



Regardless of whether you are buying thin 'sprue' asparagus or XL jumbo spears, always choose stems that are firm and vibrant in colour, being vigilant to avoid any that are discoloured, scarred or slimy at the tips. I like my asparagus cooked just to the bite and drenched in melted butter with Cornish sea salt - great thrown on the BBQ at the last minute, folded through a spring vegetable risotto or even raw in salads.

Above: Matthew, Scott and Paul in the new kitchen

12 Months of Flavour

May 09

These green spears of Spring are with us for their all too short season from May to June. Westcountry asparagus, with its intense, complex flavour and deep vibrant colour, is often considered to be the best in the world. These virtues are often attributed to our cool growing conditions. We're also big fans of Carolyn Bellinger's ducks (and their eggs) and have chosen duck eggs over hens simply for their richer flavour and beautiful golden yolks. Strike now while the asparagus is HOT!



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DEVONLIFE
FOOD AND DRINK AWARDS 2008
DINING PUB OF THE YEAR



Which? Good Food Guide Recommended



English Asparagus, Poached Duck Egg and Hollandaise.

Serves 4



Ingredients:

- 2 bunches of English Asparagus (about 500g)
 - Maldon or Cornish sea salt
 - 3 Free Range egg yolks
 - 2 tbsp Hollandaise reduction (150 ml white wine vinegar, 7 white peppercorns, 2 sprigs tarragon, 2 peeled and finely diced shallots.
- Place all the ingredients in a pan, bring to the boil and boil vigorously until the vinegar has reduced by two thirds. Strain through a sieve and allow to cool).
- 200g butter, melted and still warm. Or use clarified butter (which simply means melted and the milk solids carefully removed and the residing golden fat strained through a sieve)
 - 4 Duck eggs
 - Dash of white wine vinegar
 - Few knobs of butter

Method for Asparagus:

- 1). Bring a pan of salted water to a rapid boil and have ready a bowl of iced water. Remove woody part of the stem and peel the lower ends of the stalks.
- 2). Blanch in the boiling water for 1-2 minutes (depending on the thickness of your asparagus) or until just tender. Drain and immediately refresh in the iced water. Drain again and spread out on a clean tea towel.

Method for the Hollandaise:

- 1). Put the egg yolks, 2 tbsp hollandaise reduction, 2 tbsp warm water and a pinch of salt into a heatproof glass bowl.
- 2). Whisk until emulsified, place over a pan of barely simmering water and beat with a whisk until soft peaks have formed. This takes approx 1 minute. (If you value your wrists then use an electric one).
- 3). Slowly pour in the melted butter, being careful not to add the milk solids that will sink to the bottom (if you have not already clarified it).
- 4). Whisk continuously until the sauce is thick and emulsified (if it appears too thick, use a little warm water to thin it). Keep the sauce warm by placing the bowl over a pan of warm water until ready to use.

Method for the Duck Eggs:

- 1). Bring a wide pan of salted water to a simmer and add a dash of white wine vinegar.
- 2). Have ready another bowl of iced water. Break each egg into a ramekin, swirl the water with a spoon to create a whirlpool effect in the middle, then slide the eggs gently into the water. Multiple eggs must be done in batches of no more than three at a time. (N.B. By using the ramekins, if you should break the yolk, you haven't messed up the water!)
- 3). Cook for two minutes or until the whites are set but the yolks are still runny. Lift the eggs out with a slotted spoon into a bowl of iced water to stop further cooking, unless you are serving immediately.
- 4). Reheat the asparagus in plenty of butter for no longer than a minute. If necessary reheat the eggs in a pan of simmering water for about 30 seconds to a minute.

To Serve: Arrange a bundle of asparagus on each plate with a warm poached duck egg and drizzle a little hollandaise sauce over.