

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



# Cheeky thoughts



**RIC SMITH**  
Head of sales  
Ritter Fresh

Just brushing up on the anatomy of a beef cow it's clear that, roughly speaking, the further you get from the horns and the hoof, the tenderer the cut of meat. Fillet and sirloin are way off, flank and chuck much closer and definitely far tougher. With the game season coming to an end and spring still the far side of winter I was thinking about classic comfort food and, in particular, that little gem of a cut, the cheek. Weighing in at somewhere close to 500g per cheek, these support the above theory regarding toughness as they sit just below the horn, and are a muscle which is working for most of the day relentlessly chewing grass.

So they are energetic, which makes them tough as can be, and small, but what they lack in size and tenderness they more than make up for in flavour. Historically a cheaper cut of beef, I don't recall huge demand 20-plus years ago

Holy cow: beef cheeks are a cheap and flavoursome cut



but they are definitely 'en vogue' with chefs at the moment.

Not so many years ago you could pick these up for just a couple of pounds per kilo, but I'm afraid this has quadrupled as demand has grown. Rising costs for restaurants - rates, wages, rent and food - have combined to create a scenario where every penny counts. Beef cheeks are still a relatively cheap ingredient and with careful preparation the results can be spectacular as well as profitable. Several hours in the right hands and at the right heat

transform these tough nuggets into a dish fit for a king, delicious and so tender that they can be eaten with a spoon.

We source beef cheeks for Ritter Fresh from the lush green fields of Ireland. We used to encounter a frustrating situation where every second cheek had slashes through it where the abattoir men had checked the health of the meat. This isn't the case now and each cheek will have been carefully trimmed to produce a wonderful cut of meat ready to cook.

Freddy Bird is a busy chef who

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appreciates the quality of these cheeks. He has provided a recipe which perfectly illustrates the transformation that takes place when skill and patience are applied in the correct amounts.

## OX CHEEK SLOW-COOKED IN PEDRO XIMÉNEZ, KALE AND MASHED POTATO BY FREDDY BIRD

Lido Spa & Restaurant  
Oakfield Place  
Bristol BS8 2BJ  
0117 933 9530  
Serves 4

**Ingredients:**

- 2 ox cheeks, each cut in half
- 2 litres fresh chicken stock (made with a couple of pig's trotters)
- 300ml Pedro Ximénez
- 2 carrots, roughly diced
- 1 stick celery, roughly diced
- 1 large onion, roughly diced
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 sprig rosemary
- Salt and pepper



Applying skill and patience: Lido chef Freddy Bird



Slow food: ox cheek in Pedro Ximénez with kale and mash

► Lightly season and brown the cheeks in a little oil in a casserole dish. Set aside.  
► In the same pan add a little more oil and slowly cook the vegetables until caramelised,

add the garlic and rosemary, cook for a couple of minutes then add all the Pedro Ximénez. Do not add any salt at this point as you will be reducing the stock. Make sure that the

cheeks and vegetables haven't 'caught' on the bottom of the pan at any time. If they do, make sure you change the pot.  
► Reduce the Pedro Ximénez by about three quarters and

then add the stock and let this reduce over a medium heat to about one third of its original quantity. Now check the seasoning.  
► Pass through a sieve. Discard

the vegetables and reserve the liquid. Return the cheeks to the casserole dish, cover with the sauce. Slow cook at about 150°C-160°C for two and a half to three hours.  
► After three hours the cheeks should be tender and ready to fall apart and the sauce beautifully glossy. If it isn't, very carefully remove the cheeks, reduce the sauce to a glossy consistency and then return the cheeks to the pan.  
► For your mash, boil Maris Pipers until soft, strain and allow them to steam dry. Pass through a potato ricer and finish with seriously unhealthy amounts of butter and cream.  
► Serve on top of the mash with a little kale and a pool of sauce. Sprinkle with finely chopped chives to finish.