

"Matt Wilkinson makes you look at vegetables differently!"

- ERIC RIPERT, CHEF OF LE BERNARDIN



----- MR. -----

WILKINSON'S

VEGETABLES



A COOKBOOK TO CELEBRATE THE GARDEN

MATT WILKINSON

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Thank you so much for picking up this book and reading it. I have many cookbooks and not one person has thanked me for buying, reading or using them—so thank you. I hope that as you read it, you will be inspired by the same love of good food that inspires me every day.



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A GREEN THUMB

SO WHY A BOOK ON VEGETABLES, I HEAR YOU ASK

It's quite simple. Thinking about the vegetables first is how I cook. I look to the season we are in to get my ideas about what will be on the menu where I'm working or what I will eat at home that night and there is no better way to find out what is in season than looking at the often underrated vegetable. I build my dish around what vegetables are in season because this is when they will be the cheapest, most readily available and, most importantly, taste the best—and surely this has to be the most important factor when cooking. It's a simple concept that when things are in season they taste so much better ... But, then, how have we lost this simple thought process to eating? Look at each season. In spring, I walk into the garden and I feel alive—there is a fresh and crisp feeling in the air and soil, the trees are budding and their leaves have sprung forth. When I harvest the beans or peas from their stalks, there is a zingy snap to them—whether cooked or raw they taste so sweet. In summer, the earth is warmed and the plants almost hot to touch; with careful watering, they stay alert as though they are ready for battle. Just close your eyes and think of the smell of tomatoes—it's unmistakable and makes my mouth salivate waiting for the first bite. Autumn arrives and the mood around the garden softens, the plants are readying themselves for the cooler weather. The vegetable patch has had a great time; the basil, sorrel, spinach and Swiss chard are looking magnificent and the butternut squash and zucchini are still going great guns. When winter arrives, I add the year's compost and some manure to the soil and look at my blooming red cabbages that have been in the ground for so many months now. The broccoli is so alive and glowing such a deep green that I think I might harvest it for dinner tonight, and the salad leaves are crisp and so fresh.

Once I have decided what seasonal bounty to make the most of, and considered how the flavors will marry together, I then add the protein to my dish, usually meat or seafood, then some carbs if needed.

If you think back to times gone by, this was the way everyone had to eat. For most people, meat and seafood were not readily available, were too expensive or were hard to store (no fridges or freezers then). Over the past fifty years, technology has meant we can be a little lazy in our food thinking with great cuts of meat and seafood on hand. Today a lot of people think about what protein they feel like eating—will it be beef or chicken, fish or pork? Then what starch will be added to bulk out the meal and, as a final touch, throw in a few vegetables. This is where I'm a little different with my veg-first approach. I hope you feel inspired, while reading this book, to try the old-fashioned method to choosing the vegetable first. Vegetables are so much more diverse in flavor, types and availability than any old piece of meat.

MY FAVORITE VEGETABLES?

You might also be wondering how I arrived at the list of vegetables included in this book. Well, I can't begin to tell you how hard it was to select them. (In fact there is even one vegetable in the book that I do at times detest. I'll leave that one for you to discover, kind of a *Where's Waldo* element to

the book.) But let me tell you about some vegetables I didn't have room to include: the sweet, earthy and diverse celeriac (celery root) and its sweeter, sexier looking cousin, celery; the Welsh national emblem vegetable, the grand *ole* leek; two personal favorites of mine that have the same ending name but come from different families—the delightful and thistle-looking globe artichoke, and the earthier yet knobbly sunchoke; and lastly the glorious funghi family, which some of us hate but others love (technically not vegetables, although they too come first when I am planning a meal). Perhaps, one day, there will be book number two, where I could include these: *The Vegetables Mr. Wilkinson Forgot*.

However, this being said, twenty-three out of the twenty-four vegetables in this book I could not live without (and, in writing the book, I've come to appreciate even the one I had long disliked). I do hope you enjoy the recipes, the little history about them, how I grow them and what they mean to me. Growing, cooking and eating vegetables is healthy, better for the planet than a diet heavy in meat and best of all, means meals full of flavor and diversity.

TWO ESSENTIAL TIPS

I'll take this opportunity to give you two cooking tips that I really think you will appreciate and incorporate into your culinary repertoire—whether it's for use with this book or any others you may have.



1. How frustrating do you find it when, after a meal, you have all the cooking dishes to clean up? Personally it annoys me. So simply clean as you go. Take time out of the cooking process to clean up after yourself and try to use the same pot or pan again if you can. Otherwise, if you have children, never mind—making them wash up is a good way for them to earn their keep.

