



EARLY SPRING

There is something annoying yet so wonderful about early spring in the garden. It has sat on the fence, not too sure if the cold air at night means more chill is to come, or heed the delightful midday sun saying that warmer weather is on its way. The garden itself is trying so hard, and weeds are everywhere, which reminds me that I have neglected her for a while, like you neglect your dog when your first-born child arrives.

I'm eager to get into the garden to plant, but still not too sure about what and when. My crop of broad (fava) beans has flowered and small buds are appearing; the celery is so good I have to eat it there and then. My farmer friends are delighted by the first signs of asparagus, and tell me the avocados are looking amazing, but many are worried, hoping there won't be a late frost that could end their season of growing just as it has begun.

RECIPE:

GREEN HERB, CELERY & BROAD BEAN TOPS

A perfect quick salad for me is to head out and snip some tops off the broad (fava) beans, harvest some of the smaller celery stalks, using the leaves and thinly slicing the stalks, then mixing these with some torn parsley, the shoots of some sorrel and leaves of mint. Simply dress these with a dash of red wine vinegar, a little sea salt and a drizzle of hazelnut oil. Maybe toss through some soft goat's feta and serve.



SALAD OF TOFU, SNAKE BEANS & CRISPY SHALLOT WITH BLACK BEAN VINAIGRETTE

The black bean vinaigrette is a version from my old mate Jake Nicolson, and has become a regular at home and in dishes for work. This dish goes brilliantly with some simple Chinese-style roasted beef, duck or chicken. **Serves 2, or 4 sharing**

INGREDIENTS

400 g (14 oz) snake (yard-long) beans

300 g (10½ oz) organic silken tofu, cut into 8 pieces

1 small handful coriander (cilantro), leaves picked and washed

1 tablespoon crispy fried Asian shallots (from a jar)

BLACK BEAN VINAIGRETTE

100 g (3½ oz) fermented black beans (see glossary), soaked overnight in the fridge in several changes of water (or you can use 3 tablespoons black bean paste, from a jar)

1 small long red chilli, seeded and finely chopped

3 French shallots, finely diced

50 g (1¾ oz) knob of fresh ginger, peeled and finely grated

300 ml (10 fl oz) canola oil (non GM)

150 ml (5 fl oz) light soy sauce

40 ml (1¼ fl oz) black rice vinegar, or rice vinegar

METHOD

To make the vinaigrette, rinse the soaked black beans, if you're using fermented ones. Place in a bowl and use a fork to smash them up a little, to a paste-like consistency. Add the chilli, shallot and ginger, then carefully fold in the canola oil, soy sauce and vinegar. Taste for a nice salt and acid balance and adjust to your liking.

Bring a large pot of water to the boil. Cut the snake beans into thirds, then add to the pot and boil for 3 minutes, or until they're still a little crisp, but cooked.

Drain the hot beans and place in a mixing bowl. Add half the tofu and coriander, and enough dressing to coat (roughly 3 tablespoons). Gently toss, not breaking up the tofu too much, then place in a serving dish.

Add the remaining tofu. Dress with a little more vinaigrette and the rest of the coriander. Serve sprinkled with the fried shallots.

NOTE: See the salad dressing family tree on page 80 for other great uses for the Black bean vinaigrette. Any left-over vinaigrette will keep in an airtight jar in the fridge for yonks.



RADISHES & CHILLI

A really simple salad or snack. We list this one in the snacks section of the menu at Pope Joan. Seriously, radishes never tasted so good. You can leave out the biltong, as the dish is just as good without it, but I love it in. **Serves 2, or 4 as a little snack**

INGREDIENTS

20 sparkler, champion or cherry belle radishes, tops trimmed

1 tablespoon fine salt flakes

250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) canola oil (non GM)

20 ml (¾ fl oz) sesame oil

50 ml (1¾ fl oz) soy sauce

20 ml (¾ fl oz) black rice vinegar

1 tablespoon caster (superfine) sugar

1 long red chilli, halved

1 teaspoon chilli flakes

50 g (1¾ oz) beef biltong (see glossary), beef jerky or prosciutto, thinly sliced (optional)

1 tablespoon chopped flat-leaf (Italian) parsley

METHOD

Crack each radish by hitting it with the bottom of a pot or a mallet. You don't want to completely crack or split them — just crush or break the skins in parts. Once they're all done, place them into a bowl, add the salt and thoroughly mix through. Let them sit for 20 minutes, then rinse under cold water to wash off most of the salt. Dry.

Place the canola oil, sesame oil, soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, chilli and chilli flakes in a large pot and bring to the boil. Once boiling, add the radishes, then bring back to the boil. Immediately take off the heat and let sit for 5 minutes.

Take the warm radishes out of the pot and place in a bowl. Add the biltong, if using, and parsley, toss together and serve.

