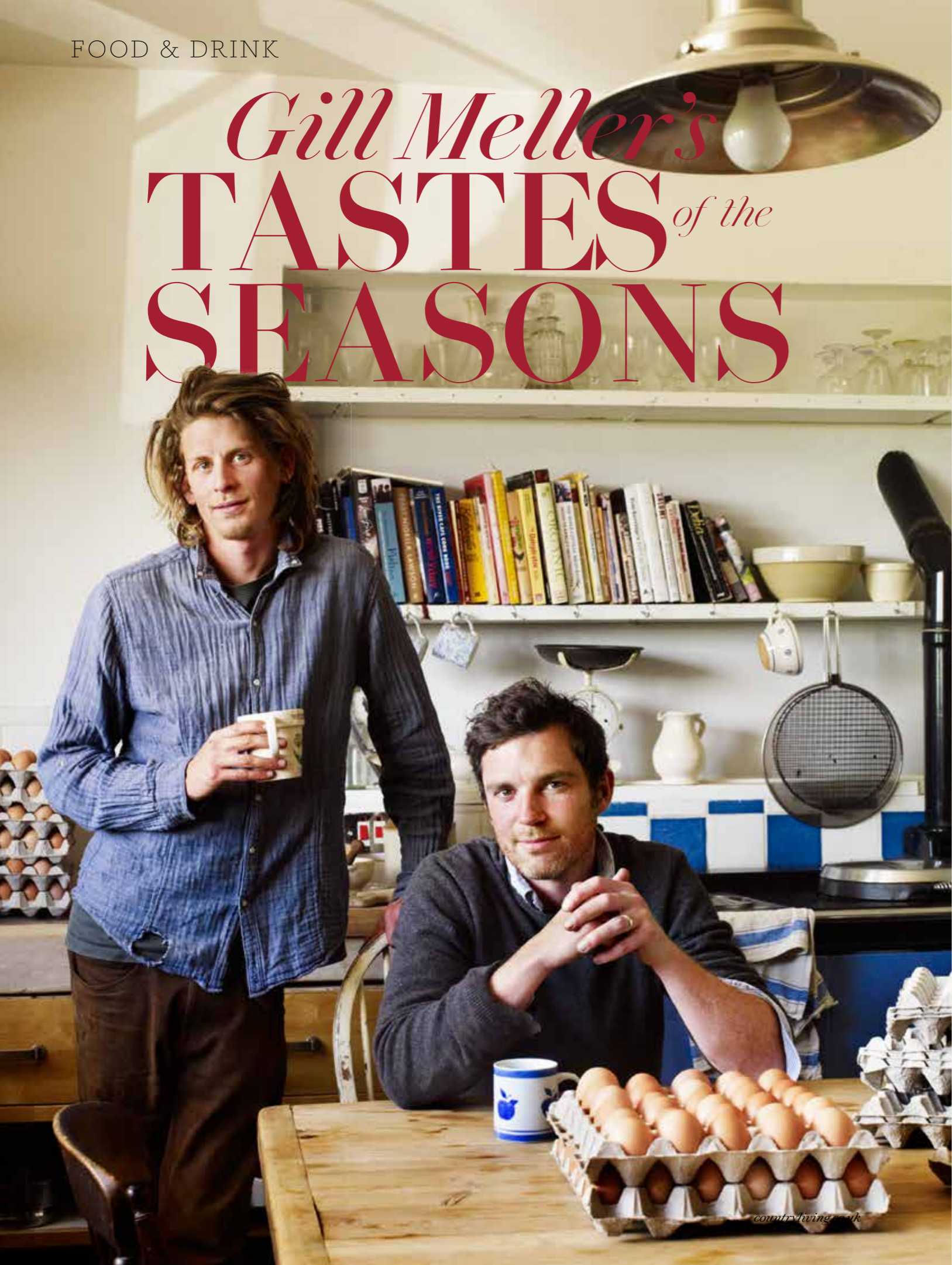


Gill Meller's TASTES of the SEASONS



OPPOSITE Gill with
Harry Boglione from
Haye Farm in Dorset
THIS PAGE Roast
chicken and egg salad



