



The Edible Garden with Alison Alexander

I get carried away and always overplant in the vegetable garden during the winter months and often end up with an oversupply of some varieties. This year it is leafy greens – just how many can two people eat? I have Tuscan kale (far too many plants), perpetual spinach, silverbeet, celery leaf and parcel, cabbages, broccoli and more.

I will cook some of the kale and freeze in small bags for later use but at present they are being used in stir-fries, soups, pasta and risotto dishes, stirred through potato mash, frittatas, added to savoury pancakes and anything else I can think of. Spinach and Feta Pies, better known as Spanakopita, are very popular and the filling can have many variations. The pie recipe today is a version from the Greek island of Samos just off the coast of Turkey but using a mixture of greens from my garden.

Making pasta dough and fresh ravioli produces a wonderful meal but time does not always allow for the making of pasta. A quick alternative with good results is to use wonton pastry available in Asian food stores and major supermarkets. With the next school holidays not far away, this is a great activity for children. Serve the ravioli with a rich tomato pasta sauce or make your own. I make a roasted tomato, capsicum, onion and herb sauce in large quantities each autumn and bottle it in Fowlers Vacola jars to use throughout the year.

Samos Pies - Filo Snail Pies

Yield: approx. 10 pies per packet of filo

1 large bunch leafy greens or 150 g packet baby spinach leaves

300 g fresh ricotta

2 green onions, finely sliced

60 g feta, crumbled

2 tablespoons each finely chopped basil or dill

2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley

1 egg, lightly beaten

½ teaspoon grated nutmeg

freshly ground pepper

1 box fresh filo pastry (Antoniou)

¼ cup melted butter

¼ cup olive or canola oil

¼ cup sesame seeds



1. Pre-heat oven to 190°C. Lightly oil a baking tray or line with baking paper.
2. If using greens such as silverbeet or kale, trim and discard coarse stems and roughly chop. Baby spinach leaves do not need any further preparation. Place greens in a bowl and microwave for about 1 ½ minutes until wilted. When cool enough to handle squeeze out excess water – this is very important to avoid sogginess in the pastry. Roughly chop the greens again.
3. Place ricotta in a large bowl and mash well with a fork. Add spinach, onions, feta, herbs, egg and seasoning and mix well and set aside.
4. Combine melted butter and olive oil together in a small bowl.
5. Lightly dampen one tea towel and lay on bench top – just sprinkle water over the tea towel with your hand rather than have it wet all over. Cover with a dry tea towel. Place filo pastry on dry tea towel and fold over the tea towels to ensure that the pastry is not exposed to the air. It is important that the tea towels are in the order described – if a damp tea towel is put next to the pastry it will absorb too much moisture and be unusable.
6. Take one sheet of pastry and brush lightly with the butter and oil mixture. Top with another sheet and brush again. Spread about 2 tablespoons of ricotta mixture across one long side of the pastry in a thin line. Roll up pastry into a cylinder. Do not be tempted to put any more filling on the pastry or you will not be able to form the snail shape as the pastry will split.



7. Bend the roll into a snail-like coil and place on baking tray. Repeat with remaining pastry and ricotta mixture placing the pies up close to each other until the tray is full. Brush tops of pies with butter and oil mixture and sprinkle over the sesame seeds. The pies can be tightly covered with plastic wrap and refrigerated for up to 24 hours at this stage. Bake in oven for about 20 minutes or until the pastry is golden in colour. Serve hot or cold.

Note: many different fillings can be used for these pies:

- Mashed pumpkin, onion, garlic, feta, rosemary, black olives
- Ragu sauce
- Cooked shredded chicken
- Leftover casserole or curry
- Lamb mince, onion, garlic, tomatoes, chopped olives and rosemary
- The mixture makes a good filling for Chicken Roulade – boned out chicken filled with stuffed and rolled up, tied with string, and roasted
- The uncooked pies can be frozen for up to 3 months and then baked straight from the freezer – do not defrost first

Garden Greens and Ricotta Ravioli

Mixture as in previous recipe

Wonton pastry

Small bowl of water

Tomato pasta sauce – bought or home made

2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley



1. Peel off one sheet of wonton pastry and place on work bench. Place a teaspoon of mixture in the centre of the pastry. Using a pastry brush or your finger, wet the outside of the pastry lightly. Top with another sheet of pastry and press gently around the filling. The pastry can be left square or you can cut to a shape with a small cutter e.g. scone cutter. You have now made a quick version of ravioli. Repeat with remaining pastry sheets until required number are made.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil and cook the wonton in small batches until they float to the top. Remove with a slotted spoon onto an absorbent paper lined plate.
3. Heat tomato pasta sauce. Place 6 ravioli in a shallow bowl and spoon over the hot sauce. Finish with a sprinkle of finely chopped parsley.

Cook's Tip: Have you noticed that when using baking paper, it can be springy and difficult to sit in a cake tin. Try scrunching up the piece of paper and then press out flat. It will now have many creases in it and be much more pliable. Simple!!