

## Take five...

## LEEKs

**1** The new season tender leeks are a treat. A member of the super-powerful allium family, leeks are full of antibacterial compounds which battle against spring colds, digestive and respiratory problems.



**2** A source of potassium (for acid/alkaline balance), folic acid (for healthy foetal development) and vitamin C (for infection fighting), they also eliminate uric acid from the system, so help with gout and arthritis.

**3** Eat the green as well as the tender white parts of leeks as they are full of beta-carotene which helps the body convert into valuable vitamin A (for healthy skin and immune system).



**4** To poach slim new season leeks use the excellent recipe from the Moro cookbook (Ebury Press) by first cooking 3 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced, in 8 tablespoons olive oil until lightly coloured. Add the leeks, 3 rounded teaspoons caster sugar, juice of 1 lemon and 300ml water and a good pinch of salt. Cover with a lid and simmer for 15 minutes until tender. Stir in handful parsley and dill just before serving. This makes a good starter course.

**5** Add sliced leeks to stir-fries and to make soups. To make a meal of them, wrap each leek in dried ham, then cover in Philadelphia cheese. Bake for 20 minutes in the oven for an easy supper.

## Tasty courses

## Roz Crowley

**C**OOKING at home is the new dining out, and if there is one benefit of the recession it's the increase in numbers attending cookery classes. Combine that with a holiday and there are invaluable knock-on effects.

A high-profile food writer and cook has decided to relocate and settle in the south of France where she is offering a range of courses to appeal to cooks, artists and aspiring writers.

Petra Carter has just completed the arduous conversion of La Souqueto, an old 'maison de village' in the mediaeval Languedoc village of Mirepeisset. Complete with demonstration kitchen, it has accommodation for students as well as regular B&B guests.

Petra is well known to foodies for her 10 years as food editor with Irish Tatler and four years as editor of SQ Food, she was a frequent contributor to Wine Ireland, Irish Times, Eat and a number of trade magazines. A trained chef with 20 years experience, during her time in Dublin she also managed to find time to revel in another passion and do a BA in fine art.

Three years ago leaving Dublin was a huge wrench, but Carter does whatever she does well. "I could see I had a huge job ahead of me, but I didn't anticipate the termite problem. It was an enormous one and added at least a year onto the conversion," she says.

Her cookery courses aim at re-educating the home-cook with a new and modern approach, using fresh, widely available ingredients to put together simple, quick and vibrant dishes that everyone wants to eat.

"While the courses have different 'subjects', my approach remains the same — to teach healthy cooking, with an occasional, permissible indulgence of course, and to do so with the ultimate aim of learning to cook without recipes."

Her 'cooking without recipes method' is based on acquiring the skill to combine different flavours — salt, sweet, sour, bitter, hot — to create the perfect, balanced



**ON COURSE:** Petra Carter's cookery courses aim to re-educate the home-cook with a fresh, modern approach.

recipe, as the Chinese have done for centuries. All classic world cuisine recipes follow the same principle, she says. "Think of 'salty' prosciutto with 'sweet' melon, 'sour' raspberries with 'sweet' meringues, 'bitter' salad leaves with 'sweet' peaches, 'salty' anchovies with 'sweet' peppers". The result is that when you are aware of the basic flavour in an ingredient, you can combine it with the perfect partner."

Petra Carter is not only a creative cook, but she is also an artist and photographer. A mine of information, her enthusiasm is infectious. Her tales of living in a treehouse while teaching cooking on Kenya's west coast alone are worth the visit. Her account of construction work reflects Peter Mayles adventures in

A Year in Provence with her own sympathetic observations of local characters and their idiosyncrasies. Her classes are relaxed, but if you want the science of it all, it's there for the asking.

"I like to teach the basics and offer some unique ideas, but encourage people to be creative themselves too," she says.

■ A good Father's Day gift for those not suffering the rigours of the recession is the Man in the Kitchen course, June 19-22. Fab Food on a Budget follows on September 18-21. For courses in painting, photography and writing as well as cookery, see her website [www.petracarter.com](http://www.petracarter.com). Courses cost €590 for a weekend, all inclusive, except flights.

## SPROUTING OUT

SPROUTING seeds are a good fibrous addition to salads, sandwiches and stir-fries. Good4U's range includes Brocco Shoots, a mixture of broccoli, alfalfa, clover and radish sprouts, and lentil and bean shoots and wispy alfalfa shoots. This company also does toasted seeds, including an appetising mix of sunflower, sesame and linseeds that makes a good alternative snack. Available in supermarkets, the sprouting seeds are on special offer in Dunnes Stores for the next month for €99c, usually €1.39.



**MANUKA HONEY** is becoming accepted by some conventional medics as well as alternative practitioners for help with internal and external ulcers, as well as various digestive and respiratory problems. Bee Vital 100% pure manuka honey is now available in supermarkets and tastes good. For minor ailments it is unlikely to do any harm, except hurt the wallet at €7.89 for 375g. Made in Ireland with honey from Australia and New Zealand.

## NATURE'S WAY

Grow Your Own Drugs by James Wong accompanies his BBC television series and gives great encouragement to would-be gardeners. The book is packed with advice on how to grow and use plants for natural beauty remedies and help for insomnia, eczema and lethargy.

His recipe for flatulence is Four Winds Tea, a mixture of caraway and fennel seeds, peppermint leaves, chamomile flowers and hot water. Published by HarperCollins, around €18. (£16.99).



**CORK** Free Choice Consumer Group presents Plant Foods for Health and Vitality with award-winning chef and nutritionist Daphne Lambert from Green Cuisine in Wales. She will speak about organic, mineral-rich and living foods at Crawford Art Gallery Café on Thursday, April 30 at 7.30pm. Entrance €6, including tea or coffee.