

Sweet Fennel Tarts

Another from Mark Hix which sounds enticingly interesting. It originated from a pastry chef at The Ivy (wherever that is). It might sound a bit of a wacky dessert, but M. Hix thinks it's absolutely delicious.

Planning

serves:	4
prep time:	25 mins
cooking time:	80 mins

Ingredients

2 large/4 medium fennel bulbs, trimmed
2 tsp fennel fronds, chopped (or fresh dill)
300g caster sugar
320g pack ready-rolled all-butter puff pastry
4 tsp icing sugar for dusting
15g unsalted butter, cut into rough pieces
vanilla ice cream, to serve

Method

Put the fennel bulbs into a saucepan with the caster sugar. Cover with enough water to submerge them. Bring to the boil and simmer gently for 1 hour, or until the fennel is soft to the point of a knife. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool in the syrup.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6. Line a baking tray with parchment paper. Unroll and lay the sheet of puff pastry on a clean surface. Cut the pastry into four 13cm round discs and prick all over with a fork.

Put the discs on the lined baking tray. Cover with a second sheet of baking parchment. Add a wire cooling rack on top so they don't rise while cooking. Bake for 4 minutes, then remove the rack and top piece of paper and turn the discs over. Place the baking parchment and rack back on top and return to the oven for another 4 minutes. Take the tart bases out of the oven and put them aside.

Remove the cooled fennel bulbs from the liquid. Strain 250ml of the cooking syrup through a fine-meshed sieve into a clean saucepan. Simmer the syrup over a medium heat until it has reduced by two thirds - it needs to be clear but starting to thicken. Remove from the heat and leave to cool a little.

Cut the fennel bulbs in half lengthways, then cut each half lengthways into $\frac{1}{2}$ cm slices.

To assemble the tarts, arrange the fennel slices in a thin layer on top of the pastry bases, covering the circles entirely. Evenly dust the tarts with the icing sugar and top each with pieces of butter, using them all up. Bake for 7-8 minutes, until the edges of the pastry are starting to go golden. Remove from the oven.

Stir the fennel fronds (or dill) into the cooled syrup and spoon this over the tarts. Serve the tarts immediately with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.