



Nigel Slater's Christmas guide part 3: fish pie

More festive tips and recipes from Observer Food Monthly. Today, hot smoked fish and leek pie

Nigel Slater

Wed 29 Nov 2017 19.00 AEDT

It has long been a tradition in our house to have a fish pie on Christmas Eve. Every imaginable fish-in-a-crust - from a deep dish of creamy fish sauce with a crumble top to whole fillets of salmon wrapped in puff pastry - has been on the table the night before Christmas. This year we are having a new version with a filling you make in advance.

Hot smoked fish and leek pie

Serves 8

leeks 500g

butter 40g

plain flour 3 heaped tbsp

hot smoked salmon 250g

smoked mackerel 250g

double cream 500ml

new potatoes 300g

olive oil 4 tbsp
chopped parsley 3 tbsp
chopped tarragon 2 tbsp
puff pastry 375g
egg 1
nigella or sesame seeds 1 tbsp

You will need 2 large baking sheets and a piece of baking parchment.

Cut the leeks into discs 1cm in width, wash thoroughly, then put them in a deep heavy-based pan with the butter over a moderate heat. Let the leeks cook for eight to 10 minutes, covered with a round piece of greaseproof paper and a lid, so they cook in their own steam and soften without browning.

Gently warm the double cream in a small pan and remove from the heat. Add the flour to the leeks, stir and leave to cook for a couple of minutes then break the salmon and mackerel into large flakes and gently stir in to the leeks. Pour over the warm double cream and leave to cook over a low heat for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Slice the potatoes into thin coins, each about the thickness of a £1 piece. Warm the olive oil in a shallow pan then fry the potato slices on both sides over a moderate heat till golden. They should be soft inside. Fold the cooked potatoes into the fish and leek cream, season carefully with salt and black pepper, the chopped parsley and tarragon, transfer to a mixing bowl and leave to cool. Chill thoroughly in the fridge. (If you skip this step it is impossible to shape the pie.)

Set the oven at 200C/gas mark 6. Place one of the baking sheets upside down in the oven. Line the other one with baking parchment. Cut the pastry in half then roll out each piece to a rectangle to a rectangle 32cm x 22cm. Place one rectangle on the lined baking sheet. Pile the cold filling on top of the pastry, leaving a border on all four sides of at least 2cm. Smooth the top of the filling so you have a deep rectangle of mixture. Beat the egg in a small bowl or cup and brush the bare edges of the pastry generously.

Place the second sheet of pastry over the filling then press the edges of the two pieces of pastry firmly together to seal. It is important that they are well sealed, otherwise your filling will leak. Brush the top layer of pastry all over with the beaten egg, scatter with the nigella or sesame seeds then pierce a small hole in the centre with knife or the handle of wooden spoon. Place in the oven, the baking sheet on top of the hot, upturned one, and bake for 40 minutes till golden brown.

Leave to settle for 5 minutes before sliding off the baking sheet onto a serving board or dish, and slicing.

Adapted from The Christmas Chronicles by Nigel Slater (4th Estate, £26), the Guardian Bookshop's November book of the month. To order a copy for £19, go to guardianbookshop.com or call 0330 333 6846

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