

local flavour unsurpassed

Using fresh local produce has far more benefits than just better flavour.

{ words Craig Squire
{ photography Nellie Pratt

I think we would all agree that one of the great things about living in the tropics is the abundance of local fruit. The best fruit is always the freshest, straight off the tree, from the farm gate or local stall. It is so superior to fruit that has been held in cold storage and transported thousands of kilometres.

This time of year we look forward to many tropical fruits as they come into season. The most prominent is the mango, then lychee, star apple and mangosteen. Less familiar fruits include durian, the king of fruits with its strange odour, soursop and custard apple.

A great reference for tropical fruits and other local produce is online at www.australian-tropical-foods.com or take a trip to the Tablelands to taste the fruit first hand.

One fruit not normally associated with the tropics is strawberries. Luckily with the cool dry climate on the Tablelands there are fantastic strawberries grown by Shaylee near Atherton. They are served at several restaurants around Cairns but only available retail in Atherton or direct from the farm, which is well patronised. When I asked why I couldn't buy them in retail stores locally, the answer was the low price paid by supermarkets made it uneconomical for Shaylee. This is a typical complaint about the big supermarkets, it's all about the margin, not the product. Hopefully with consumers demanding and prepared to pay a little more, this product will be stocked by Cairns outlets.

While we expect everything to be available all year, the by-product of this is poor quality, lower nutritional value, increased costs and carbon output. And often it is our farmers who miss out to cheaper imports.

So when you are shopping make conscience decisions to favour local produce and support our local farmers.

Here are two recipes using local produce, including the fantastic mascarpone cheese made from local buffalo milk by Vanella cheese factory in Portsmith.



Craig Squire is the chef and director of Ochre Restaurant and Catering. View his recipes at www.ochre-restaurant.com.au/recipe.html



Fresh Shaylee strawberries, Mt Muru honey syrup, Vanella mascarpone and Wondaree macadamia tuille

Serves 4

Ingredients

250g strawberries
200g mascarpone

Ingredients – Tuille

126g unsalted butter, soft
3 egg whites
1 cup plain flour
½ cup castor sugar

Method – Tuille

The hardest thing about making a tuille biscuit is cutting out a stencil. We use a plastic lid from ice-cream containers or similar. You could use stencils the kids may have as they can be any shape. Mix all ingredients in a food processor until paste forms, place stencil on baking sheet and smooth tuille into stencil with a palate knife – about

2mm-3mm thick is best. Repeat. When the baking sheet is full, sprinkle tuille's with crushed unsalted macadamias, bake in a pre-heated oven at 180C for 8 minutes. Cool and store in an air-tight container.

Ingredients – Syrup

150ml honey
100ml water
1 vanilla bean

Method – Syrup

Simmer for 5 minutes, cool and scrape vanilla seeds back into syrup.

To serve

Wash and hull strawberries. With a little mascarpone on the plate to stop sliding, stack tuilles, strawberries, mascarpone, drizzle with syrup and dust with icing sugar as shown.

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Wattle seed tiramisu

The tiramisu is an Italian classic, I love combining the wattle seed to give it a depth of flavour and of course an Australian twist that make's it just a little healthier! Small jars of wattle seed can be purchased at the Ochre restaurant.

Makes 1 x 10" cake
Serves 8 - 10

Ingredients

3 eggs (separated)
100g castor sugar
2 sheets or 2 teaspoons
powdered gelatin
450g mascarpone
1 pkt savoiardi (sponge finger)
biscuits
30ml masala or rum

Method

In mixing bowl whip yolks, sugar and rum or masala to sabayon (thick and white). Add mascarpone and pre-whipped whites together. Do not over-beat. Combine until just mixed, then stop. Keep cool.

Coffee / wattle seed mix

2 cups expresso – 60ml strong
black coffee
60 ml wattle seed essence
30 ml rum/masala

Soak biscuits quickly in coffee/wattle seed mix, lay in the base of a 10" high cake tin or similar, cover with 1/3 mascarpone, repeat twice while smoothing off the top layer. Refrigerate for 2 hours. Dust liberally with cocoa before serving. Great with strawberries.



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