

Every other month, Ric Smith and Steve Downey of specialist ingredients supplier Ritter Fresh share their sourcing expertise and hand-pick an exclusive recipe to show off the best seasonal produce



Mad as a March hare



RIC SMITH
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Research has informed me, that across Europe over five million hares are eaten each year making them, almost certainly, the most important game animal on the continent. I also learnt that hares are classified as at least risk by the European conservation bodies which monitors wildlife populations. Hares have always been hunted by man, traditionally with packs of beagle hounds whose superior stamina would inevitably win the day, or by the aristocracy who favoured using fast greyhounds and considered it a superior and noble sport. Just to make sure that it remained noble they banned all people of lesser rank from hunting in this way.

How can these beautiful animals survive such intense hunting? That they are fast and can run to evade capture is beyond doubt. They can reach speeds of 72 km/h which would have left Usain Bolt a distant figure even when he reached 44.72



km/h to become the fastest ever human. But speed isn't what enables the hare to tolerate such pressure on their numbers. If you look at the way they reproduce the answer becomes clearer.

The hare has always been a symbol of fertility, in fact the ancient Greeks associated it with the gods Dionysus and Aphrodite. Are these claims of extraordinary fertility founded? The facts make for an interesting read.

To slip in the collective noun, let's take a look at a drove of hares. The first thing to note is that they are promiscuous, both males and females mating with numerous partners. The scenario often seen in

spring of boxing hares was long believed to be males, (bucks) fighting for a partner. Now we know that it is actually females, (does) fending off unwanted suitors. When the doe is ready to mate she will set off on a long run with the bucks in pursuit. When only the fittest remains she accepts him as a mate.

Brown hares have a lengthy breeding season from January to August during which four or even five litters of between three or four leverets will be born. They are precocious, born with hair and eyes open. Dad has gone and mum does all of the rearing but it is unlike any other parenting. The doe will suckle her leverets once a day for five

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minutes shortly after sunset. Immediately they will disperse and only come together the following day at sunset. Four weeks later the young are weaned. Even before these four weeks are up she may have given birth to another litter as the doe is able to carry more than one litter at a time, re-mating whilst still pregnant.

The figures look great. One doe gives birth to maybe, 15 leverets, who are also breeding later in the same year. I can't do the maths but my electronic friend has told me that one doe could have about 50,000 relatives within five years allowing for a 50/50 split of sexes at birth. Impressive and maybe the ancient Greeks had a point as well as the answer to our conundrum. Below is a recipe from Rob Weston of La Trompette who uses a saddle of hare supplied by Ritter Fresh.

LINCOLNSHIRE HARE PITHIVIER, ROAST CAULIFLOWER, PUMPKIN, GARDEN CHARD, WALNUT KETCHUP

La Trompette, 3-7
Devonshire Road,
Chiswick, London W4 2EU

Ingredients

1 Hare jointed and boned
(legs, saddles, shoulders,
offal)

For The Farce
(makes 1 pithivier)

70g Meat
30g black pud
30g Diced lardo
30g shallots
30g ceps
1 egg
Half the offal

For the Pastry
(makes 6 pithiviers)

1kg plain flour
450g soft butter
30g salt



La Trompette's
Rob Weston

30g sugar
340ml whole milk

To prepare the pithivier

► Make the farce. Mince all ingredients then beat over ice for a smooth consistency
► Make the pastry: combine all the dry ingredients, add



Hare style:
Weston's Pithivier

butter and gradually add milk to make a dough.

► Roll out to 3mm
► Spread the farce generously over the pastry
► Place the loin of hare and a lozenge from a deboned leg on top, coat with more

farce and encase in the pastry.

► Egg wash the pithivier (we use just yolk and milk), place on cast iron tray.
► Place in pre heated oven at 210°C for 12 minutes
► Each pithivier yields 2 portions

To prepare the garnish

► Roast half a cauliflower from raw at 180°C for 30 minutes. Then baste in foaming butter
► Select a beautiful crescent of delicate pumpkin, roast with butter, chilli and rosemary. De-glaze with honey and sherry to finish.
► Use the bones from the hare to make a stock, add mushrooms and shallots then finish the sauce with the blood and blackberries
► Roast from raw 180 °C 30 mins baste in foaming butter
► Fresh chard we pick from our garden at Chiswick house
► Mushroom ketchup (Weston's secret recipe)