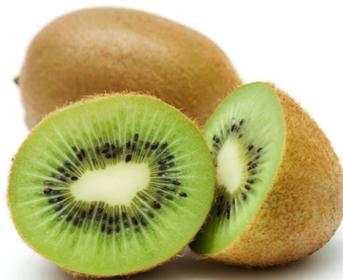


CARRUTHERS SEASONAL NEWS



The majority of the UK population grow up in urban areas, with little or no awareness of when and where various foods are produced. Imports from around the world ensure that supermarket shelves look the same week in week out. We at Carruthers aim to promote an understanding of food seasons. Each month we will focus on the fruit and/or veg, which is currently in season, and share enlightening facts, useful tips and enticing recipe ideas picked from the web and our favourite publications. When a food is in season its quality can vary dramatically. Food produced locally, e.g. bought from a farmers' market, is likely to be a lot fresher than its supermarket equivalent. Each fruit or vegetable has a prime time when it's at its seasonal best.

SPRING FRUIT AND VEGETABLES





seasonal vegetables and fruit;

asparagus, broccoli, mushrooms, jersey royal new potatoes, chicory, cabbage, rhubarb, leeks, spinach, spring onions, purple-sprouting broccoli, new potatoes, cauliflower, radishes, carrots, watercress lettuce & salad leaves such as rocket and red chard.



Seasonal from further afield

Italian kiwi fruit, Spanish Strawberries

SPRING

Spring has to be the most anticipated of the seasons, particularly after the unusually cold and wet winter we've just experienced. Many spring vegetables are brief visitors (blink and you'll miss the asparagus and purple

sprouting broccoli) but all the more appreciated. The range of vegetables in season include, spring green cabbages, cauliflowers, cucumbers, kales, curly lettuces, and spinach. With the exception of rhubarb, local seasonal fruits are less available. In this issue of Carruthers seasonal news we are going to focus on Rhubarb which is sourced initially from Devon and then a Scottish variety May. We will also feature an imported fruit from Italy the Kiwi which is currently being supplied to our schools. With Easter just around the corner we have an interesting idea for young children to grow Cress in an egg shell and some healthy lunch box ideas.

EAT RHUBARB

The outlandishly coloured vegetable that thinks it's a fruit. Rhubarb makes deliciously comforting puddings but its sharpness works extremely well with meat and oily fish dishes.

Forced rhubarb (grown in the dark) has yellowish leaves and usually appears in January. The field-grown variety replaces it around April and is less tender but often more flavourful.

HISTORY

Rhubarb was used as a medicine in ancient China. It was brought to Europe by Marco Polo and has been eaten as a food since the eighteenth century.



Rhubarb is a member of the family Polygonaceae and is related to sorrel. It grows best in cool climates and the effect of forcing was discovered by accident at the Chelsea Physic Garden early in the 19th century.

BUYING

Choose crisp, firm, plump stalks with good colour.

STORING

Kept in the fridge, fresh rhubarb will stay in reasonable condition for 1-2 weeks. Raw and cooked rhubarb freeze well.

PREPARING

Wash and trim both ends of the stalks, and discard the poisonous leaves. Rhubarb, in particular the later field-grown variety, is very tart and requires considerable sweetening. As with other relatively acidic foods it is recommended that it is not cooked using aluminium pots.

NUTRITION

Rhubarb is a good source of fibre and contains moderate levels of vitamin C and calcium. Studies have linked the fibre from rhubarb in the diet with reduced cholesterol levels.

Roasted Rhubarb

Heat oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6. Rinse 400g rhubarb and shake off excess water. Trim the ends, then cut into little-finger-size pieces. Put in a shallow dish or a baking tray, tip over 50g caster sugar, toss together, then shuffle rhubarb so it's in a single layer. Cover with foil, then roast for 15 mins. Remove foil. Give everything a little shake, roast for 5 mins more or until tender and the juices are syrupy.

Rhubarb & custard cake

Ingredients



roasted rhubarb 400g
250g pack butter, softened, plus
extra for greasing
150g pot ready-made custard (Ambrosia)
250g self-raising flour
½ tsp baking powder
4 large eggs
1 tsp vanilla extract

250g golden caster sugar

icing sugar, for dusting

Method

Make the roasted rhubarb first, carefully draining off the juices before you let it cool.

Butter and line a 23cm loose-bottomed or springform cake tin. Heat oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4.

Reserve 3 tbsp of the custard in a bowl.

