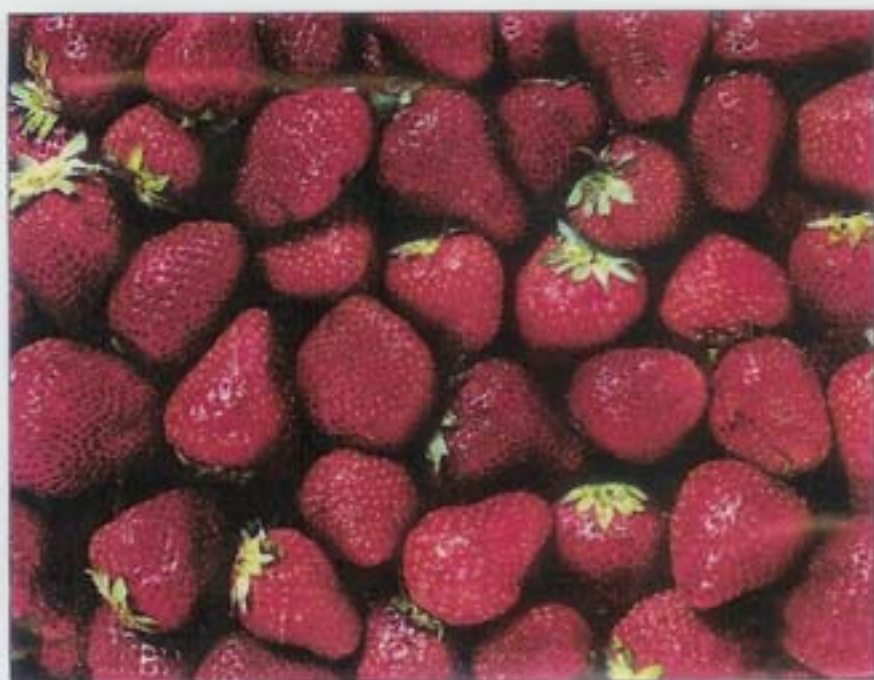


SEASON TREATS



Today's seasonal chef Guy Massey talks to **VIKKI RIMMER**

With Kent fruit growers throwing open their fields to the pick-your-own faithful, there's every excuse this month to fill your punnets with the king of soft fruits – the strawberry.

There are few things as quintessentially British as gobstopper sized strawberries dipped in cream and eaten while watching the last British hopeful drop shot his way out of Wimbledon!

Harvested in season, all fruits deliver peak flavour and value for money. At this time of the year there's an abundance of locally grown soft fruit available from the Kent fields, but my personal favourite for July barbecues, and afternoon tea is the Strawberry.

The strawberry is an amazingly versatile fruit, it has evolved to cope with different climates and grows a far a field as Sweden and Africa.

The plants share their ripe fruit around 35 days after flowering occurs and it's important to eat the softest of fruits as

soon after picking as possible. Kentish strawberries are served at Wimbledon each year and are picked the day before serving in order to retain the fulsome flavour and the important healthy nutrients.

Strawberries are good for you; they contain high levels of vitamin C in phosphates, potassium beta carotene and antioxidants.

They are low in fat and have a low calorie count. They've even been freeze dried and taken into space as nutritious snacks for weightless astronauts.

LAVENDER LUNCH

■ The Watermark Restaurant will be serving Lavender Lunches from June to September. Two courses £10, three courses £12.95. For more information log onto www.thewatermarkrestaurant.co.uk or call 01322 860300.