In this new series, the West Country chef meets his favourite local food producers, then creates mouthwatering dishes with the ingredients they grow and produce

This month CHICKEN AND EGGS

RECIPES AND FOOD STYLING BY GILL MELLER • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW MONTGOMERY • INTERVIEW BY ALEX REECE
FOOD AND DRINK EDITOR ALISON WALKER

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE Harry and his partner Emily hope their trailblazing organic methods will help Haye Farm become a model for agricultural practice in the future



Gill Meller has lived in the West Dorset/East Devon area all his life. As head chef at River Cottage, he has been involved in sourcing sustainable and ethical food, creating recipes and developing the cookery school, where he also teaches. He has often appeared alongside Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in his TV series, and has lately been producing books as an independent food writer. The field-to-fork mentality of good ingredients, simply prepared, is key to his approach and he has built up relationships with numerous inspiring producers, growers and farmers in his area. "Everything I do hangs on these amazing people," he says, "and respecting the part they play in the food I cook."



always like the change of the seasons, and it's especially exhilarating after a hard winter because, even though it's a lovely time of year and one of my favourites, to see the first signs of spring lifts my heart. It signifies to me a whole new chapter in the culinary year. Just the smell of wild garlic or coming across the first nettles inspires me, and I think the transition lifts creativity for cooks.

Early spring is a time of new growth and new life, which is one of the reasons eggs are associated with Easter. I'm a massive fan of the extraordinary versatility that eggs, and chicken, inherently offer as ingredients. Without eggs in particular, it would be a different landscape foodwise, when you think that we use them for mayonnaise, meringue and everything in between.


For me, having access to really fresh eggs makes a huge difference to my cooking. It's not so much the finished result but how you feel about what you're making, because you know where the eggs have come from. From the way they taste to the way they crack in the pan or even the colour of the yolk, everything about them says they are from hens living the life they really should be.

A couple called Harry Boglione and Emily Perry run a medium-sized mixed farm in a valley around the corner from where I live, between Lyme Regis and Axminster. The organic chickens and eggs they produce at Haye Farm can't really be compared to the

commercial equivalents. In the case of their table birds (which are Hubbards), there are all sorts of things about the carcass that are considerably different from a standard, indoor-reared chicken: the bone size, the colour and thickness of the skin and, ultimately, of course, the flavour. The texture of the meat has a proper grain to it – partly because their muscles have been able to develop normally.

Harry and Emily have only been at the farm a year, but they've invested a lot of time and effort in diversifying the land. They have egg and meat chickens (about 600 of each), a small herd of Red Devon cattle, some Oxford Sandy and Black and Gloucester Old Spot pigs, ducks and sheep. They also grow a wide variety of vegetables. Harry's very unusual in that he's pretty young to be in control of such a large farm – he's only in his mid-twenties.

He says that his knowledge of growing comes mainly from his parents, who are the owners of Petersham Nurseries in Surrey. With regard to livestock, he has previously worked on farms in both England and Australia, but a lot of his farming know-how is "self-taught and passion-driven".

"We do a bit of everything because we believe the best way is to be as sustainable as possible," Harry explains. "And it also works for us, because we sell all our products directly to the consumer rather than going through supermarkets." Haye Farm now supplies local 



concerns, such as River Cottage, with its produce, along with restaurants in London (Petersham Nurseries and The River Café, for example) and a few grocery shops in the capital, too.

For their egg chickens, they cultivate specific plants and vegetables in order to encourage their foraging behaviour. The meat chickens also have a much larger area to do this than normal – even for an organic farm. “I’m quite keen on the concept of combining farming and nature, which is something that’s not generally considered possible,” Harry says. “I genuinely believe that the right practice is using all land for both reasons – we can encourage biodiversity and create habitats for wildlife as well as having a productive, profitable farm.” It is his hope that Haye Farm will one day become a model for agricultural methods.

