

White Strawberries

You might be tempted to think that white strawberries are a modern monstrosity but they are in fact a hybrid variety created from a natural white strawberry indigenous to Chile. Why all the excitement about a white version of strawberry? Attributes of the white strawberry include an amazing perfume, a small berry size with a delicate soft texture and a lovely, lovely flavour. Just close your eyes, pop one in your mouth and experience real flavour and luscious berry texture. I'm sure you will be convinced. Being white allows some creative opportunities. A white wedding cake with a mass of berries with their blush of pink could look magnificent. Pair white strawberries with a red or a green colour focus – think jellies, sorbet or the intense green of a matcha roll cake. White strawberries look great with chocolate too. Here I have made a bavarois with red strawberries to contrast the white strawberries.

[Gippsland Strawberries](#) are selling their white (Blush) strawberries now at farmers markets around bayside Melbourne, including VegOut St. Kilda. Check their Facebook posts for upcoming market attendance. Alternatively, if you have a green thumb then take a trip out to [The Diggers Club at Herronswood, Dromana](#) and buy some midi pots of [strawberry "Pineberry"](#) to cultivate.



Trifling With Prosecco

Prosecco has been in the news lately with Italy trying to ban the use of the name for anything other than the Italian sparkling wine made in the Prosecco designated area in Northern Italy. This is unfortunate for the King Valley growers in Victoria, many of Northern Italian heritage themselves, who have been hugely successful with their Prosecco. Technically I think the fact that Prosecco is the name of the grape variety, until the recent back peddling name change by Italy, gives us some legitimacy but trade negotiations are complex and open to significant compromises

and trade offs. While not a trifling matter for our Prosecco producers I think we should be confident with the quality of our products by using our own regional names if we have to. In the meantime a Melbourne summer calls for some chilled Prosecco, whether as an aperitif or with a plate of Australian grilled prawns or other seafood or light salads lunches on the terrace. It's popular for a reason; it's crisp fresh taste is appealing in many situations. I have even done my bit of trifling with Prosecco and used it to make a wine sabayon (French) or zabaglione (Italian) cream. Flavoured with orange zest, chilled and folded through with whipped cream it is a wonderful dessert served in a glass with sliced strawberries or layered with sponge fingers and fruit for, you guessed it, a trifle. Serve with a King Valley Prosecco of course.

Strawberry Orange Prosecco Trifle

- 4 egg yolks
- 150 g caster sugar
- zest of an orange
- 300 ml prosecco or white wine
- juice of three large oranges
- 300 ml thickened cream
- 1 500 g packet Unibic sponge finger biscuits
- 3 punnets strawberries

To make the zabaglione place the egg yolks, 100 grams of the sugar, orange zest and 250 ml of the prosecco in a bowl that fits securely over a saucepan of gently simmering water and whisk the contents until thickened. Be careful not to overcook the cream. Cool the thickened zabaglione and place in the fridge to chill. Squeeze the oranges into a small saucepan and add the sugar. Reduce over medium heat to 2/3 of the original

volume. Cool and add 50 ml prosecco to the reduced juice and pour into a flat bowl large enough for soaking sponge finger biscuits. Whip the cream to soft peaks and fold through the zabaglione. Hull the strawberries and halve them or slice the larger ones. Now you are ready to assemble the trifle. In a large deep glass bowl arrange the sponge fingers, soaking one at a time in the orange juice, vertically around the sides of the dish. Place strawberry halves, cut side facing outwards, in between the sponge fingers. Place some fingers in the base of the bowl. You may have to break them in half to do this. Place a quarter of the cream on the base followed by the strawberries and a layer of sponge fingers. Continue layering, finishing with a layer of cream on the top. You can decorate the top with more fruit if you wish but best to do that just before serving with fresh strawberries, blueberries, mint leaves or nothing at all. Ultimately you are going to serve large spoonfuls of the trifle in a bowl which will taste great but is not the most photogenic of desserts. Chill the assembled trifle overnight for best results.