GUY MASSEY'S

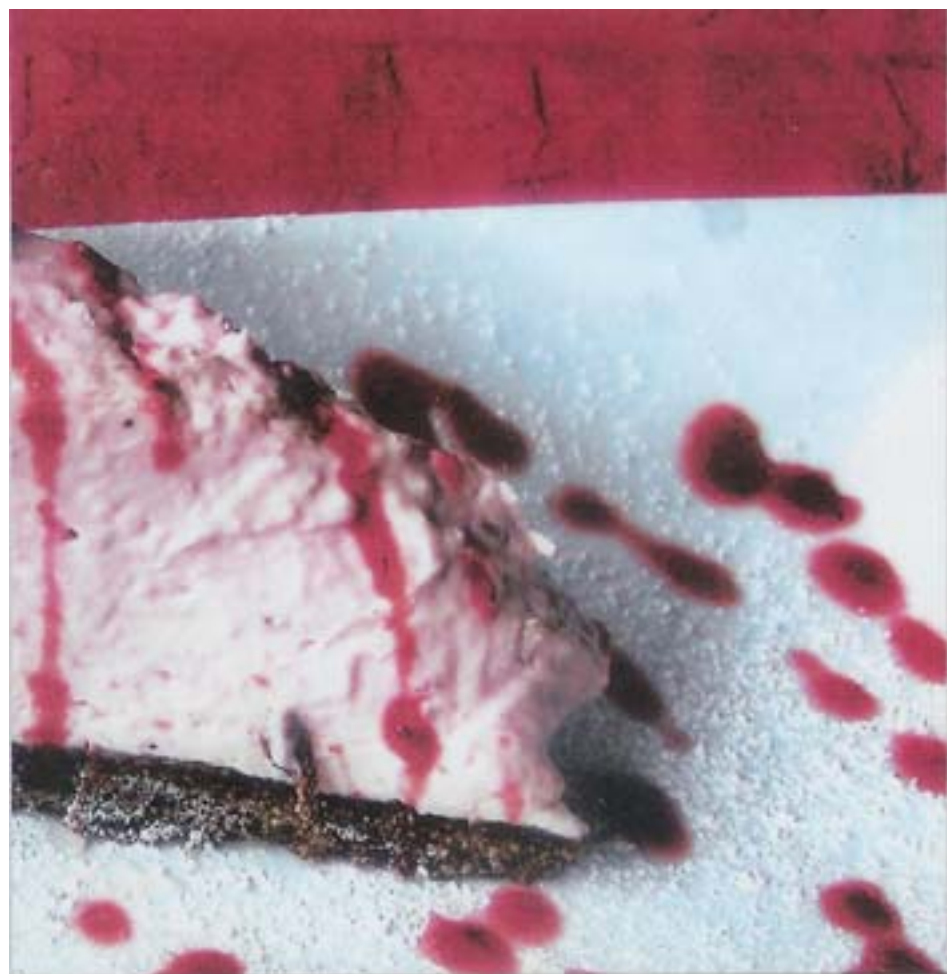
Purists like nothing more than to savour the strawberry with a dollop of cream or ice cream. Chantilly Strawberries is a quick and easy twist on the strawberries 'n' cream dessert. A simple twist on the strawberry and cream favourite is Chantilly Strawberries: Whip up half a pint of double cream with two tbsp of sugar, add five drops of vanilla essence and stir. Lace the strawberries with the cream, serve and enjoy.

And although for the purists strawberries are best enjoyed on their own, I like to dress things up a bit by bringing in some complementary flavours.

Lavender blends well with summer fruits, and having been introduced to Mediterranean cuisine last summer at The Hop in nearby Shoreham, I've been chomping the bit to experiment with the fresh flowers this month.

It's important to remember that when experimenting with lavender to use sparingly – a light touch is needed so that the essence of the desert doesn't resemble potpourri soap!

Home made lavender ice cream works really well with fresh Kent strawberries. There are many ways to make ice cream but for the lavender ice cream we served at the restaurant we looked to Martha Stewart for inspiration.



FOOD FOR JULY

LAVENDER ICE CREAM

INGREDIENTS

6 egg yolks
4oz sugar (125g)
Vanilla pod
8fl oz of milk
8 fl oz cream
2 tablespoons of lavender flowers or 1 drop of lavender essence
2 tablespoons of honey

METHOD

1. Combine milk, honey and lavender in a medium sized saucepan and bring gently to the boil, cover and remove from the stove. Let the milk mixture infuse with the lavender for between 5 minutes and an hour (depending on how strong you want the taste of lavender).

Strain to remove lavender.

