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by Liz Robb

Baked Cod with Cheese and Spinach



Ingredients

25g dry bread, without crusts
20g grated parmesan cheese
A few sprigs of parsley
150g spinach
30g butter, with extra for buttering dishes
30g plain flour
Salt and freshly milled black pepper
Fresh nutmeg
250ml semi-skimmed milk
75g mature cheddar cheese
Two thick cod steaks, weighing about 200g each

Preparation

1. 1. Preheat the oven to 220 degrees, 200 degrees fan oven.
2. 2. Break the bread into pieces then grind into breadcrumbs in a food processor. Remove the stalks from the parsley and add the leaves to the bread, then grate the parmesan and add that too. Pulse them together into fine breadcrumbs.
3. 3. Wash the spinach thoroughly and pat dry. Place it in a large, hot dry pan, sprinkle with a little salt, and stir constantly for a minute or two until the leaves are just wilting. Transfer the spinach to a colander to drain, gently squeeze out any excess moisture, and set it aside to keep warm.
4. 4. Melt 30g of butter in a saucepan over a low heat. Add a little of the flour and stir briskly until it makes a smooth paste, and keep adding and stirring until all the flour is incorporated. Then add the milk a little at a time, stirring after each addition to blend it completely into the flour and butter paste until you have a thick, smooth sauce.
5. Simmer gently for a minute or two then season well with salt and black pepper and grate in fresh nutmeg to taste.
6. 5. Grate the cheddar cheese and add it to the pan, stirring until the cheese has completely melted into the sauce. Turn off the heat.
7. 6. Divide the wilted spinach between two individual dishes. Check that the cod steaks, with skin removed, are free from bones, pat them dry and place on top of the spinach. Spoon the cheese sauce evenly over the fish and spinach in the two dishes, then bake

in the preheated oven for 25-30 minutes, or until the fish is just cooked

when it is, it will part easily with a fork in the thickest part and appear very white.

7. Sprinkle the parsley and parmesan breadcrumbs on top of the two dishes and return to the oven for a further 5 minutes to for the breadcrumbs to crisp up. Serve immediately.

Variations:

- I like to serve this dish with crispy roasted rosemary potatoes, but it also tasted good accompanied by mashed potato, or wedges and salad.

- You could use other white fish, haddock, for example, or an inexpensive fish such as coley.

- Try including other vegetables as a base instead of spinach, broccoli or leeks perhaps.

- Choose your own favourite cheese to add to the sauce, maybe gruyere or mozzarella.

Cooks Note