

Nettle bake

Erhan Şeker is a talented Turkish chef who makes great use of wild greens and herbs. He cooks all sorts of weird and wonderful leaves, shoots and tendrils, most of which I wouldn't know how to find back at home in the UK. But one thing we can definitely find at home is stinging nettles. In many areas they're abundant. And of course they're free, and very good for you.



This dish, called 'çırpma' in Turkish (meaning 'mixed', as I guess you could mix up all sorts of greens in here if you wanted, wild or otherwise), was expertly made for us in Erhan's kitchen by his assistant Nesrin, using Erhan's homemade goat ricotta. It's the kind of comfort food that feels like it should be bad for you it's so satisfying, but is actually incredibly good for you. Wild greens are more nutritious than cultivated ones as they're higher in antioxidants and other goodies that the plants must have plenty of in order to defend themselves from pests.

Serves: 6

Total time: approx 1 hour

flour

water

olive oil

bunch of nettles, roughly chopped

bunch of spinach, roughly chopped

bunch of parsley, roughly chopped

bunch of dill, roughly chopped

bowl of ricotta cheese

1 onion, peeled and finely diced

1 leek (white and pale green bits only), halved lengthways and thinly sliced*

1 egg, lightly beaten

breadcrumbs

salt and pepper

1. Heat oven to 180C.
2. Make a batter out of flour and water and season it with salt. It should be the consistency of thick cream and smooth.
3. Grease a gratin dish with olive oil.
4. Mix all the greens with the ricotta, onion and leek. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

5. Pour a layer of batter over the base of the baking dish. Spoon over the greens and cheese mix and lightly flatten to even out. Next drizzle the egg all over the greens. Then top with another layer of batter. Finally scatter the surface with breadcrumbs.
6. Bake at 180C for 30-45 mins or until the dish is cooked through and golden brown and crispy on top. Let it cool before serving, as it will be much easier to cut into sections and will also taste better.

* How to clean a leek

Leeks are notoriously hard to clean as the earth they grow in gets right inside the layers of leaves. I think the best way is to trim off and discard the root end and dark green leaves at the top, split the leek lengthways into two, chop the two lengths as finely as desired, then put the whole lot into a large bowl of cold water, mix it around a bit with your hands, leave for a few minutes to let the dirt sink to the bottom of the bowl, and then lift the chopped leeks out of the water using your hands, a slotted spoon or a sieve. The same method works well for other dirty leaves, like spinach and lettuce.