Plum Galette

A galette is a flat pastry cake that is baked on a tray in free-form unlike a tart which is defined by the distinctive border of the tart mould. A galette is supposed to look a bit rustic in appearance and is often made with whole grain flours, which adds some nuttiness to the taste but the base is really a vehicle for showcasing the ripeness of seasonal stone fruit. Having said that, galettes also work well with blueberries and even strawberries and raspberries, but I think plums really make the nicest sweet galette; when cooked this way plums not only look luscious, they really are. If you have

a garden with a fruit tree dripping with juicy plums (there are still a lot of plum trees around suburban Melbourne) you would definitely want one of these plum galettes cooling on your kitchen table. You can of course buy small, sweet Angelina plums but I like the idea of putting garden plums to good use, so if you have some give this ago. The pastry for this galette is really a rough puff pastry made by rolling chilled diced butter into the flour and then folding the dough over into thirds and rolling it, a bit like you would when making a puff pastry but with way less butter and way less time. The pastry should have tiny lumps of butter still visible in the dough as these will give the pastry the desired flakiness. By taking the time to roll then fold the dough and chill it at each stage of preparation you will be rewarded with a really lovely texture but if you can't be bothered you can just pulse it in a food processor until it just comes together and then chill it. If pastry is just not your thing then maybe try [Careme spelt short crust pastry](#).

(Backyard) Plum Galette

makes one 20 cm diameter free-form galette, enough for 4 people

- 175 g spelt flour
- 115 g unsalted butter
- 2 tsp chilled water
- 10 small ripe plums
- 2 tbs caster sugar
- 1 sachet Hoyt's vanilla sugar
- pinch cinnamon
- 3 tbs ground almonds
- 1 egg for brushing pastry plus extra sugar for

sprinkling on rim

To make the pastry: cut the butter into dice and chill it in the freezer while while you weigh out the ingredients. Place the flour and butter on a clean bench and using a rolling pin, roll the butter into the flour, drawing it together. Mix the quark with the water to loosen it and pour over the dough. Fold the dough over and roll it again, forming a rectangle. Fold it into thirds and roll it out again. Repeat this process twice more. Fold and roll the pastry as best you can into a thick flat disc and wrap in plastic and chill in the fridge for an hour. Halve the plums by running a small paring knife around the middle right to the stone (at right angles to the stem) and then twist the plum in half. Remove the stone. Keep about 10 halves intact and quarter the rest. In a bowl mix the sugars and spice together and gently mix in the plums and set aside.

Line a baking tray with baking paper. Roll the pastry between two pieces of baking paper to form a circle of about 4 mm thickness. Return to the fridge to chill for 15 minutes. Remove the pastry disc and sprinkle the with ground almonds leaving a 4 cm border. Arrange the plum halves in the centre and fill in the gaps and perimeter with the quartered plums. Cut the pastry with short 4 cm cuts to form a broad fridge and fold over the flaps to create the rim of the galette. Briefly chill the galette again for 10 minutes before baking. In the meantime heat the oven to 170°C fan forced. Brush the rim of the galette with beaten egg and sprinkle with sugar. Bake for 25 minutes. Serve as is, the juice from the plums is luscious enough!

Cherry Quark Strudel

The wild, wet weather we have been having might mean a short cherry season. Much of the fruit may be split due to rain and will be dumped and remaining fruit may have a shorter shelf life. Premium cherries will command a higher price as a result but other cherries are still good eating but best stored in the fridge or made into a compote for a Christmas dessert such as a cherry strudel. Making a traditional strudel is a bit of an art, requiring a little practice in stretching the dough to paper thinness in order to be rolled over the the filling multiple times. Bought filo pastry does the job quite well but is not quite *echt*, being very thin and brittle as well as tasting a little different. You could go the bought puff pastry route which is fine too but if you really want something genuinely Austrian and don't want to make the pastry from scratch the closest I have found to the real deal is [Irene's Traditional Greek Pastry](#) found in the freezer compartment of supermarkets. I thaw it overnight in the fridge and then leave it out all day until it is at room temperature, soft and pliable. You need to do this so it can stretch without breaking. With two people it is easier to roll it out over a old flour-dusted tablecloth and then using your hands underneath the dough stretch it out to cover the surface, about one metre square or thereabouts. For the filling I use a mix of pitted cherries lightly poached in their own juice and a traditional Austrian pastry cream made with a mix of quark cream cheese, sugar and eggs. The cherry strudel can be baked in advance and reheated for 10 minutes at 180°C before serving, making it a practical Christmas dinner dessert.

