

Olia Hercules' curd cake with caramelised apples

All you need to do is add a mug of tea to the scrumptious curd cake with caramelised apples from Olia Hercules' new book.

"My friend once drunkenly asked me to cook for his dad Anton's 70th birthday, which I enthusiastically agreed to (also tipsy)," recalls the 36-year-old who was born in the south of Ukraine, before moving to Cyprus and later England.

"Anton grew up in Derby - his Polish father had settled there after the war, when he was demobbed from the Army. Sernyk, a traditional cheesecake eaten across Poland and Ukraine, was one of Anton's childhood favourites, something that connected him to his Polish heritage, so I decided that's what I would make.

"Struggling to find good-quality cottage cheese the day before, I panicked and bought ricotta, adapting my mum's original recipe to suit the moister texture of ricotta.

"Happily, it was a huge success, and this cake is now also one of my son's favourites. I hope someone will make it for him when he is 70."



Summer Kitchens by Olia Hercules is published by Bloomsbury, priced £26. Recipe photography by Joe Woodhouse.

INGREDIENTS

(SERVES 8-10)

200g unsalted butter, softened
200g apples, cored and sliced
1tbsp brown sugar
200g golden caster sugar
3 eggs, separated
1tsp vanilla extract
500g ricotta or good-quality cottage cheese
120g fine semolina or polenta
Pinch of salt

METHOD

1 Melt 25g of the butter in a frying pan over a medium heat, add the apples and cook for two to three minutes on each side until they start to turn golden. Sprinkle in the brown sugar and cook the apples for another minute on each side, then transfer the caramelised apples to a bowl and let them cool slightly.

2 Preheat your oven to 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas Mark 6 and grease a 20cm square or round cake tin with butter. Lay the apples in the base of the cake tin.

3 If, like me, you left your butter out in the kitchen overnight, but it was so blooming cold it didn't soften properly, cut the rest of it into small pieces. Whatever state the butter is in, put it into the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, along with 150g of the caster sugar, and whisk until it's looking fairly fluffy. Break the egg yolks with a fork and gradually add them, whisking well, then whisk in the vanilla extract and cheese. Transfer the mixture to another bowl, then fold in the semolina or polenta (the latter will result in a cake with more texture).



4 Wash and dry your mixer bowl and whisk attachment thoroughly, then put in the egg whites and whisk until they start frothing up. Add the remaining 50g of caster sugar and the salt and keep whisking until you have soft peaks. Now take a large spoonful of the egg white mixture and fold it quite vigorously into the butter and

cheese mixture to loosen it up. Add the rest of the egg white mixture and fold in gently. Pour the mixture over the apples in the cake tin and bake for 30 minutes, or until it is a little wobbly, but not liquid. Remember it will set more firmly as it cools.

5 Leave the cake in its tin to rest and cool down, then slice and serve. Some unsweetened tea with lemon goes perfectly with this.