

Garden diary : Winter gardening

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Chuchichäschtli (Kitchen cupboard)

Zibelechueche (Onion Tart)

You will find Zibelechueche, that delicious, onion-infused delicacy, at the Zibelemärit (Onion Market) in Berne. The night before the Zibelemärit takes place, Bernese city-dwellers leave town or they barricade themselves into their flats, as a precautionary measure. Why?

During the Zibele Märit, the town is flooded from the early morning with pleasure-seeking non-Bernese people. Adorned with strange headgear and onion tresses, they throw confetti and swing rubber mallets, while mobbing past market stands and through the narrow side-streets.

The "real" Bernese only turn up again later in the evening and fondly speak of the times when confetti was only allowed to be thrown at exactly four o'clock in the afternoon, and that only in the jam-packed Spittelgasse (hospital lane).

But of course, everyone still eats a piece of Zibelechueche, in remembrance of old times.

Recipe

For a baking tray of 30 cm:

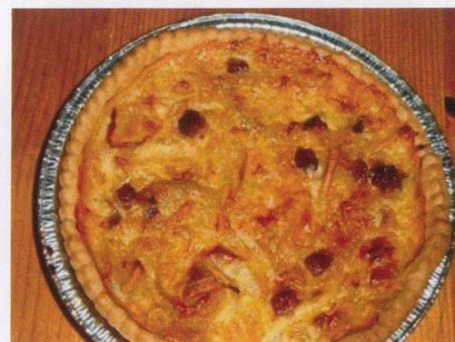
- ♥ 700 g onions peeled and sliced in thin stripes
- ♥ 2 tablespoons butter for frying
- ♥ Salt
- ♥ Pepper
- ♥ Nutmeg
- ♥ 1 dl Cream
- ♥ 1.5 dl Milk
- ♥ 2 eggs
- ♥ Short Pastry



Quickly fry (sautee) the onions without letting them brown, season with salt, pepper and nutmeg, and let cool for a while. Mix the onion mixture, milk, eggs and cream and pour it on the baking tray lined with the pastry.

Bake in the oven at 180°C for about 20 minutes and serve hot with salads. Are you worried about possible consequences for the digestion because of the amount of onions? Rest assured that quickly fried (sauteed) onions are not so bad and organic onions not at all. Even I would dare this.

*Contributed by Edith Hess
(Kindly translated by Ursula Nixon)*



Zibelechueche
www.kochbar.de

Garden diary: Winter gardening

At this time of the year, there are usually some empty spaces left in the garden. These can be layered with mulch or compost left to rot until spring or dug in if not too boggy. This will add nutrients and structure to the soil ready for spring growth. You can still grow winter vegies from seed such as spinach, silverbeet and cold hardy lettuce, but they will be slower to germinate. Some salad varieties can be grown in pots and used as 'cut and come again' crops by just picking leaves as you need them, such as red lettuce, rocket and mesculin.

Plant brassicas either as seed in trays to plant out in July for spring or put in punnets of cabbages, caulis, broccolis and bok choy. If you managed to get leeks in earlier, mound them up or cover the stems with cardboard rolls or narrow plastic pipes which don't rot to blanch the stems. Plant some snow ball turnips which grow into tennis ball sized globes which taste sweet and can be added to soups or grated raw into salads. Now is the time to plant Strawberries: Buy small plants or bundles of bare rooted runners, or ask a garden friend if they have any to spare. Strawberries like full sun and

free draining soil, or they will rot over winter if water logged. Add new plants to existing beds to replace old or tired plants, as they are at their best for only 2-3 years. Planting strawberries up in hanging baskets makes an interesting display: They are easy to pick as they hang over the sides, but it is not easy to keep birds off. Garlic and shallots can go in any time now until spring but usually on the shortest day. Buy seed garlic or use local organically grown cloves only, as imported garlic is treated to stop growth. Plant in a sunny spot in free draining soil previously composted with sheep pellets and organic matter, as they are heavy feeders. Bury the unpeeled outer cloves pointy end up about 5cm deep. If your soil is very wet or cold, you can sprout cloves in punnets of potting mix to start them off, but take care when transplanting to prevent root disturbance. Shallots however need to have their pointy end just out of the ground. When they sprout, use the green tops like chives, making sure to leave some to fatten up the bulbs. Now is a good time to spray fruit trees with copper and conqueror oil 2 weeks apart to kill bugs and lingering spores.

Add to your orchard dwarf fruit tree varieties for smaller gardens or pots, or grow along a North facing wall or fence line. Grapes are easy to propagate by taking cuttings when pruning back and sticking in the ground where you want to grow them. Just remember which way is the correct way up! Prune apple and pear trees now as well, as it is easy to see crossing over or diseased wood. Plant raspberries in July: They are hardy and don't mind cooler temperatures and are best suited to cooler areas, as they need chilling temperatures to set fruit, which is probably why mine have not done so well last season, as it was too hot and dry. If you have established plants, now is the time to remove spent canes that fruited last year, leaving the young vigorous ones. Apply citrus fertiliser regularly from when the buds begin to form and water in. Lastly get shopping: Look for new releases in seed catalogues - there are endless varieties to choose from or look for heritage varieties to try. Have a warm and safe winter!



By Melissa Lanz