

Rhubarb & orange meringue pie

Who can possibly resist those first pink shoots of rhubarb that are pushing themselves through the soil at the moment - irresistible especially when flavoured with oranges. This recipe is inspired by Delia Smith who turned a meringue classic into a spring treat. My mistake in my enthusiasm to photograph it while it danced with life was to cut into the dish before the filling had set properly - but it still tasted superb.

You will need:

- 8oz (225g) short crust pastry made with butter
- 1½ lb (700g) rhubarb
- Juice and zest from 3 oranges
- 3oz (75g) caster sugar
- 3 tbsp cornflour
- 3 egg yolks - beaten
- 3 egg whites for the meringue
- 6oz (175g) caster sugar for the meringue.

Method:

- Prepare the pastry and place in the refrigerator for half an hour.
- Grease a 9" (23cm) baking tin and turn the oven to 190°C / 375°F or gas mark 5.
- Line the tin with the pastry and prick the base with a fork to prevent the pastry from rising. Bake for about 20/25 mins or until it begins to brown.
- Cut the rhubarb into finger sized chunks and cook gently with the juice and zest of one orange and 3oz of the sugar until soft but still whole. Remove from the heat.
- Squeeze the juice of the remaining two oranges into a saucepan, along with the zest of one (you need the zest of the second one to garnish the meringue).
- Pour a little of the orange juice into the cornflour and mix to a paste.
- While the pastry is cooked, bring the orange juice to simmering point and gently stir in the cornflour until the mixture thickens.
- Strain the juice from the cooked rhubarb into the mixture and then whisk in the egg yolks with a balloon whisk to reduce the possibility of lumps. Now tip the cooked rhubarb into the mix and stir again. Remove from the heat.
- Whisk the egg whites until they form peaks and then gradually add the caster sugar, stirring as you go, until all the sugar has been absorbed and the mix is smooth and glossy.
- Assemble the dish by pouring the rhubarb mix into the cooked pastry case, then top with the meringue. Grate the zest of one orange over the top for garnish and extra colour.
- Return the dish to the oven and cook for about 20 minutes or until the meringue begins to brown and set. Allow at least two hours before cutting.