Along the hedgerows of Harry’s farm around now, there’s a whole array of new wild pickings coming up, including wild sorrel, nettles, primroses and wild garlic. I’ve decided to feature some of these lovely early herbs and plants in my recipes. I’m particularly fond of nettles, so I’ve come up with a hearty chicken and nettle pie, which makes an ideal accompaniment if you’re venturing out on a springtime picnic.

➊ *For more information on Haye Farm, or a price list, contact hayefarmproduce@gmail.com or call 01297 552036.*



ROAST CHICKEN AND EGG SALAD

Preparation 20 minutes

Cooking 30 minutes Serves 4

It’s quite unusual to see recipes in which chicken and eggs are paired in the same dish, but here, in this vibrant and substantial

salad, I have done just that. Early new-season beetroot and waxy potatoes are tumbled together with salty anchovies, which are so good with both chicken and eggs.

- 500g new potatoes, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 8 small beetroot
- 4 eggs
- 6-8 salted anchovy fillets, roughly torn
- 200g-300g leftover roast chicken
- small handful of chives
- FOR THE DRESSING**
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp sugar
- ½ small garlic clove, peeled and bashed
- 2 tsp cider vinegar
- 50ml sunflower oil
- 50ml olive oil

- ➊ First make the dressing. Put all the ingredients into a lidded jar. Season and shake vigorously to combine. Taste and adjust the seasoning, sweetness or acidity as required.
- ➋ Put the potatoes in a pan of salted water and bring up to a simmer. Cook for 10-12 minutes until they are tender. Drain and, while still warm, toss with 2 tbsp dressing, season and leave to cool.
- ➌ Cook the beetroot in the same way, although they will need to simmer for 20-30 minutes until they are tender when pierced with a knife. Drain, leave to cool, then peel. The skins will slip off quite easily.
- ➍ Bring a medium-sized saucepan of water to the boil. Add the eggs and simmer for 6-7 minutes. Drain, cool, then peel and halve.
- ➎ Scatter the dressed potatoes and beetroot in a large shallow salad bowl or platter. Dot the eggs around the vegetables, then lay pieces of anchovy fillet and roast chicken in and



around the eggs. Finish the salad with fresh chives, some flaky salt, freshly ground black pepper and a good trickle of the remaining dressing.

ROAST CHICKEN WITH WILD GARLIC

Preparation 25 minutes

Cooking 1 hour 30 minutes Serves 4-6

In spring, I use freshly foraged, tender wild garlic to flavour

roast chicken instead of my usual garlic bulb and thyme combination. It makes a delightful alternative.

- 100g wild garlic leaves
- 50g butter, softened
- zest of 1 lemon
- 1.5kg-2kg chicken
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 glass of white wine (or water)
- 1-2 tbsp plain flour
- 300ml-400ml hot

chicken or vegetable stock

1-2 tsp redcurrant jelly

- ➊ Put 75g garlic leaves into a food processor along with the butter, lemon zest and some salt and freshly ground black pepper. Pulse until you have a coarse bright green butter.
- ➋ Remove the chicken from the fridge about 1 hour before you plan to cook

