeriac

salt and pepper to taste

200g puff or shortcrust pastry

1 egg yolk combined with salt to make an egg wash

Preheat the oven to 220C. Melt the butter in a saucepan over moderate heat and add the diced onion and carrot and cook until soft. Add the flour and stir in and cook for 1-2 minutes.

Take the pan off the heat and allow the mixture to cool for a minute or two, then add the milk to the pan, stirring with a wooden spoon.

Cook gently for 15 minutes. Add the stock and stir in to thin the mixture. Stir in the mustard, meat and celeriac. Taste for seasoning and adjust if necessary.

Put the filling into a pie dish and allow to cool.

Roll out the pastry about 2cm larger than the dish. Trim to the size of the dish.

Dampen the rim of the pie dish and place the trimmed edge of the pastry around the rim of the pie dish. Dampen the ring of pastry.

Place a pie “shoulder”, if you have one, or an upturned eggcup in the middle of the pie to support the pastry. Put the pastry over the pie and trim the edges.

Make a couple of steam escape holes in the pastry. Brush with the egg yolk and salt mixture, which should be quite spreadable.

Cook in a hot oven, 220C, for 10 to 15 minutes until golden-brown and then reduce the temperature to 180C and cook for a further 10 to 15 minutes until the pie is heated through and the pastry is crisp.

This recipe is based on one from Nicola Cox in her book *Game Cookery* and is also in *Maggie's Farm* by Maggie Beer. Pheasant, chicken or rabbit also make a good base for the pie.

Braised celeriac with almonds

1 large or 2 smaller celeriac

2 tbsp butter or good quality extra virgin olive oil

½ cup skinned, slivered almonds

¾ cup chicken stock

salt and pepper to taste

Peel the tough skin from the celeriac and cut the vegetable into finger-length strips, about 1cm thick. Heat the butter or oil in a heavy frying pan on medium heat.

Add the almonds and cook until they are golden brown. Using a slotted spoon, remove them on to kitchen paper to drain. Add the celeriac strips to the pan of hot butter and oil and saute for a few minutes. Then reduce the temperature to very low and add the chicken stock.

Cover the pan and cook gently until the celeriac is just tender. Serve hot sprinkled with the almonds.