

Seasonal cook



Photo: Quentin Jones

Smashing pumpkins

In savoury dishes and desserts, this unlikely star hits the sweet spot, writes STEVE MANFREDI.

Pumpkin is not really a vegetable, it's a fruit. So are tomatoes, eggplants, zucchini, capsicums, cucumbers, chillies and even green beans. Others, like peas, are stranger still to think of as fruits. But, for the botanist, that's exactly what they are.

Whenever we eat a seed-bearing part of a plant, it's a fruit. Vegetables have no such definition apart from an arbitrary one based on social and cultural understandings.

By "vegetable" we mean a plant that is edible and not used in desserts – at least not often. Even though tomato, eggplant and zucchini are fruits, in culinary terms they are vegetables.

Looking for some sort of order in all this apparent chaos is even more frustrating when a true non-fruit like rhubarb is mostly used in desserts.

Then there are fruits that are considered

vegetables but occasionally used in sweet dishes. Ever tried eggplant layered with ricotta and chocolate? It's a traditional dessert from Salerno on the Amalfi coast in Italy. Zucchini cake is well known and so is carrot cake. Pumpkin pie is the Thanksgiving dessert of Americans.

Whether fruit or vegetable, anything can be prepared sweet or savoury, some more successfully than others.

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Steve Manfredi is taking part in Bread for Good. Find participating restaurants at breadforgood.com.au.

PUMPKIN PUDDING WITH ANISE CREAM

FOR THE ANISE CREAM:
250g double cream (35 per cent fat)
750ml milk
20g anise seed

1¼ cups castor sugar
12 free-range egg yolks
Place cream, milk, anise seed and 1 cup of sugar in a saucepan and bring to a simmer, then remove from heat. Meanwhile, beat egg yolks with remaining sugar in a bowl until thick and pale. Pour in hot milk mixture and whisk to combine. Cook in a double boiler, stirring, until thick. Strain and cool in the fridge.

Makes about 1½ litres and can also be used as custard

FOR THE PUDDING:
300g Queensland blue pumpkin flesh, cut into slices
500ml milk
100g sugar
1 vanilla bean, split in half lengthwise, seeds scraped
10ml amaretto liqueur
2 eggs, beaten
1 string soft eating liquorice, cut into 1cm long rounds

Simmer pumpkin in milk with sugar and vanilla bean (and scraped seeds) until soft. Add amaretto and eggs and whisk well. Remove vanilla bean and push pumpkin with all its liquid through a fine sieve. Pour into moulds – I have used a doughnut-shaped one but other moulds would do just as well – then cook in a water bath in a preheated 120C oven for 50 minutes. Cool and unmould onto serving plates. Serve with anise cream and a slice of liquorice.

Makes 12-15 (pictured) depending on mould size

Wine Late-picked semillon – not too rich

ROAST PUMPKIN WITH SEEDS

The mixture of seeds used is up to you.

1kg pumpkin, peeled, seeded and cut into wedges
8 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 cup mixed seeds – pumpkin, caraway, poppy, flax, sesame, linseed, sunflower or other
1 tbsp finely chopped rosemary
1 tbs flaky salt

Preheat oven to 180C. Place pumpkin in an oven dish ensuring it's not crowded. Pour olive oil over pumpkin then toss until well coated. Roast in oven for 20-25 minutes until pumpkin begins to darken at the edges. In a bowl, mix seeds, rosemary and salt. Remove pumpkin from oven and sprinkle seeds on top. Return to oven for 5 minutes, then serve. Can be served as part of a vegetarian meal or as an accompaniment to roast meats.

Serves six as a side dish

Wine Tempranillo