



Keen for mustard from Cusacks

Shirlee and Jane of Eat Surrey seek and find the best small food producers, restaurants, cafés, pubs and shops, publishing weekly reviews on their website. Here Shirlee introduces essence readers to Cusacks, an award winning artisan producer of mustards using Dorking real ale.

Joan Cusack left a career in lettings to introduce a more creative edge to her working life, and a family recipe for mustard pickle turned out to be the trigger that shot her into the spicy world of condiments.

The use of beer from a local brewery in Dorking gives Cusacks' products a truly local vibe. Sadly, the farming of mustard seed in the UK has declined gradually and today there are fewer than twenty farmers still growing this crop in East Anglia, its traditional birthplace. Most of this is sold to large mustard producers and due to declining yields, it's hard for small producers to access a regular supply at a competitive price.

Research by Joan found that really good, high quality seed and mustard flour is imported from Canada, so this is what she currently purchases. Quality is top priority for this business as Cusacks is currently in the process of obtaining SALSA (Safe And Local

Supplier Approval) accreditation, which many companies, such as Lakeland, prefer their small food producers to have. It's a mark of confidence too for small retail food businesses such as farm shops who prefer to buy from artisans, but with a safety net built in.

Although the über professional packaging might suggest otherwise, these mustards are made in true cottage industry style. Yellow and black mustard seeds are soaked in ale for twenty-four hours to swell. Then, depending on the recipe, they are combined and either left whole or processed. For example, Grain Beer Mustard is a combination of beer-soaked dark and light seeds mixed with cider vinegar and mustard powder. Partially processed seeds are half ground leaving a crunchy texture and mouth-feel which interacts seductively with cheese and cold meats. Processed the next day, depending on the recipe, they are mixed and packed into sterilised jars. Maximum production for Christmas orders was up to five



hundred jars a day with a substantial order from a hamper company.

Because the seeds for these products are soaked in beer rather than vinegar, the mustards are far less astringent on the palate. Tasting them on their own they are noticeably milder than commercial mustards, but when eaten with other food (as they should be), they come into their own, enhancing flavour and building a more intense experience in the mouth.

Mustard has been used traditionally in cooking to bring out the flavour of other foods (first records go back to 1390). Experienced cooks add a spoon to cheese sauce, mashed potatoes, spread on steak prior to cooking and, of course, for salad dressings. Welsh rarebits, sandwiches, mayonnaises and many other favourites work with good mustard to give them an edge.

After sampling the full Cusacks' range I have two clear favourites. The beer mustard, which won a gold star in the 2013 Great Taste Awards, and the coarse grain beer mustard. This is simply yellow and black mustard seeds soaked in beer with seasoning and vinegar. Not only do the mustard seeds have an earthy crunch with a mild kick, but the product also looks really attractive. It has featured prominently on my festive canapés this year (I use it instead of fish roe which is saltier and a lot more expensive) as it lends a gourmet look and taste without elevating the calorific value.

Joan was worried when she started her venture that lack of previous experience in the food world would hold her back. She needn't have worried – her professional approach and business skills have helped develop this brand. Joan then spent months perfecting her recipes and creating a brand image. It's no wonder that farm shops and larger retail concerns are keen as mustard to sell her products. ●

essence info

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Roast salmon with whole grain mustard crust

[serves 2]

Two fillets of wild catch salmon*
Two dessertspoons grain beer mustard
Two large handfuls of Secretts' salad leaves, washed and drained
One dessertspoon of extra virgin olive oil
One clove crushed garlic
Five to six chestnut mushrooms, washed and sliced
50ml single cream or half fat crème fraîche
One to two teaspoons of coarse grain mustard
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Pre-heat the oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas mark 5.

- Put the salmon fillets on a drizzle of olive oil on a foil lined baking tray. Place a dessertspoon of grain mustard on each and spread evenly over the surface.
- Place in the oven and cook for 15 minutes or until pink all the way through.
- Meanwhile prepare the salad and mushrooms.
- Toss the salad leaves in a dressing of your choice such as a little olive oil and a squeeze of lemon.
- Heat a frying pan and add the oil and garlic. Once the pan is sizzling add the mushrooms and stir-fry until they start to soften. Don't be tempted to add more oil.
- Add the cream and mustard to the pan, season and cook for two to three minutes (if the sauce is too thick add a little milk).
- To serve, divide the salad between two plates and top each with a salmon fillet. Pour the sauce to one side of the fish and serve immediately.
- Delicious with a few freshly cooked new potatoes tossed in a little butter.

* Why not buy from a local fishmonger and support an independent trader?