

Tart movement: Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's gooseberry recipes

Few summer fruits rival the gooseberry for complexity, depth and sheer zesty oomph



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Gooseberry and strawberry rough-edged tart: One of the easiest tarts you'll ever make. Photograph: Colin Campbell for the Guardian

Strawberries are not the only fruit; they're not even the only summer berries. I will always be very happy to eat them – good ones, grown here in the UK and properly ripened, at any rate – but luscious, fragrant and versatile as the little red mouthfuls can be, they should never be allowed totally to eclipse their berry brethren. As picking season gets under way, I find myself just as excited about the other star berries in our native fruit firmament, and I'm going to tell you about them over the next three weeks, starting today with gooseberries.

Usually a soft, pale green, but sometimes golden, or even tinged a gorgeous wine-red, these delicately bristled little fruits are under-appreciated these days. I think this is because they require a little work from the cook, beyond wash and gobble. But that is more than repaid by what they give in return. Few summer fruits rival the goosegog when it comes to complexity, depth and sheer zesty oomph.

These characterful berries have a long association with British cooking. Way back in the 1600s, herbalist Nicholas Culpeper talked of them being scalded, baked or eaten raw; there are recipes for them in Hannah Glasse's Art Of Cookery (1747), in Eliza Acton's Modern Cookery (1845) and Mrs Beeton's Book Of Household Management (1861). Gooseberry wine, gooseberry sauce, gooseberry pudding, gooseberry jam and jelly: these simple dishes are gifts from a time when richness of flavour was appreciated as much as sweetness.

That flavour is liberated by just the right amount of sugar; always be ready to reach for a little more caster sugar if the cooked fruit is coming up a bit tart. Gooseberry fool is

one of my favourite summer puds – my version is a tart sieved puree mingled with cold custard, whipped cream and yoghurt. A straightforward gooseberry crumble or pie is also hard to beat.

But this fruit is not just for dessert. It also makes a fabulous jam – either alone or paired with other fruit such as strawberries – and fine chutney. It has other savoury applications, too: cooked and only lightly sweetened, it makes a tart sauce that's long been a traditional partner to mackerel. Rather like a puree of cooking apples, this sauce can enhance all kinds of rich, fatty meats and fish, too.

Basic preparation is simple – a quick wash followed by a top-and-tail. Use kitchen scissors or a sharp little knife to nip off the tough stalk from the top of the berry and the dried remains of the flower from the other end (both are unnecessary if you're going to sieve the cooked berries). Most gooseberries then require cooking and sweetening; though some varieties can be eaten straight from the bush towards the end of the season, when fully ripe and sun-soaked, I generally prefer to pick them when they're still on the firm and tart side, and cook them.

Gooseberries thrive in our climate. They do best in a sunny, sheltered spot on fairly rich soil. Buy a few young bushes, if you can, and plant 1.5m apart in late autumn or early spring. If you have limited space, train against a wall. Maintenance is pretty simple: keep soil moist, net developing fruit to protect from birds and prune once the bushes are three years old or more. My favourites are Invicta (a good all-rounder resistant to bugs and mildew) and the golden-tinged Keepsake.

June and July is peak gooseberry season. If you're not growing your own and you can't find them fresh-picked locally, it's worth going for frozen berries, provided you're intending to cook them. They'll wilt on defrosting, but that hardly matters if they're going to be cooked. In fact, this fruit leaks out its juices so readily that you shouldn't need to add water to the pan. If you're cooking with fresh berries, add only the minimum of water – just enough to stop them burning before they release their own delicious, fragrant liquid. Cook until they collapse, but don't boil too hard, stir in 100g sugar per kilo, taste and adjust sugar levels as required. Then let the goosegog fun begin.

Gooseberry and strawberry rough-edged tart

Strawberries' perfumed sweetness goes brilliantly with tart gooseberries in one of the easiest tarts you'll ever make. Serves four.

