

Petits choux salés

Ingredients:

Makes 6 x 12 cm éclairs & 6 x choux puffs or
20 gougères

Choux paste

50g butter
125mls cold water
65g plain flour, (or rice flour for gluten free)
2 medium eggs, beaten
Salt to taste

Beetroot cured salmon with horseradish crème fraiche

Fresh salmon (allow 50g per person)
2 tbs sugar
1 tbs salt
Grated fresh beetroot, or dill or lemon zest,
optional
1 tbs per choux of crème fraiche
Horseradish or wasabi to taste

Pickled beetroot & fresh goat's cheese

Fresh beetroot (or pickled see below)
1 tbs soft goat's cheese per choux
Chopped chives (or red onion optional)

Beetroot glaze

Beetroot pickling liquid (your own, jar or can)
Agar-agar or arrowroot

Simple cheese gougères

50g finely grated cheese for gougère.
We use a mix of hard Brebis/Chevre, gruyere
or cheddar are equally good!

Asparagus choux puffs

Fresh asparagus spears
30g butter
1 tbs plain flour
300mls milk



Choux pastry was traditionally used in sweet confections like profiteroles, éclairs and cream puffs. Nowadays our patisseries in France offer exotic savoury versions with interesting fillings. Most popular are ingredients like goat's cheese and beetroot, foie gras and figs, smoked salmon, asparagus – actually ingredients you might use in a vol-au-vent and those combining a sweet and savoury note!

Whether making sweet or savoury, we keep things flexible by adding a little salt and no sugar (the sweet fillings are usually enough!)

Also, very fashionable is “craquelin” which means “crispy hat”. This is a crumble type mix, rolled out very thinly and placed on top of sweet or savoury choux and then baked to give a “crazed” texture on top. The recipe for this is also included below.

Savoury fillings are infinite and up to your imagination to use as either a starter served with a small salad garnish or as a canapé.

Method:

Pre-heat the oven to 220C. Place a baking tray in the bottom of the oven, you can then add hot water to make steam when you are ready to cook.

Put the butter and water into a pan and leave over a low heat until the butter has melted. Turn up the heat until the mixture just starts to boil.

Take off the heat, add the flour beat vigorously until the mixture is smooth and comes away from the sides of the pan (usually about a minute).

Return it to a medium heat and cook out the flour for about 3-5 minutes, fold the mixture over itself. It will first look like mashed potato and then become smooth and work itself into a ball.

Place in a bowl, spread the mixture up the sides of the bowl to cool until it is hand hot.

Beat the eggs and add in three stages until you have a smooth, glossy choux paste. (Never add it all at once as you may not need all of the egg!) Keep working the paste with a wooden spoon to develop the gluten and until it is thick enough that the spoon stands up in the mix. *Add a little water to the remainder of the beaten egg and use to glaze your choux for a glossier finish)

Using a 1.5 cm nozzle, pipe into 12 cm lengths for éclairs onto a tray lined with baking paper. Or pipe or drop tablespoon size balls for profiteroles or gougères.

Pour some hot water from the kettle into the baking tray at the bottom of the oven as you put them in the oven to create steam. Bake for 15 minutes at 220C, then turn down to 180C and bake for a further 10 minutes. (We always check ours at the half way mark and turn them if necessary)

Check that the choux is dried out on the inside by breaking open one to test. Cook for a further few minutes if necessary - remove from the oven and poke a small hole in the base with a skewer or cut in half with a serrated knife to release the steam.

*The choux can be frozen and then refreshed in a hot oven for about 3-5 minutes until they become crisp again.

Beetroot cured salmon with horseradish crème fraîche (or use smoked salmon)

Combine two tablespoons of sugar with one of flaked sea salt. Use a plastic container which is slightly larger than the salmon.

Lay the salmon on the salt mix, and then turn it over so you have some on the other side as well. Cover with cling film. Leave for about 36 hours. (I start mine in the morning and then turn it at roughly lunch time the next day.) There will be plenty of liquid, which is the water being drawn out by the cure. You can add flavours at this stage – fresh grated beetroot, lemon zest, finely chopped dill, a splash of gin and some crushed juniper, a splash of vodka and some crushed pink peppercorns.

Cut it through to check that it is cured throughout – it should be firm and opaque. Wash or brush off any excess salt and dry with kitchen paper. Wrap well and keep it in the freezer until required. It as it will cut best when well chilled.

For the filling, we usually use 1-2 tsp of hot horseradish to 10 tsp of crème fraîche or whipped cream and a pinch of salt. (it will depend on how hot your brand is). Pipe or fill the éclairs with the cream mix, then layer on the salmon slices. Garnish with a little chopped red onion, capers or some chives or other fine herbs.

To pickle beetroot and make a glaze

Dissolve 30g of sugar and 25g of salt in 50mls of mild vinegar (white wine or rice wine work really well) and 50mls of water. Bring to the boil and add the thinly sliced or cubed beetroot, allow them to cool in the pickling mix. They will keep in a jar in the fridge for a week or so. You can re-use the pickling mix a couple of times as long as you strain and boil it first.

Beetroot glaze - warm 100mls of the pickling liquid (or use liquid from a can or jar of pickled cooked beetroot). Add a sprinkling of agar-agar or use arrowroot - according to the packet instructions. You can paint it over the éclairs or let it partly set in a tray and cut to size and lay over the éclair while still warm.

Asparagus choux puffs (this recipe works equally well with smoked salmon or trout)

Cook the asparagus to your taste – the French like to boil it thoroughly, we prefer it to have a bit of bite! Drain it well. Melt the butter in a saucepan, stir in the flour to make a roux, stir well for 2-3 minutes on a low heat to cook out the flour. Remove from the heat, gradually add warmed milk stirring well until smooth. Return to the heat and simmer for 3 minutes, season well and mix through the cooked asparagus, saving a few green tips for a garnish. If using smoked fish, a teaspoon of horseradish added to the bechamel works well.

Presentation and variations

We serve two or three different variations of choux as a starter and use the cheese gougères as a canapé. We find that beetroot, goat's cheese and chives and salmon, horseradish & crème fraîche work well together, in season we might use fresh asparagus in a light sauce or thinly sliced artichokes with a preserved lemon dressing.

A salmon ceviche or just simply smoked salmon also work well. You can dress the plate with fresh or chopped pickled beetroot, thin slices of red onion, preserved lemons, capers or caperberries and fresh herbs such as chives or mint. You can drizzle the plate with a flavoured oil such as tarragon, mint or parsley – you will find quantities for these in our Canapés and garnishes recipes.

An extra option - savoury craquelin (crispy hats!)

Cream 70g butter with 90g of finely grated hard cheese, work in 90g of flour (or mix in a food processor). Roll out the dough as thinly as possible between two pieces of baking paper. Freeze until required. Cut squares or rounds of the dough to fit your choux shape and place over the choux before baking. (For a sweet option, replace the cheese with 90g of raw sugar and use on your profiteroles or sweet éclairs!)