

Baked brie with pecans, blackcurrants, honey and herbs

INGREDIENTS

SERVES 4-6

45g pecan nuts
250g wedge of brie
70g fresh or frozen blackcurrants
2tsp thyme leaves or finely chopped rosemary needles
3tsp blackcurrant vinegar or balsamic vinegar
3-4tsp runny honey

METHOD

1. Pre-heat the oven to 190°C/170°C fan/gas mark 5.
2. Put the pecans in a small oven dish and place in the oven for eight minutes, until toasted. Remove (leave the oven on), set aside to cool, then roughly chop.
3. Take a small baking dish, the right size to fit the piece of brie snugly. Slice the brie horizontally in half



(so you have two flat triangles). Put one half in the dish, cut side up. Take half the toasted pecans and press them gently into the cheese. Do the same with the blackcurrants (some will fall off the sides into the dish - that's fine, but try to get as many as possible on the cheese). Sprinkle over half the thyme or rosemary, then drizzle over half the vinegar and half the honey.

4. Put the other piece of brie on top, rind side upwards (so you have essentially sandwiched the cheese back together as the wedge it was). Press the remaining pecans and blackcurrants onto the top of the cheese (again, some will fall off). Drizzle over the remaining vinegar and honey and sprinkle with the remaining thyme or rosemary.

5. Bake for 10-15 minutes, or until the cheese has melted and spread out a little in the dish. Remove from the oven, leave for five minutes, then dive in with crackers or good crusty bread.

■ **The Botanical Kitchen** by Elly McCausland, photography by Polly Webster, is published by Bloomsbury Absolute, priced £26

Baked brie - gooey and straight from the oven - is the perfect crowd-pleaser if you've got guests round. This version by Elly McCausland pimps the classic with tangy blackcurrants, buttery pecans and fragrant herbs.

"I like to serve it with Scandinavian-style rye crackers but a good, crusty baguette is also an excellent vehicle for transporting cheese to mouth," she says.

"I highly recommend seeking out blackcurrant vinegar (I get it from demijohn.co.uk), but you could replace it with the more common raspberry vinegar, or a good, syrupy balsamic."

The recipe is in Elly's first cookbook, *The Botanical Kitchen*. It is packed with recipes celebrating fruits (like orchard fruit or berries), leaves (banana leaves, kaffir lime leaves and herbs), flowers (lavender, saffron and elderflower) and seeds (cardamom or poppy).

The dishes might feel a bit alien to many home cooks. After all, how often do you really cook with flowers?

"When I was describing the book to someone and said there was a chapter on flowers, they looked at me like I was a bit mad," Elly admits.

"However, I discovered lamb goes really well with lavender - just enough to get a slightly resinous, grassy taste, it really brings out the natural herbiness [of the meat]. Ditto with chicken and rose!"