200g gooseberries, topped and tailed
200g strawberries, hulled and halved or quartered
75g caster sugar, plus a little extra to finish
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
3 tbsp ground almonds
1 egg white, lightly beaten

For the sweet shortcrust pastry

200g plain flour
1 heaped tbsp icing sugar
Pinch of salt
120g cold, unsalted butter, cut into cubes
1 egg yolk
About 50ml cold milk (or water)

For the pastry, put the flour, sugar and salt in a food processor, blitz briefly to

combine, then add the butter and blitz until it resembles breadcrumbs. (To make it by hand, rub in the butter with your fingertips.) Add the egg yolk (save the white) and enough milk or water to bring it together into large clumps. Tip on to a lightly floured surface and knead lightly into a ball. Wrap in clingfilm and chill for 30 minutes.

Combine the berries, sugar and lemon zest, and set aside to macerate for 30 minutes.

Heat the oven to 200C/400F/gas mark 6. Line a large [baking](#) tray with baking parchment or nonstick liner – use a tray with a slight edge, as the tart may leak juice while baking.

On a floured surface, roll out the pastry to a rough circle, 2-3mm thick and about 35cm in diameter, and transfer to the baking tray. Sprinkle the ground almonds evenly over the top without going right to the edges. Spoon the macerated fruit, and any juices, over the pastry, leaving a 3-4cm border. Fold the border inwards over the fruit, brush the pastry edges with the egg white and sprinkle with more caster sugar. Bake for 30 minutes, or until the pastry is a deep gold. Serve warm, with cream or ice-cream.

Gooseberry ice-cream



Gooseberry ice-

cream: In a word, luscious. Photograph: Colin Campbell for the Guardian
This luscious, sweet-tart ice is great with shortbread biscuits. Serves four.

500g gooseberries

125g caster sugar

250ml double cream

125ml whole milk

2 large egg yolks

Put the gooseberries and 65g of the sugar in a large pan with a trickle of water – just enough to cover the base of the pan (don't add water if you're using frozen berries). Stir over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved, bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 10-15 minutes, until the berries are completely soft and mostly broken. Rub through a sieve into a bowl, and discard the skins and pips. As soon as the puree is completely cool, chill in the fridge.

Combine half the cream with the milk in a pan and bring to just below boiling point. Whisk the egg yolks with the remaining sugar, then pour the hot milk and cream on to them, whisking all the time. Return this custard to the pan and stir over a gentle heat until it thickens. Remove from the heat, pour through a sieve into a clean bowl and cover the surface with clingfilm or greaseproof paper, to stop a skin forming. Leave until completely cool, then chill.

Combine the custard with the puree. Very lightly whip the remaining double cream,

just until it holds soft peaks (if you make it too stiff, it will be hard to fold in), and fold into the gooseberry custard. Taste and add sugar if you think it needs it – it should taste a little too sweet because its sweetness will be muted once it's frozen.

Pour into an ice-cream machine, churn until soft-set, then transfer to the freezer to freeze completely. Alternatively, pour the mix into a plastic container and freeze for about an hour or until the sides start to get solid; once this happens, mash with a fork, mixing the frozen sides into the liquid centre, and return to the freezer for another hour. Repeat this twice more at hourly intervals, then leave to set solid. Remove from the freezer about 30 minutes before serving, to soften a little.

Gooseberry and sage sauce

With their fragrant acidity, gooseberries make a lovely sauce for meat – try this with roast pork or pork chops. Serves six.

400g gooseberries, topped and tailed

2 tbsp caster sugar

1 tbsp finely chopped sage

Put the gooseberries in a pan with the sugar. If using fresh berries, add a tablespoon of water; frozen ones will not need any additional liquid. Bring to a simmer and cook gently, stirring from time to time, for 10-15 minutes, until you have a pulpy sauce. Stir in the sage, then leave to cool. Taste and add more sugar if need be, but try to keep it nice and tart.

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