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Heston Blumenthal's Snail Porridge

Fat Duck classics that will clear away preconceptions about eating snails

Recipe serves six.

Something of a Fat Duck classic and, whatever you think of the title, utterly delicious. Part of our expectation of food is conditioned by language - we eat porridge for breakfast, often with something sweet, such as sugar, honey or jam, yet porridge itself is not sweet. It is a grain, just as rice is, and the idea with this dish is simply to use oats as you would rice. This is best served as a starter.

Snail butter

25g whole garlic cloves, peeled
40g button mushrooms
40g shallots
200g unsalted butter, at room temperature
25g Dijon mustard
20g ground almonds
5g salt
100g flat-leaf parsley, chopped
40g Parma ham

Blanch and refresh the garlic in boiling water three to four times (this might seem excessive, but the garlic will be bitter and aggressive otherwise). Finely chop the mushrooms; peel and finely chop the shallots. Heat 50g butter in a frying pan and sweat the mushrooms and shallots for five to 10 minutes, until softened. Tip into a food processor, along with the remaining ingredients, then purée until smooth. This will take a few minutes because you'll have to stop the machine intermittently, to scrape the sides.

Once puréed, rub the mix through a fine-mesh sieve on to a sheet of clingfilm and roll into a cylinder. Store in the fridge (it also stores well in the freezer). Then simply cut off segments of butter as and when required.

Snail stock

Although snails are usually sold cooked, they benefit from further cooking in stock and aromatics. They then add an extra flavour to the stock.

500g chicken wings (optional)
Snails (as many, or as few, as you wish)
1 carrot, peeled and thinly sliced *
1 onion, peeled and thinly sliced

1 fennel bulb, finely sliced
1 stick celery, finely sliced
100g button mushrooms, finely sliced
2 cloves garlic
Bouquet garni of bay, thyme and rosemary

Roughly chop the chicken wings (if using), put in a pan of cold water and place on medium heat. Bring to the boil, remove from the heat at once, drain through a colander, rinse off the wings and return to the pan. Return the pan to the heat, with water to cover. Add as many snails as you want and bring the liquid to the boil. Skim, and lower the heat to a gentle simmer. Add the remaining ingredients and simmer very gently for three hours. Remove from the heat, leave to cool a little and strain through muslin, reserving the liquor.

To assemble

72 cooked snails (ie, 12 per person, but, of course, amend according to taste)
10g Parma ham
1 small fennel bulb
200ml snail stock (alternatively, use a stock cube, or even water)
60g good porridge oats
70g snail butter
Salt and pepper
1 tsp sherry vinegar
3 tsp walnut oil

Roughly chop the snails and set aside. Finely shred the ham. Slice the fennel as thinly as possible and set aside. Heat the stock in a pan over a high heat and, once simmering, add the oats. Stir until all the liquid has been absorbed. Remove from the heat and beat in the snail butter and the snails. You may find you have to return the pan to the heat, in which case be careful: if it gets too hot, the butter will split, causing the porridge to become grainy. Season generously.

Spoon the porridge on to six plates and top with ham. Toss the fennel with the vinegar and walnut oil, season, place on porridge and serve