

Figs, basil and carob pods. Annemarie Brookman, The Food Forest. February 27, 2011

Basil

Basil is at its best during summer, produces abundantly and responds well to regular picking. Its growth starts to slow down when the nights get cooler in early autumn and at the same time the flavour also diminishes. Basil can be used fresh in lots of different ways and is very popular with tomatoes.

Here are a couple of recipes that make use of the summer abundance and once preserved make a wonderful addition to any cooks toolkit and makes for great gifts!

Pesto

- Approx 2 cups firmly packed basil leaves
- 2 large garlic cloves, pressed
- ½ cup chopped walnuts, almonds, pistachios or pine nuts.
- (You may need to adjust the quantity of oil depending on nuts used)
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- ½ cup olive oil
- Salt to taste

Blend all, except the cheese, together until smooth
Blend in the cheese
Put in clean glass jars, cover with a thin layer of olive oil
Store in fridge. Keeps for many weeks.

*Pesto freezes well. A lot of recipes suggest leaving the cheese and garlic out if the pesto is to be frozen as the cheese changes texture and the garlic flavour changes.
Of course also handy when vegan friends visit!*

Another delicious and easy recipe.....

Stephanie Alexander's Basil Butter

From 'The Cook's Companion'

- 250g butter
- 1 cup basil leaves, torn into small pieces
- Freshly ground black pepper

Blend all ingredients in a food processor until bright green.
Scrape butter onto baking paper and form into a sausage shape.
Roll up and wrap in foil, then freeze

A slice of this butter floated on a fresh tomato soup is delicious.
A little can be added to any cooked tomato dish too
Yummy on a crusty piece of bread



Picking basil for the Farmers Market at The Food Forest



Figs are hardy trees that grow well in SA. At The Food Forest we have more than 20 varieties of figs ripening through the season starting early January with White Adriatic, moving onto Archipal, White Genoa, Brown Turkey, Black Genoa. Fruit needs picking every few days and once picked needs to be eaten or preserved quickly. Information about figs can be found on: www.foodforest.com.au

Eat fresh. Most varieties are best peeled. If picked fully ripe (best flavour) it is best to eat them the same day. Store figs in on a layer of fig leaves in a single layer to avoid bruising and refrigerate.

Figs can be frozen. Pulp only: Cut in half and scoop out pulp, freeze in small portions. With skin: wash and dry figs. Half or quarter with the skin left on. Lay out on trays till frozen and put in bags. Easy to remove skin when figs are partly defrosted. Makes for a yummy and easy dessert out of season. Partly defrost, add cream, mascarpone or ice cream

Dried figs. Use solar or electric dryer. Wash figs. Cut into halves or quarters; depending on size and the weather they will take few days to dry. Figs can also be cut into slices and dried.

Recipe from Graham Brookman's grandfather, who worked with fruit growers in the Riverland

Grandfather Bowen's best fig recipe (early 1900)

6lbs figs

4 lbs sugar

2 ozs ginger

6 wineglasses vinegar (we often wonder what the size of a wineglass was, we guess ~ 125ml)

1 wineglass water

Mix all ingredients, boil figs for about 2 hrs. Drain dry and press roll in castor sugar.

Bake in hot oven for 5-10 minutes or till slightly caramelised

Store in a jar, in cool, dark spot. Delicious by themselves or with cheese and nuts

Stephanie Alexander's grilled figs.

Halve unpeeled ripe figs, place on washed fig leaves, dot with butter, grind over pepper and grill until warmed through. Goes well with ham steak, pork chop, duck breast, grilled bacon, goats cheese or nuts

Carob pods

Also known as St John's bread. Nature's answer to a Mars bar. Very hardy tree which grows well in SA. Yummy pods to nibble on when you feel like something sweet. Wash and dry the pod. Eat the flesh only, watch out for the hard seeds. Matures in February. Best variety is called Sfax.

