

Roast beetroot salad with Moro blood oranges, goat's cheese panna cotta and walnuts

Serves: 4 as a starter

Total time: 3½ hours

For the panna cotta:

1 tsp gelatine granules
240ml (1 cup) + 4 tbsps dble (heavy) cream
140g (5oz) soft, fresh goat's cheese
salt and white pepper to taste
walnut oil



For the salad:

10 baby purple beetroot
10 baby yellow beetroot
5 tbsps olive oil
4 Moro blood oranges
large handful walnut halves
2 tbsp walnut oil
2 handfuls baby rocket leaves
salt and pepper

For the vinaigrette:

2 tbsps champagne vinegar
1 tbsp blood orange juice
½ tsp Dijon mustard
2 tbsps walnut oil
7 tbsps extra virgin olive oil
salt and pepper to taste

Method:

1. Lightly grease four very small (3-4 fl oz) ramekins with walnut oil.
2. Sprinkle gelatine evenly over 4 tbsps cream in a small bowl and let 'sponge', stirring gently if needed.
3. Heat remaining cream to just below boiling. Off the heat, combine cream with goat's cheese, whisking in the cream bit by bit to ensure a smooth consistency. Add salt and white pepper to taste.
4. Melt the sponged gelatine by heating the bowl in a shallow pan of just simmering water, stirring gently if needed. It should go fully translucent.
5. Pour melted gelatine into warm cream and cheese mixture in a steady stream, whisking constantly. Both gelatine and cream should be lukewarm.
6. Strain mixture through a sieve into a measuring jug and then divide between ramekins. Cover and chill until set, approx 3 hours.

7. Trim stalks off beetroot, wash, rub with olive oil, salt and pepper and roast in a hot oven (450F) covered with foil until tender, approx 30 mins.
8. Peel off two strips of blood orange zest and julienne finely. Blanch julienned zest briefly, drain and set aside for the garnish.
9. Peel and segment oranges, cutting between membranes, reserving juice.
10. Make vinaigrette by whisking together all listed ingredients.
11. When beetroot are cool enough to handle, peel and halve them from stem to root. (Quarter them if needed.) Marinate in vinaigrette 'til needed.
12. Break each walnut half into 4 pieces and toast them lightly in a small frying pan with 2 tbsps walnut oil. Set aside.
13. To serve: Let panna cotta ramekins sit in hot water briefly to loosen and then turn each out onto the centre of a serving plate. Dress baby rocket leaves with a little vinaigrette. Place beetroot halves, orange segments and baby leaves decoratively around panna cottas. Sprinkle with walnut pieces and garnish with orange zest.

One day recently at school we were given the chance to develop some recipes of our choice. I worked on this one, trying to recreate a similar dish I had had at Postrio in San Francisco. Apart from this dish, the restaurant's food was sadly otherwise very disappointing – an array of overly 'creative' and entirely unsuccessful attempts to revive faded glory. I will admit this recipe is a real faff, but the result is both beautiful and delicious. All the flavours go so well together. If you can't be bothered to make the panna cotta, just place some lovely fresh goat's cheese in the centre of the plate instead.

