

One foot in the garden one foot in the larder

Fresh spring produce overflows on the supermarket shelves but the majority is imported because here in the UK as gardeners and growers know we are in the hungry gap. This is when preserves made from fruits and vegetables from other seasons, and stored in the larder are even more important. Dried and fermented foods, chutneys and cordials can make the slowly growing range of produce from the garden, allotment or veg box go just a little further at this time of year.

Carrots and potatoes are still available from store and coming in are the first new potatoes and asparagus, radishes, rocket, spinach, spring onions, spring greens and there a plenty of nettles and the last of the wild garlic to forage. Outdoor cultivated rhubarb becomes easy to find, strawberries appear towards the end of the month and you can wild gather the heady scented elderflower.

White bean soup with nettle pesto

serves 4

200g white beans soaked overnight
good splash of olive oil
5 spring onions
2 cloves garlic finely chopped
1 carrot chopped
a sprig of thyme leaves chopped or 1/2 teaspoon dried
1 litre vegetable stock
4 dessertspoons nettle pesto

Gently cook the spring onions and garlic in the oil until soft, add the well-drained beans and stir well, add the carrot & thyme, tip in the stock and cook for approximately 1½ hours or until the beans are soft. Cool slightly, tip into a food processor and blend until smooth.
Gently reheat, divide between 4 bowls and top with nettle pesto

Nettle pesto

200g nettle tops (top 5/7 leaves)
50g chopped walnuts
1 clove garlic finely chopped
200ml olive oil
salt & black pepper

Bring a pan, large enough to take the nettles, ½ filled with water to the boil. Add the nettles and cook for 1 minute. Drain through a sieve over a bowl to save the cooking water. Immediately plunge the nettles into the iced water. As soon as they are cold, remove and squeeze them dry. Put the nettles into a food processor along with the hemp seeds & garlic. Process together for 30 seconds then slowly trickle in enough oil to reach your desired consistency.

Season your pesto with salt and pepper to taste.

Will keep, packed in a jar for up to 2 weeks in the fridge

The reserved nettle water is a nourishing drink.