2. Beat the eggs and sugar until thick and pale. Return the milk to the saucepan and simmer. Add half the warmed milk to the eggs and sugar and whisk. Stir in the remainder and blend. Cook over a low heat, stirring all the while, until the mixture coats the back of the spoon.

3. Remove from heat and stir in the cream. Place the bowl in another bowl of cold water to cool. Freeze in an ice cream maker.

■ For a strawberry twist, before transferring to airtight container and freezing, pour 1/2 cup of fresh strawberries for a fantastic treat.

STRAWBERRY AND LAVENDER CHEESECAKE

CRUST INGREDIENTS (Makes 12 servings):

1 cup digestive biscuit crumbs
1/3 cup melted butter
1/4 cup sugar

FILLING INGREDIENTS:

1 cup crushed strawberry juice
1/4 cup water
2 (1/4-ounce) envelopes unflavored gelatin
1 1/2 cups sugar
5 large eggs, slightly beaten
1/2 cup Butter, softened
2 (8-ounce) packages softened cream cheese
1/2 cup whipping cream
Lavender sprigs
Lavender essence or 3 teaspoons of lavender syrup

METHOD

1. Mix your crust ingredients in a bowl, press into the bottom of a 9inch cheesecake mould. Combine the strawberry juice, water, 2 drops of lavender essence and gelatin. Let it stand.

2. Add sugar and eggs and cook over a medium heat stirring all the time until the mixture comes to a gentle boil. Set aside. In a separate bowl, combine butter and cream cheese, beat, then gradually add the strawberry and gelatin mixture. Refrigerate.

3. Beat half a cup of chilled whipping cream in a mixer until stiff peaks form.

4. Garnish with lavender sprigs and serve with whipped cream.

UNCORKED

A SWEET TREAT

Wine is usually sipped until it's time to cut the cheesecake – there's another level of decadence that fewer people experience – enjoying wine with dessert, or as a separate course before or after dessert.

A good dessert wine can stand alone as a delightful treat for those who require a sugary ending. While it can easily be drunk on its own, there is no reason why it has to be.

The problem of pairing wine and food seems to be one that bothers many people but should not as wine and food generally work well together. Food and wine matching is all about choosing complementary flavours and tastes. Balance is the key so choose a wine that is sweet as the dessert or even sweeter.

Good wine comes from terroir and local food is best complemented by local wines. The Kentish fruit in the cheesecake works well with Chapel Down's Botrytic Nectar (£8.99), a light-alcohol and deliciously aromatic sweetie from Tenterden. This wine is perfect for lighter tarts as well. Also recommended with the cheesecake is the Mount Horrocks Cordon Cut Riesling (£15.99), one of Australia's outstanding and rare dessert wines. There are no botrytis, but the wine is extraordinarily complex and balanced with subtle hints of mayflowers, honey, pineapple and apricot.

Served chilled, Sauternes from Chateau de la Peyre (£9.99) is also a treat with this cheesecake. Sweet and intense, this wine comes from botrytis grapes with a singular richness full of pineapples, peaches, syrup and spice. A great New World alternative is De Bortoli's Noble One Botrytis Semillon (£16.99) from Australia with a pungent bouquet of apricot, orange, kumquat and citrus with hints of creamy vanilla oak.

With its succulent and complex flavours of pear, citrus and dried mango, the exquisite and subtle lavender cream should not be overpowered so we recommend the Yering Station Late Harvest Pinot Gris (£11.99) – also served chilled with chilli dishes. For a treat with the ice cream – and something unusual on British dinner tables – try either the Rheingau Schloss Vollraus Auslese (£32.99) or Barbeito's Madeira Single Cask 276 (£18.99) Madeira. The Madeira made for a delicious synergy when we poured it over this ice cream. Finally, Taittinger's rich gourmet Demi-Sec Champagne (£30.99) also works well with this ice cream. The sweetness and richness imparted by the dosage make it a valuable accompaniment. Champagne is one of the most versatile wines in food matching and will accompany many other desserts as well.

Written by James W...

■ The Secret Cellar, 43-45 Church Road, Tunbridge Wells
Tel 01892 537 961
sales@thesecretcellar.co.uk