2. This tip will help you immensely if you do it. Cooking should be fun, relaxed and certainly not a chore. If you follow these simple steps when looking at a recipe, I promise you, they will help you to be more organized and less stressed:

- ✦ *After you have chosen the dish and recipe you would like to cook sit down, have a cup of tea or glass of wine and have a pen and notepad at the ready.*
- ✦ *Read the ingredients list and method thoroughly.*
- ✦ *Have a sip of your chosen beverage, then read the recipe again.*

✦ *Now, write out the ingredients list with measurements of those you need to go and buy.*

✦ *Have another sip.*

✦ *Now write out the method in your own words, not copying, but your own words.*

✦ *Sip number three.*

✦ *Then check that you have the correct ingredients, method and you know what you need to purchase.*

✦ *Close the book, and do not open it again. Use your notes to cook from. This helps for a few reasons. First, when you write the method in your own words you will understand it more clearly when following the steps. Second, you don't dirty your precious cookbook with cooking marks. And third, you are starting your own personal cookbook. You can adapt the recipes to your liking and they are at hand when and if you need them in the future.*

Try this out, it helped me immensely and will help you too.



TO MY LITTLE RAY OF SUNSHINE
FINN THOMAS AND YOUR BEAUTIFUL
MOTHER MY LOVE SHARLEE AND, OF COURSE,
QUINCY the DOG.





The name "asparagus" comes from the Greek language meaning "sprout" or "shoot"



Let asparagus be the crown jewel of vegetables that you wait for every spring. The beautiful snap of the stalk when ripe, the crunch of it raw in a salad or delicately cooked.



ASPARAGUS



(*ASPARAGUS OFFICINALIS*)

ASPARAGUS

I may harp on a lot about eating vegetables only when they are in season but honestly, wherever you are in the world, is there really any other vegetable that you would live without for a whole year, just waiting for the next brief season, except the beautiful asparagus?

RECIPES

[BLANCHED WHITE ASPARAGUS WITH RICOTTA & BELGIAN ENDIVE](#)

[PICKLED ASPARAGUS](#)

[SALAD OF RAW ASPARAGUS, SKORDALIA, PROSCIUTTO & DUKKA](#)

THE CROWN JEWEL

Growing up in England, I remember eating asparagus when I was younger, but it wasn't until I moved to Scotland and started my career working for Martin Wishart that I realized how stunning fresh asparagus truly is, and I began to fully appreciate the luxury of it. It was almost a “truffle moment” for me—that amazing indescribable sensation when you smell and taste a real truffle for the first time. It was just like that when the first boxes of asparagus would arrive. The Scottish season was so fleeting—only a few weeks—but what it left me with was a deep appreciation for seasonality and why asparagus is so worth waiting for. Those few weeks were just wonderful.

And that's where the interesting point lies: it's so amazing in season, but so terrible out of season. It's woody, tasteless, limp and, on top of all that, bloody expensive! So why buy it? Why buy asparagus imported from Thailand? Why import it at all? Do we really need to be able to buy asparagus year round from the supermarket? I understand that people don't want to go through half the year without, say, the tomato, but asparagus? If you're just using it because you have a recipe book that says “use asparagus,” well, how about choosing a different recipe instead?

Surely we can wait? The flavor, the anticipation, the beautiful snap of the stalk when ripe, the crunch of it raw in a salad or delicately, respectfully cooked. Let asparagus be the crown jewel (fittingly it's got a lovely crown hat) of vegetables that you will wait just for spring to come around again so you can enjoy it.

The tip of the spear, if left to grow, will become a flower—just like the globe artichoke. It is a member of the lily family (and therefore related to the likes of onion, leek and garlic) and, though it originated in the Mediterranean, it has been naturalized all over the world. It grows wild in the salt marshes of Europe and Asia, but it was the Romans who first cultivated and domesticated it. It has always been considered the height of elegance and a favorite of kings and emperors. The Egyptians even gave bundles of it as offerings to their gods. It has been respected for its beauty and elegance for

thousands of years, and I think we need to continue showing it that respect.

PREPARING AND COOKING

The asparagus season begins in early spring, and, if conditions are favorable, will continue through to early summer. Early in the season, you should be able to eat it just as it is. When it's young and fresh you can eat it raw and it makes a lovely crudité, which works perfectly with bagna càuda (see [page 149](#)). But, as the season goes on, you should peel the stalk as the skin can become quite fibrous. You should also cut or snap off about 1 inch from the base of the stalk as it is quite woody and makes for unpleasant eating. By doing this you also have an indicator as to how fresh the asparagus is; if fresh, you should get a lovely “snap” when you break it. Listen for it. And if you think that all this peeling and trimming is wasteful, then think again. Asparagus is really quite an amazing vegetable—you can use all of it. The peelings and stalk remnants can be used to make a soup or purée, and the rest can be boiled, broil, stir-fried, steamed, baked, broiled, or any other way you can think of.