- ➌ Pull the legs away from the body and lift the wings out from under the bird – this helps hot air circulate around the meat while it is cooking. Place the chicken in a roasting tin.
- ➍ Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Lift the skin from the breast by carefully edging your fingers between skin and meat. You can do this both from the back and the neck end of the chicken. Try not to tear the skin. Spoon two-thirds of the wild-garlic butter under the skin of the bird, massaging it down to the thighs and wings if you can. Season the chicken all over with salt and freshly ground black pepper and drizzle with the olive oil.
- ➎ Roast the chicken in the oven for 20 minutes, then add the wine or water to the base of the tin. Cook, basting once or twice, for another 50 minutes. Spoon the remaining wild-garlic butter over the bird and scatter in the last of the wild-garlic leaves, chopped roughly if they are big. They will wilt in the roasting tray juices. Cook for a further 10 minutes. Check that the bird is cooked by pulling at a leg – it should want to come away from the body without much effort. If the meat is not cooked, return it to the oven for a further 10-15 minutes. Lift the chicken onto a large serving platter and leave to rest for 15 minutes before serving.
- ➏ To make a simple gravy, spoon off the excess fat from the roasting tray and set it over a low heat. Sprinkle in the flour and stir well, cooking gently for 1 minute. Add the stock and bring to a simmer. Season to taste with salt and pepper and tweak the sweetness with a teaspoon or two of redcurrant or other fruit jelly. Serve with the chicken. ➔

EGG MAYONNAISE WITH TARRAGON, PARSLEY AND SPRING ONIONS

Preparation 15 minutes

Cooking 10 minutes Serves 2

I love proper egg mayonnaise, particularly when the mayo is homemade and rich, and the eggs are still warm. Tarragon is a lovely herb to use with eggs and it's great with chicken, too – it is delicate and wonderfully fragrant with an undertow of cool green aniseed, which lifts this light lunchtime dish.

- 4 free-range or organic eggs
- ½ bunch of tarragon, leaves picked
- 2 slices sourdough bread

3-4 spring onions, thinly sliced
handful of flat parsley leaves
extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling

FOR THE MAYONNAISE

- 1 very small clove of garlic
- 1 large fresh egg yolk
- 1 heaped tsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp cider vinegar
- 1 small salted anchovy fillet, finely chopped
- 100ml sunflower oil
- 100ml extra-virgin olive oil

1 For the mayonnaise, crush the garlic with a good pinch of salt, then combine in a bowl with the yolk, mustard, vinegar and anchovy. Season

with freshly ground black pepper. Whisk well for 30-40 seconds.

- 2 Combine the oils in a jug, then slowly whisk into the egg mixture, a few drops at a time to start with, then in a very slight trickle, whisking all the time until you have a thick, glossy mayonnaise that holds its shape. Taste and add more salt, pepper, mustard or vinegar if required. You can also make this in a food processor using the same method. Keep the mayonnaise in the fridge and eat within one week.
- 3 Bring a medium saucepan of water to the boil. Add the eggs and simmer for

7-8 minutes. Drain and run under cold water. When cool enough to handle, peel and coarsely chop the eggs and mix in a bowl with 2 tbsp of the mayonnaise, half the tarragon leaves, chopped, and salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

- 4 Toast or, better still, chargrill the bread over a high heat until it takes on some griddle marks – this brings a great flavour to the dish.
- 5 Put a piece of toast on each plate and top with the egg mayo. Scatter over the spring onions, parsley leaves and remaining tarragon. Season and finish with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil. ➔



CHICKEN AND NETTLE PIE

Preparation 40 minutes, plus standing Cooking 1 hour 35 minutes Serves 6-8

Spring is a good time to pick nettles for cooking. Lush, tender and very sweet, they're just as tasty as spinach and, like kale, are incredibly good for you. This rustic pie shows off the nettle's affinity with chicken. It's superb warm from the oven, but equally good cold, as part of a picnic, perhaps.

FOR THE PASTRY

300g plain flour
150g cold butter, diced
iced water

1 medium egg
a splash of milk

FOR THE FILLING

1 large colander of nettle tops, washed
1 tbsp olive oil
200g bacon lardons

2 small onions, sliced
2 garlic cloves, sliced
25g butter
75g plain flour
500ml warm chicken stock
100ml double cream
350g cold roast chicken