Cherry Quark Strudel

serves 12-14

Cherry Compote

approx. 8 cups pitted fresh cherries See [Cherry Season Cake](#)

Quark (Topfen) Filling

- 500 g quark (I recommend [Schulz Organic Quark](#))
- 4 eggs, separated
- 100 g caster sugar
- zest of a lemon
- 4 tbs semolina

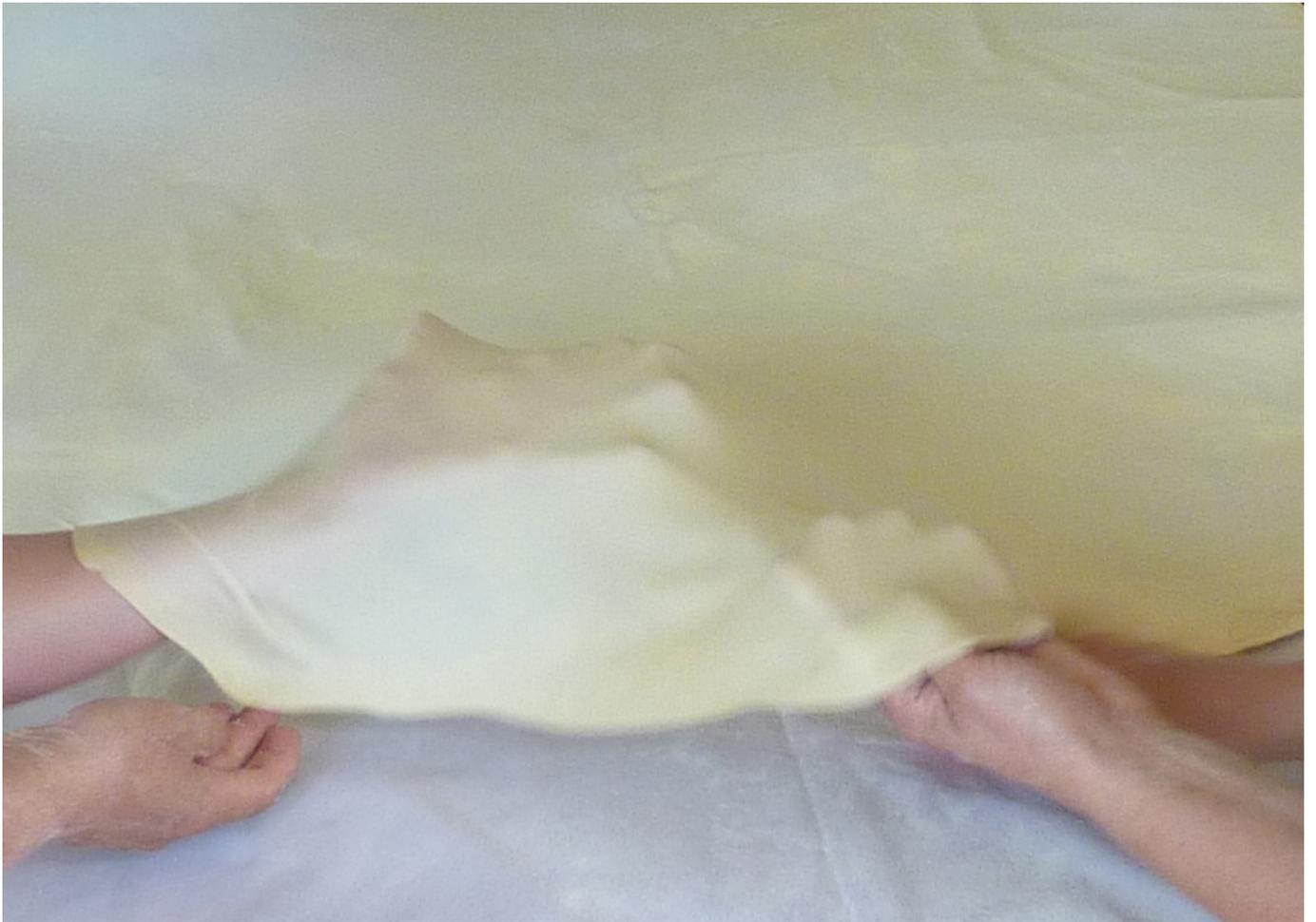
For The Strudel

- 1/2 packet of [Irene's Traditional Greek Pastry](#) (left to soften completely at room temperature)
- 125 g unsalted butter, melted
- approximately 2 handfuls toasted bread crumbs or panko

Prepare the fresh cherry compote ahead of time and make sure it is chilled.