WHITE VERSUS GREEN

Now, I have never grown asparagus, and the reason for that is it takes such a long time from sowing to harvest. If you grow from seed, it will take three years before you get a crop. To fast-track the situation somewhat, you can buy one-year-old plants, called “crowns,” from your nursery, which will reduce the growing time. I have been lucky enough, though, to be invited by Jo and Trevor Courtney to their property, organic Bridge Farm, near Koo Wee Rup, to see how they grow their asparagus. And it is a truly beautiful sight to see, the elegant stalks lined up in rows. The fern of the plant is almost prehistoric looking like some sort of bracken.

The Courtneys explained to me some of the many ways to grow white asparagus, which is exactly the same plant as green but has been grown under different conditions—it is starved of sunlight so that the chlorophyll within the plant (the chemical which makes it green) can't develop. This can be done by covering the emerging crowns with soil or, as some other farmers do, with black plastic to stop the sun reaching the plants. There is an ongoing argument with chefs and growers the world over as to which one, out of the green or white, is a better product, with many saying that the white has a sweeter and more delicate flavor. But it's really up to you which one you prefer. Try them both and make up your mind.

TAKE A CHANCE

And the topic you thought I might not touch on. Will eating asparagus make your wee smell or not? Scientists aren't sure what the compound is in asparagus that can make some people's urine smell. It appears to be a genetic thing as to whether it affects you or even whether you can smell it if it does. Only around 50 per cent of the population can ... I say, “Who cares?” For something this delicious, it's worth taking the chance!



BLANCHED WHITE ASPARAGUS WITH RICOTTA & BELGIAN ENDIVE

SERVES 2 AS AN ENTRÉE

If you do not have any almond and orange spiced crumb on hand, you can substitute croûtons. This salad works beautifully with some sliced charcuterie meat too.

1 LARGE BUNCH THICK-STEMMED WHITE ASPARAGUS (OR 2 BUNCHES THIN-STEMMED)

¼ TEASPOON DIJON MUSTARD

⅓ CUP EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

SEA SALT AND FRESHLY GROUND BLACK PEPPER

½ SMALL HEAD RADICCHIO, LEAVES SEPARATED, WASHED AND TORN

1 RED BELGIAN ENDIVE, LEAVES SEPARATED AND WASHED

1 CUP ARUGULA, WASHED AND SPUN DRY

⅓ CUP FRESH RICOTTA

1 QUANTITY ALMOND AND ORANGE SPICED CRUMB (SEE [PAGE 278](#))

Snap off the bottom part of the stalk of the asparagus. Slice a little of one stem and eat to see if the asparagus is stringy in texture. If it is, peel the skin with a vegetable peeler starting from the crown and moving down to the base of the stem. If it isn't, leave her well alone. Halve the asparagus widthways.

Cook the asparagus for 1–3 minutes, depending on the size, in a saucepan of salted boiling water until still a little firm. Drain and plunge into a bowl of icy cold water. Once cold, remove immediately from the water and put into a bowl.

Whisk together the mustard and olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Pour over the asparagus and mix until well coated.

Tear in the radicchio and add the Belgian endive and arugula. Gently break up the ricotta with a spoon and mix in half of it. Place onto plates, top with the rest of the ricotta, then pour over any remaining juices from the bowl. Sprinkle over a generous amount of the spiced crumb and serve.



PICKLED ASPARAGUS

FILLS 3 × 10½ FLUID OUNCE JARS

As a general rule, when it comes to pickling, it should be done when the produce is at its peak and is therefore cheaper. When it comes to pickling asparagus, I don't really follow that rule, though. I usually pickle different varieties of asparagus at the start of the season to preserve the first crop, which have skins that are really succulent and do not need peeling. Pickled asparagus is great as part of an antipasti platter or added to salads when the fresh stuff is out of season.

6 BUNCHES ASPARAGUS

2 ⅔ CUPS WHITE WINE VINEGAR

1½ CUPS APPLE CIDER VINEGAR

¼ TEASPOON MUSTARD SEEDS

¼ TEASPOON CORIANDER SEEDS

¼ TEASPOON WHITE PEPPERCORNS

2 GARLIC CLOVES, THINLY SLICED

1 SHALLOT, THINLY SLICED

Preheat the oven to 275°F.