- 1 First make the pastry: put the flour in a bowl, add the butter and rub with your fingers until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add a good pinch of salt and enough water to bring it all together into a pliable dough. Wrap in clingfilm and chill.
- 2 Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil, add the nettles and cook for 1-2 minutes. Drain and plunge into cold water to retain their green colour. Drain well and set aside.
- 3 Meanwhile, put a medium or large heavy-based pan over a medium heat. Add the oil and, when hot, throw in the lardons. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the fat starts to render and the bacon begins to colour. Add the onions and garlic, and cook for 5-6 minutes. Add the butter and, when bubbling, stir in the flour. Cook for a minute or two.
- 4 Pour in the stock and bring to a simmer - the sauce will begin to thicken. Keep stirring until smooth and velvety. Add the cream and chicken and cook for 1-2 minutes over a low heat.
- 5 Chop the nettles and stir into the chicken with some seasoning. Remove from the heat and leave to cool.
- 6 Heat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan oven) gas mark 5. Grease and flour an 18cm spring-form cake tin. Roll three-quarters of the pastry into a circle about 4-5mm

thick. Carefully line the cake tin with the pastry - there should be an overhang of a few centimetres.

- 7 Spoon the cooled chicken filling into the pastry case and level. Roll out the remaining pastry to about the same thickness to make a lid. Whisk the egg with a splash of milk to make an egg wash; brush this around the lip of the pie, then lay the lid over the top. Trim away the excess, then use your finger to crimp the pastry together tightly.
- 8 Make a cut in the centre and brush the surface with more egg wash. Cook for 50-60 minutes. Remove the sides of the spring-form tin. Brush around the pie with egg wash and return to the oven for 15 minutes. Leave to stand for 25-30 minutes, then serve with mustard and salad leaves. ➔





LEMON CURD AND CREAM MERINGUE WITH HAZELNUTS, PRIMROSES AND SORREL

Preparation 30 minutes

Cooking 2 hours 30 minutes

Serves 6-8

This pretty dessert makes the most of good free-range eggs, with crisp, pillowy meringue topped with sharp, fragrant lemon curd. If you have primroses in the garden, scatter a few over the top – they look lovely. Wild sorrel tastes like

lemony gooseberries, making it an ideal foil to the sugary meringue.

FOR THE MERINGUE
flavourless oil, for greasing
4 egg whites
200g caster sugar

FOR THE LEMON CURD
finely grated zest of 3 lemons
200ml lemon juice
125g unsalted butter
450g caster or granulated sugar

4 large eggs, beaten
TO SERVE
300ml double cream

35g toasted hazelnuts, lightly crushed
small bunch of fresh primroses, flowers picked
small handful of young sorrel leaves

- 1 Heat the oven to 140°C (120°C fan oven) gas mark 1. Lightly grease a sheet of baking parchment and lay over a large flat baking tray at least 30cm x 30cm.
- 2 To make the meringue, whisk the egg whites with

an electric whisk until they hold stiff peaks.

- 3 Still whisking, add the sugar, a spoonful at a time, until incorporated. Continue to whisk for 6-8 minutes until the meringue is thick.

- 4 Spoon onto the tray. Try to make a large circle with slightly peaked edges, but it doesn't have to be perfect.

- 5 Bake in the oven for 25-30 minutes, then reduce the oven temperature to 110°C (90°C fan oven) gas mark $\frac{1}{4}$ and cook for another 2 hours. Remove and leave to cool. Store in an airtight container if not using immediately.

- 6 To make the lemon curd, put the lemon zest and juice, butter and sugar into a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water. Slowly whisk until the butter has melted and the mixture is smooth. Pour in the eggs and whisk every few moments for 8-10 minutes until thick and creamy.

- 7 Push the curd through a sieve into a clean bowl and leave to cool before chilling.

- 8 To serve, whisk the cream until thick. Spoon over the meringue, spreading it out towards the edges. Generously top with the chilled lemon curd, then sprinkle with the hazelnuts. Finish with the flowers (if in season) and a scattering of sorrel. Serve immediately. Any remaining lemon curd will keep in the fridge for at least a week. 

CL OFFER

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