

spinach, goat's cheese and pesto salad

serves 4

I have been making a version of this salad in my restaurants for over fifteen years now and it's a sure crowd-pleaser. You need perfect un-bruised spinach leaves for this simple recipe. I love the addition of some creamy goat's curd (not hard goat's cheese) and also the surprising flavour you get from stirring crushed roasted hazelnuts through the pesto. This is great as a salad to go with a roast dinner or, better still, cook a lamb back strap or rump, let it rest, then slice and toss through the salad to make a main meal.

200 g (7 oz) baby English spinach leaves
¼ red onion, finely diced
5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
4–6 tablespoons soft goat's curd (chèvre)
2 tablespoons crushed roasted hazelnuts

pesto

2 garlic cloves, roasted and peeled
2 tablespoons toasted pine nuts
1 anchovy (if you like)
100 g (3½ oz/2 cups) basil leaves
2 tablespoons grated parmesan
zest and juice of 1 lemon
200 ml (7 fl oz) olive oil

To make the pesto, either using a mortar and pestle or hand blender, pound the garlic to a paste with some sea salt, add the pine nuts and then the anchovy, pounding all the time. Next, pound in the basil and then the cheese, then the lemon zest, lemon juice and olive oil until it has a sauce consistency. Season with black pepper.

Lightly toss the spinach leaves with the red onion and some sea salt and pepper. Add the oil and vinegar, gently toss again and arrange the goat's curd on top.

Mix the roasted hazelnuts with 4 tablespoons of pesto and drizzle over the top of the salad (keep any leftover pesto in a screw-top jar in the fridge, covering the surface with a layer of oil).