

Full of beans

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The season has been kind to STEVE MANFREDI, who is happy to prolong his love affair with an old favourite.

Each year I devote a column to one of my favourite things: broad beans. This season I thought I'd give them a rest but the weather intervened and, well, here we are.

It's been a rather cool spring. Usually by this time, broad beans have peaked and tend to be tapering off. They don't like hot weather, it makes them go hard, white and mealy. But this year is different.

Artichokes, with their thistle blue flower, should also be starting to bloom by now but the cooler weather has delayed this, extending the season of another of my favourite vegetables.

Enjoy broad beans while you can. Double peel them - pod them first then peel away the tough casing around the seed - and blanch them for a few minutes in salted boiling water.

Drain and toss with butter or good extra virgin olive oil and serve as an alternative to peas, or try something just a little more involved, such as one of these recipes.

Either way, try them now as pretty soon it will be all over for another year.

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BROAD BEAN CAPONATA

This usually accompanies fish or shellfish but adding broad beans makes it a great first course.

300g eggplant, cut into 1cm dice

4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

30g onion, cut into 1cm dice

80g celery heart, cut into 1cm dice

1 tbsp castor sugar

4 tbsp red wine vinegar

1 tbsp pine nuts

1 cup double-peeled broad beans, blanched

50g olives, pitted and chopped

50g tomato, diced

20g Sicilian capers, washed and desalted

Salt and pepper

2 tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley

Pan-fry eggplant in 1 tbsp olive oil until golden. Pan-fry onion in 1 tbsp olive oil but don't let it colour. Blanch celery for 2 minutes in boiling salted water. Heat sugar in a saucepan until completely melted and light caramel in colour. Add vinegar to make a syrup. Just before serving, add syrup to all the nuts and vegetables and mix. Add 2 tbsp olive oil, season with salt and pepper, add parsley and mix again.

Serves 6

Wine Primitivo or zinfandel.

GRILLED MULLOWAY PIECES WITH BROAD BEANS, TARRAGON AND TOMATO

This dish can be made with your choice of fish, such as snapper or salmon.



Grilled mullet pieces with broad beans, tarragon and tomato. *Photo: Marco Del Grande*

4 mullet pieces (about 160g each),

skin on

1½ cups double-peeled broad beans

4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

4 ripe tomatoes

4 tbsp fresh tarragon leaves

Salt and pepper

Cut each piece of mullet into 6 pieces and set aside. Blanch broad beans in boiling, salted water for 45 seconds, drain and mix in a bowl with 1 tbsp olive oil. Blanch tomatoes in salted boiling water for 2 minutes. Remove and plunge into a large bowl of ice water; tomato skin should remove easily. Cut each tomato in half and scoop out entire core, seeds and all. Cut remaining tomato flesh into 1cm-wide fillets and set aside in a bowl with 1 tbsp olive oil. Mash cooked broad beans with a fork. Mix in tarragon and tomato fillets. Season with salt and pepper. Heat remaining olive oil in a wide skillet. Salt skin on each piece of mullet and fry, skin-side first, for 2 minutes. Turn and fry other side for about 1 minute. Serve fish on broad beans.

Serves 8 as a main course

Wine Rich chardonnay or viognier.