Beat the rest of the custard together with the butter, flour, baking powder, eggs, vanilla and sugar until creamy and smooth.

Spoon one-third of the mix into the tin, add some of the rhubarb, then dot with one-third more cake mix and spread it out as well as you can. Top with some more rhubarb, then spoon over the remaining cake mix, leaving it in rough mounds and dips rather than being too

neat about it. Scatter the rest of the rhubarb over the batter, then dot the remaining custard over.

Bake for 40 mins until risen and golden, then cover with foil and bake for 15-20 mins more. It's ready when a skewer inserted into the middle comes out clean. Cool in the tin, then dredge with icing sugar when cool.

EAT KIWI

The kiwi is a strange, rather uninviting looking fruit with it's brown, tough exterior. However, on cutting, it has a startlingly attractive bright green or yellow interior in which tiny seeds are radiating with many fine, pale lines from the centre. With a delicate sweet-sour taste and interesting hints of melon and strawberry, the kiwi is delicious eaten fresh, and makes an attractive component of fruit salads, and many other dishes.

Kiwi fruit are widely grown in warm temperate and Mediterranean zones. However, the main production countries are Italy, New Zealand, Chile, France, Greece, Japan and Uk, in order of volumes grown. Greek and Italian fruit in February-May and New Zealand and Chilean fruit in September to November. This season we are supplying the well-known green Hayward kiwi which is grown in Italy.



The growing area of kiwi fruit, and the subsequent handling procedures in packing the fruit, have an influence on its eating quality, which can vary from sweet and delicious to rather sour and off-putting. We will try to point out the best, as a good kiwi is quite irresistible!

-Kiwi fruit don't give you many clues on whether they are ripe or good to eat. So what to look for? Fruit with a slight 'give' to touch are nearer to being ready to eat.

-Remember to eat kiwis when they start to soften. The fruit will ripen if left at room temperature in your fruit bowl.

Storage: Kiwi fruit are reasonably robust fruit, but will ripen quickly if left at room temperature, particularly in the presence of an ethylene-producing fruit (bananas). However, if harvested at the correct time, kept at 2-5 degrees and in an ethylene-free environment they should keep for a few weeks.

Nutrition: Kiwis are high in vitamin C and have almost as much potassium as a banana, weight-for-weight.

A fun idea
For



Breakfast
Clubs

Easter 'Egg Heads' – A Fun Activity To Make
With Children



2 eggs

You'll also need

2 tsp cress seeds, 2 cotton wool balls, felt-tip pens or acrylic paints

Carefully remove the tops from the eggs, leaving the bottom two-thirds of the shells intact. Empty the shells (save the eggs for another time), then carefully wash them out. Decorate the shells with pens or paint, then leave them to dry. In this case acrylic paints were used, as they are colourful and dry quickly. But you could use felt tip pens (be careful not to press too hard) or dyes. You don't even have to paint them you could stick on the eyes straight to the unpainted egg shell, they still look great! If you're making these with a toddler or young child

you may need to hold the egg for them so they don't crack it.

Dip the cotton wool balls in a little water, squeezing off any excess. Place 1 ball inside each shell, then sprinkle 1 tsp cress seeds onto each one. Sit the filled shells in eggcups and leave in a dry, well-lit place for a week – a windowsill is perfect. Keep the seeds moist by sprinkling some water on daily with a teaspoon or mist spray. If you turn them round so they're eyes face the window sometimes it will help the 'hair' look more even, as the cress will grow towards the sun. The cress will start to grow within a few days, perfect for making egg & cress sandwiches.

Top tips for a healthy lunch box

- Always include fresh fruit and vegetables. Vary the selection to keep it interesting.
- Offer a variety of whole grain breads, rolls, pita bread and flat breads.
- Use ripe avocado as a spread instead of butter or margarine.
- Use reduced fat dairy foods. Cheese and yoghurt are ideal.
- Kids need a serving of protein at lunchtime. Ensure you include lean meat, egg, peanut butter, chickpeas or tuna.

- Add a chilled bottle of water and limit juice.

Keep it fresh - packing the lunchbox

It's important to keep food in the lunch box cold to inhibit the growth of harmful bacteria.

Pack the school lunch in an insulated lunch box and include a small freezer brick or freeze a bottle of water and pop it into the lunchbox to keep food cool also let's you make up the night before.

Curruthers will ensure that seasonal fruit and vegetables are delivered to each school allowing for provision of seasonal food for school lunches.

