

FENNEL AND SPINACH LASAGNE

The sauce for this lasagne is made from yoghurt, giving the dish a lighter texture. It has a wonderful combination of flavours. Use either fresh lasagne sheets or the type that needs no pre-cooking.

Serves 6

225g/8oz lasagne sheets
450g/1lb fresh spinach
6 medium bulbs fennel
2 large cloves garlic
2 teaspoons green peppercorns in brine
2 tablespoons olive oil
3 teaspoons fennel seeds
225g/8oz small, round white goat's cheese with rind
1 rounded tablespoon cornflour
2 tablespoons milk
150ml/¼ pint Greek-style yoghurt
2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan
salt and black pepper

Put the lasagne sheets (unless you are using the fresh kind) into a sink of hot water into which you have sprinkled a little cooking oil and leave them to soak – they should not be left for longer than 20 minutes or they will become too soft.

Wash the spinach and boil in salted water till limp. Drain thoroughly, pressing out excess liquid, and chop up small.

Cut the tough stalks and base off the fennel, and any marked outer parts, reserving the green leaves. Chop the fennel up into fairly small pieces and boil in salted water for a few minutes until softened. Drain. Peel and finely chop the garlic and roughly crush the green peppercorns in a pestle and mortar.

Heat the olive oil over a medium heat in a large, deep frying pan or a wide, heatproof casserole dish, add the garlic and fennel seeds and stir for a minute. Add the fennel, stir for another three to four minutes, then remove from the heat. Stir in the peppercorns and the drained chopped spinach and season with salt and a little pepper.

Place the soaked lasagne sheets in single layers on absorbent kitchen paper to drain. Butter a rectangular oven-proof dish, roughly 27.5 x 20cm (11 x 8in). Slice the goat's cheese across thinly without cutting off the rind.

Arrange a layer of lasagne sheets in the dish, then spoon one third of the fennel and spinach mixture over the lasagne. Arrange one third of the goat's slices on top. Lay on more lasagne and continue as before, ending with a layer of lasagne sheets.

Preheat the oven to 400P/200C/Gas 6. Put the cornflour into a saucepan, add the milk and stir until smooth. Then stir in the yoghurt. Put on to the heat and bring to the boil, stirring constantly in one direction only. Allow to bubble, still stirring, for two to three minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Spoon the stabilised yoghurt evenly over the lasagne and sprinkle with the grated Parmesan.

Cook in the centre of the oven for about 35 minutes, until speckled brown on top. Finally, garnish the edges with chopped fennel leaves before serving.

Anita Brookner: *Hotel du Lac*

'Miss Brookner is a shrewd observer who writes with beautiful precision and gently malicious wit. One should read *Hotel du Lac* slowly, enjoying each excellent sentence, as a convalescent with his appetite restored, might relish a small box of delicious sweetmeats.'

Sunday Telegraph

Edith Hope, 'a writer of romantic fiction under a more thrusting name', has fled in disgrace to a genteel, out of season Swiss hotel to recover from an act of uncharacteristic recklessness. She plans to use her time in exile to finish her latest novel but her fellow guests prove to be an irresistible distraction...

Compassionate, precise and elegantly written, *Hotel du Lac* won the 1984 Booker Prize.

'The book does honour to the Booker Prize, as well as the other way round. It is a smashing love story, very romantic, humorous, witty, touching, and formidably clever. Well done the judges.'

The Times

'It is hard to convey the great qualities of this novel. She has produced a classic, a book that will be read with pleasure a hundred years from now.'

Spectator

Hotel du Lac is written with a beautiful grave formality, and it catches at the heart.'

Hermione Lee, *Observer*

'This is a remarkable novel... her best so far.'

Victoria Glendinning, *Sunday Times*