



SUSSEX PESTO WITH WILD MUSHROOMS

Lewes-based John Bayley - a well-respected vegan and vegetarian cook with his own catering company (Cashew Catering), and the Head Chef at Tilton House, talks Gerry Warner through this fabulously easy recipe

John explains that the ingredients for this recipe can be harvested from the Downs, your back garden, or you can just replace the wild greenery with a mixture of your favourite herbs. On the Downs right now (especially around the South-erham fields) we are coming to the end of the wild oregano carpeting this area but if you look hard you should still be able to find some. Nettles are everywhere still (use the tops and blanch them quickly), there should be plenty of plantain and dandelion in most grassy areas. Likewise with the mushrooms - but never consume a wild mushroom that you're not 100% certain is safe to eat - if in doubt leave it out. Alternatively choose a selection from a supermarket - John uses button, cremini and oyster for this. The mushroom season will soon be upon us and we are spoilt for excellent foraging sites in this area - with one of the kings of edible fungi, the cep, being abundant during a good season. John caters for weddings and private functions, provides vegan and raw food workshops and courses (look out for his events as part of the Lewes OctoberFeast programme) and writes a mean blog about his culinary adventures (cashewcatering.co.uk).

"Healthy, nutritious food doesn't have to be boring, difficult or expensive - it can be fun, creative and exciting."

Sussex pesto with wild mushrooms

For the pesto:

2 packed 'cups' of wild herbs/leaves - incl.

oregano, nettles, plantain or dandelion
 ½ cup of extra virgin olive oil
 ½ cashews - toasted if you prefer (or similar: pine nuts, sunflower seeds etc)
 ½ cup nutritional yeast flakes (available from all good health food shops)
 ½ cup water
 1 tbs white wine vinegar
 1 tsp salt
 1 clove garlic peeled

Using a food processor, put the garlic and the oil in first and process until the garlic is well minced, then add all the other ingredients and process until the nuts are breadcrumb-sized. All done - this should make enough to last a few days and can be stored in the fridge for at least a week.

For the mushrooms:

500g of your favourite wild or cultivated mushrooms - cleaned and sliced (this is a very hearty portion for one, or a modest amount for two to share)

2 or 3 cloves of garlic - minced. Plenty of oil for frying. Salt to taste

Heat a large frying pan and add the oil and the mushrooms and fry for about 3-4 minutes, then add the garlic and fry for another 2 or 3 minutes, stirring regularly to stop the garlic sticking and burning. Remove from the heat and serve.

This would also be lovely served with a poached egg, chunky bread and perhaps some steamed kale or similar!