To make the quark filling: Beat the egg whites with a pinch of salt until stiff and set aside. Beat the egg yolks with the sugar and lemon zest until thick and pale. Add the quark and beat until combined. Fold in the egg white and semolina.

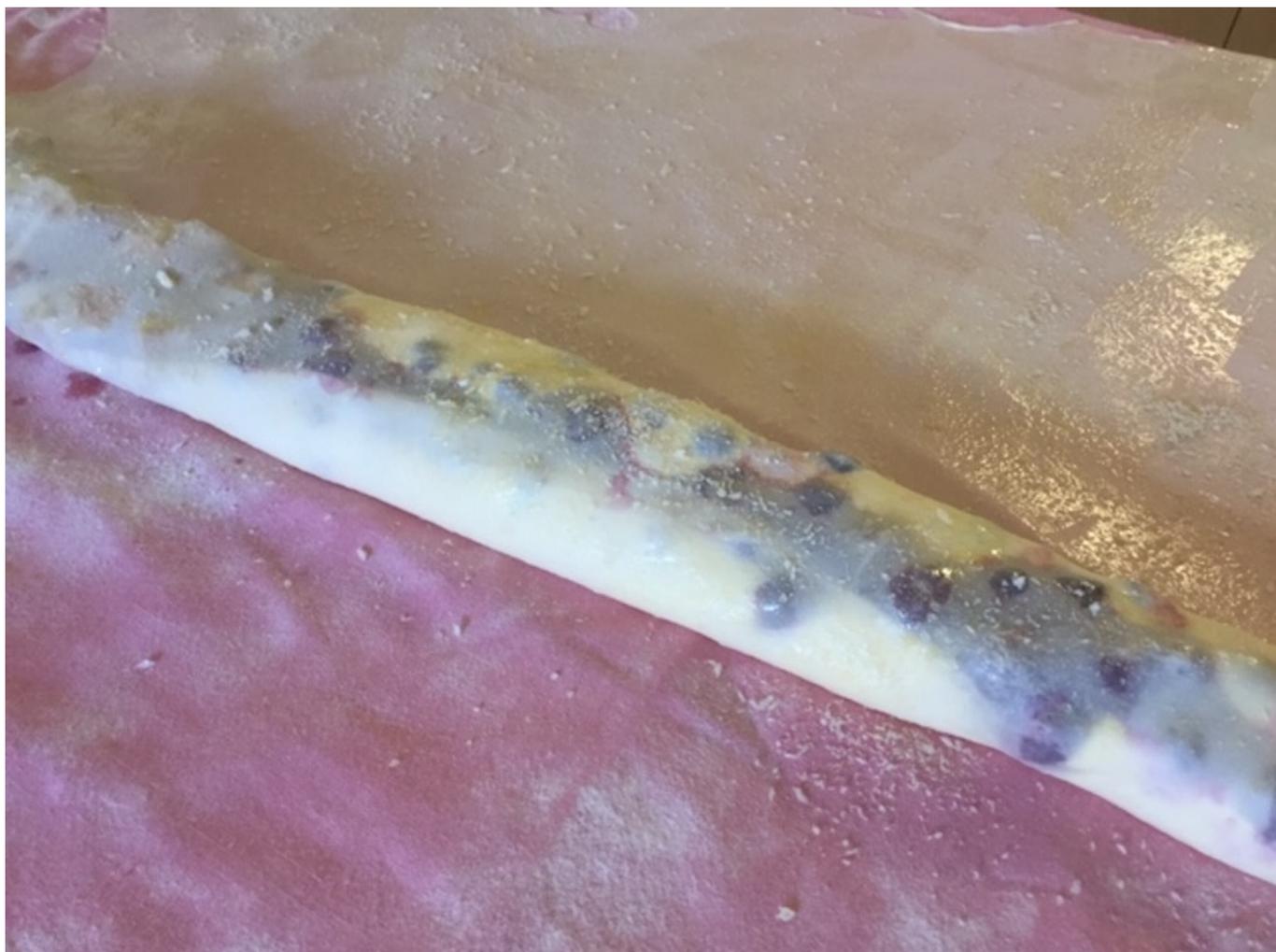
To assemble the strudel: Preheat the oven to 180°C. Melt the butter in a small saucepan. Spread an old tablecloth or sheet on the table and dust with flour. Roll out the pastry on the dusted cloth as much as possible, working from the middle to the edges. Brush lightly with melted butter. Remove any watches and rings that may catch on the pastry and using the pads of your fingers gently stretch the dough from underneath, so that covers approximately a metre square of the table top. Doing this with two people is easier.



