

SPRING VEGETABLES

HOME gardeners now have their reward for hard work in the vegetable garden; delicious spring vegetables are coming forward in plenty.

Cook vegetables only until just tender; on no account overcook them. There is a peak of flavour developed in the cooking of every vegetable; go beyond that point and the flavour deteriorates, and the colour fades.

Asparagus

This is not so often home-grown; but it seldom stays long in market or shop, so is generally fresh. It is best served as a course by itself, especially when it first comes into season. Cut the stalks to a convenient and uniform length, wash carefully and tie in bundles. Stand them upright in a saucepan containing enough boiling water to cover the white part. The tips will cook in the steam. Add a little salt to the water, and cook gently for 25 to 30 minutes, or till tender. Untie the bundles, and serve each person's quota in an individual dish, with a piece of toast underneath, to absorb any water. Pour a little hot melted butter over. Or arrange on buttered toast and put crisp grilled bacon on top.

Asparagus Spring Salad

This is delicious. Pile up cooked asparagus on individual salad plates, allowing about six stalks to each person. Arrange crisp heart-leaves of lettuce round, and pour over a little French dressing, mixed with minced chives. Sprinkle with tiny crisp croutons of bread fried in butter, and garnish with red radishes peeled backwards to look like flowers.

Asparagus Cigarettes

These make delightful savouries. Prepare some thin triangular pieces of fresh white bread, spreading very sparingly with butter, and dusting with grated cheese. On these place cooked asparagus tips, about 3 inches long, and roll them up. Brush with melted butter and grill a light brown all over. If preferred, the "cigarettes" may be fried brown in a little butter.

Scalloped Asparagus

One bunch asparagus, 2 cups milk, 2 tablespoons butter, 1 cup breadcrumbs, 2 tablespoons flour, 4 hard-boiled eggs. Cut the asparagus into inch lengths, soak in cold water for half an hour, then boil half an hour. Make a sauce of the butter, flour and milk, chop the eggs finely and add to the sauce. In a buttered dish put a layer of asparagus, then a layer of sauce, then breadcrumbs, and repeat till the dish is full, finishing with breadcrumbs on top. Bake a golden brown in a moderate oven.

Cooking Young Peas

1. Put the shelled peas into boiling water, adding a few of the washed pods,

which help to give flavour. When half cooked, add a few sprigs of mint, a little sugar and salt. Drain when cooked, add a good knob of butter, and shake gently over low heat until the peas are coated with butter.

2. Take several outside leaves of lettuce, wash them well and lay in bottom of saucepan, with water clinging to them. Put the young peas on top, and gradually bring to the boil. No water need be added, as the juice from the lettuce leaves provides moisture enough. Cook over a low heat, and serve with a knob of butter melted on top. Peas cooked in this way have a delicious flavour.

Young Carrots and New Peas

Wash the young carrots, leaving them whole, unless large, when they may be split down lengthwise. Put them into a saucepan with sufficient boiling, salted water to cover well, and allow to cook steadily. When nearly tender, add the peas, a sprig or two of mint, a dash of sugar, and a walnut of butter, and simmer till both vegetables are cooked. Then strain and thicken the liquid with cornflour mixed with milk, adding chopped parsley before pouring it over the dished carrots and peas. In this way the mineral salts in the water are not wasted. Eaten with small new potatoes, wholemeal bread and butter and cheese, this is a really delicious meal.

FROM THE MAILBAG

Christmas Puddings for England

Dear Aunt Daisy,

I should very much like to send Christmas Puddings to my friends in England this year. I fear I shall not have sufficient butter to make all the usual cakes, and should be so glad of your advice.

My idea is to cook the puddings in some sort of greaseproof paper and then a cloth, making them as nearly as possible the shape of the small sized cake tins in which I hope to send them, boil them and let them dry out thoroughly; then re-wrap them in plenty of greaseproof paper and seal them down in their tins.

Does this sound practical to you? Or could you make a better suggestion? The usual pudding basin would be the wrong shape and waste space. I must not run the risk of a failure; it would be too disappointing to the recipients as well as a shocking waste of valuable and scarce ingredients.

I do hope you will be able to help me.
"Dorothy."

I think your suggestion very good indeed; but the puddings may not stay quite the shape you fashion them; and be sure you leave room in the cloth for them to swell. Make them smaller than the tin, of course; you can fill up the spare spaces with paper.

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