

A Red and Orange Glow in Winter

As the red and orange leaves of Autumn rapidly disappear it is wonderful to be able to add some of that vibrancy to the winter dinner table. Both these dishes use readily available root vegetables to great effect, bringing out a red and orange glow that will cheer everybody. The barbecued carrot salad is a revelation to me, it is so simple and the grill marks look great. Barbecuing the carrots really brings out the colour and the sweetness of the carrots and contrasts well with an olive oil /vinegar salad dressing. In winter when salad leaves are not very tender it might be best to admit defeat and use in season vegetables, such as fennel, kohlrabi and carrots in a salad. The carrots don't need to be blanched, simply slice them at approximately 2-3 mm thickness lengthwise, brush with olive oil and BBQ on a low setting for about 15-20 minutes. Toss the grilled carrots with an extra virgin olive oil and red wine vinegar dressing with chopped fresh mint. Dried mint works well too and extra green can come in the way of some roughly chopped parsley.

The beetroot orzotto, a barley "risotto", is a stand alone dish that is not only tasty and nutritious but deeply satisfying. The orzotto is cooked first with a portion of the beetroot that is puréed and a little red wine. The cooked diced beetroot is added at the end to inject a bit more red and beetroot flavour to the dish.

Beetroot Orzotto

For Two

- 2 medium beetroots
- 1 cup barley
- 2 shallots, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, finely diced
- olive oil
- sprig of fresh thyme
- dash of red wine
- 1 L chicken or vegetable stock
- soft goat's cheese (suggest Holy Goat Silk) and/or feta cheese
- parsley to garnish

Peel the beetroot and cut into small dice. Put the beetroot and a little olive oil into a small enamel casserole with a lid and bake in the oven at 170°C until tender (approx. 20 minutes). Remove one third of the beetroot and blitz it with a stick blender until smooth. Heat the chicken stock in a small saucepan to simmering. Sauté the shallots in olive oil until translucent. Add the barley, stirring it for a few minutes to coat in olive oil and to toast it. Add a dash of red wine and then most of the chicken stock. Add the garlic and thyme leaves and stir. Cook the barley for approx 30-40 minutes, adding additional stock as needed. When close to tender (it will always be a little more toothsome than an *al dente* risotto), add a dash of olive oil and give the barley a vigorous stir to coax out the starch. Finally, add the diced cooked beetroot and warm through with a little of the cheese to melt it. Plate out the orzotto and garnish with the rest of the cheese and parsley leaves.