Trim the thick edges of the pastry with a small knife or scissors and discard. Brush the stretched out pastry with melted butter and sprinkle with breadcrumbs. Place the quark filling in a band along one end of the pastry and place the cherries on top.



Using the tablecloth, fold the filled end over onto the pastry and roll it over again. Brush the top with melted butter and sprinkle with breadcrumbs. Continue this process until you reach the end.



Place the long roll on a baking sheet lined with baking paper, laying it in a horseshoe shape to fit the sheet. Bake in the oven for 10 minutes at 180°C, then rotate the baking sheet for even baking and turn down the oven to 160°C and bake for a further 20 minutes. Cool then cut into portions dusted with icing sugar. Serve with whipped cream.

Cherry Season Cake

It's cherry season and the lovely ruby red fruits are a beautiful festive reminder that Christmas is not far off. A big bowl of cherries makes a wonderful addition to the Christmas lunch table that is particularly enjoyed by children

and anyone not up to tackling the Christmas pudding but cherries can also take centre stage in many ways. A simple compote of pitted fresh cherries can be chilled overnight and served with ice cream as a great dessert for a hot Christmas day or the compote can be folded into mascarpone for a trifle or whipped cream for a filled sponge cake. I thought a cake would be nice to try out. For my seasonal cherry sponge I decided on a white chocolate ganache marbled with a little of the reduced cherry juices obtained after poaching and some fresh cherries with stems attached to complete the decoration. The red and white of this fresh cherry cake really says Christmas to me.

Cherry Season Sponge Cake

serves 12

For The Cherry Compote

- 4-5 cups of pitted cherries (make sure you check that the pips are removed as you pit them)
- 1/2 cup sugar

Heat the pitted cherries and sugar gently, stirring occasionally until the sugar dissolves.

Cook gently for 10 minutes and then pour the cherries into a sieve, draining the liquid into a bowl. Return the liquid to the saucepan and reduce over the heat by about half, cool and place in a separate container to the cherries and refrigerate both overnight.

For The Sponge Cake

- 12 eggs, separated
- pinch salt
- 12 tbs sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 12 tbs

- cake flour *

Butter and line two 28 cm sponge pans with baking paper

Preheat the fan forced oven to 150°C.

Using an electric beater beat the egg whites with a pinch of salt. When the eggs start to foam, slowly add the sugar and beat until the peaks are firm but the very top still droops. Add the egg yolks and vanilla with a slow speed until mixed through. Fold in the sifted flour with a large spatula with a cutting motion to maintain air in the batter. Divide the batter over the two sponge pans and bake for 15-18 minutes.

Cool in the pan for 5 minutes and then remove to a wire rack to cool completely.

For The Ganache

- 170 g white chocolate couverture buttons
- 150 ml thickened cream
- 100 ml approximately reduced cherry juices

Place the white chocolate button in a mixing bowl. Heat the cream in a small saucepan until bubble start to form around the edges. Pour the hot cream over the white chocolate buttons. Stir until melted.

To Assemble The Cake

- 450 ml thickened cream
- cherry compote
- whole cherries with stems for decoration

Whip the cream until stiff. Fold in the chilled cherry compote and spread over the base of one sponge cake. Top with the remaining sponge cake. When the ganache has cooled but still fluid dribble on some reduced cherry juices and pour over the cake. Top with whole cherries. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

*Cake Flour: remove 2 tbs from 1 cup of plain flour and replace it with 2 tbs cornflour. Sift to mix well.