Wash and make sure your glass jars are odor-free and dry. Lay a jar on its side and measure the asparagus next to it, chopping off the bottom part of the stalks to fit the jars. (Discard the scraps or use them to make asparagus soup or a salad.)

Quickly blanch the asparagus in a saucepan of salted boiling water, then drain and refresh in icy cold water. Once cool, take out and pat dry, then place into the jars, crown side up.

Put the vinegars in a saucepan and bring to a boil, then allow to cool. Divide the spices, garlic and shallot between each jar and pour over the vinegar, making sure the liquid completely covers the asparagus. Screw on the lids, place on a baking sheet and put into the oven for 10 minutes. Label and store in your cupboard for at least 1 week before using, but 3 months is better. Unopened jars will keep until the next season. Once opened, store in the fridge.



SALAD OF RAW ASPARAGUS, SKORDALIA, PROSCIUTTO & DUKKA

SERVES 4 AS ENTRÉE
OR AS A SALAD TO SHARE

Such a quick and simple salad to make for lunch. You could replace the skordalia with a simple aioli and the result would be just as delicious. You could also add a little shaved Parmesan, if you wished and maybe even a perfectly poached egg to enhance the dish even more.

2 LARGE BUNCHES GREEN ASPARAGUS
(THICK-STEMMED PREFERABLY)

1 TABLESPOON FINE SEA SALT

8 SLICES PROSCIUTTO

3 TABLESPOONS EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL,
PLUS EXTRA TO SERVE

JUICE OF ½ LEMON

1 TABLESPOON CHOPPED BASIL,
PLUS EXTRA TO SERVE

1 TABLESPOON CHOPPED ITALIAN
PARSLEY, PLUS EXTRA TO SERVE

FRESHLY GROUND BLACK PEPPER

1 QUANTITY POTATO SKORDALIA
(SEE NOTE, PAGE 210)

2 TABLESPOONS DUKKA (SEE [PAGE 278](#))

Using a mandoline, thinly slice the asparagus from the base to the crown, making long ribbons. Place in a large bowl, add the salt and let stand for 1 minute. Tear in the prosciutto, add the olive oil, lemon juice, basil and parsley and season with salt and pepper. Dollop some of the skordalia onto the plate, arrange the asparagus salad neatly on top and finish with a drizzle of olive oil, some more chopped herbs and a sprinkling of dukka.

PROTEIN / FOLATE / IRON



BEANS & PEAS



*Beans are one of the
longest cultivated plants*

(FABALES)

BEANS & PEAS

I have to admit, for something that seems so simple, I'm really not the greatest at growing beans and peas—specifically sweet peas, runner beans and their ilk. But I have always been successful at growing fava beans. Beans and peas are vegetables so firmly entrenched in the English food lexicon that, when I was growing up, the standard question when you ordered anything at a pub was, “Peas or beans with that?” Peas being mushy peas and beans being baked beans. Beans and peas. Is it because they are readily available nearly all year round that we love them so much?

RECIPES

[BAKED BEANS](#)

[CRUSHED FAVA BEAN & LENTILS, GOAT CHEESE & PEAR](#)

[PEA & MASCARPONE PLIN WITH SAGE & BUTTER SAUCE](#)

[SOME DIFFERENT BEANS AS A SALAD](#)

THE UNIVERSAL BEAN

They are what I like to think of as a “universal” vegetable, found in different guises as a staple foodstuff the whole world over. They are all members of what is known as the *Fabales* group, an order of flowering plants that include legumes, like chickpeas and lentils. And there are more varieties than you can count.

The Chinese have yard-long beans, which can grow up to a foot long. These are used throughout South-East Asia. Indians love to use both dried and fresh beans in their cuisine, in iconic dishes such as lentil dhal and chickpea curry. Middle Easterners have haricot blanc beans (better known to the rest of the world as “the bean found in your baked beans”), Italians love their cannellini and borlotti beans and South Americans have the lima bean and red kidney bean varieties. All over the world, beans have been embraced and used fresh or dried. They are an extremely important part of the diets of people from developing nations, where meat may be too expensive or difficult to come by, as they are a valuable source of protein. Of course, this is precisely why vegetarians are big fans of beans: these powerhouses of protein are also a great source of many vitamins and minerals.

ALL GREEN BEANS ARE EQUAL

In the UK, where I hail from, we have become so accustomed to fine straight green beans (especially from areas like Kenya) that it is common practice to buy these beans judged on looks and not taste. We will discard a bean with a black spot, if it's not straight or has a bit of diversity in color. Watch people in the supermarket and see how they select fruit and veg, especially green beans. They always

sample content of Mr. Wilkinson's Vegetables: A Cookbook to Celebrate the Garden

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