



INTRODUCTION

The swallows are back, looping joyfully in their fly-catching pursuits to feed their demanding children, and the gentle daybreak cooings of the wood pigeon are met with smiles from the pillow. Country lanes are thick with the pong of wild garlic and village greens smell pleasantly of sweet mown cuttings. Cows let out from overwintering go bonkers in their crazy moment of release, as if trying to throw phantom rodeo riders, while blind newborns wobble in the trees and fields. Once more I can excitedly regiment my fly boxes as the rivers wake up and now my gun is locked away and replaced with my obsession for fishing.

I love my jumper collection, but – yippee! – summer’s coming. As spring turns everything greener, one must strike like a kingfisher at the short seasonal ins and outs. Heavy raids on purple sprouting broccoli become leaping grabs at the elderflowers. Native molluscs are better left closed, but meanwhile the bass, mackerel and bream flash around over grumpy fat lobsters, hunting their targets into warmer, shallower waters.

May sees erotic asparagus charging up through the soil, then bowing to the arrival of regal artichokes, as herbs stand close to sunlit walls, waiting to add their flair. July is a blood-letting of red fruits, as juices stain the fingers and chins in the race to get there before the blackbird’s beak. Fat-bottomed tomatoes threaten to snap their branches in humid hothouses, as the samphire becomes woody on the shores and the last adorable broad bean has been popped from its furry pod. Meat benefits from the rich grasses of late spring and summer, with excellent beef to lay over the pulsing white embers of the barbecue, and good milk squirts from the teat.

Throughout these 6 months the abundance becomes generous beyond belief and a Continental approach to food shopping – that is, outdoors and giving everything a good squeeze – really illustrates the arrival and departure of our wonderful fare.

As for this book, although not in itself edible, which might come in handy during a credit crunch, it aims to feed you through this element time with recipes to freshen your spirit, lighten your step and engage you in joyful cooking, as the clink of glasses and happy chat drift through the kitchen window from outside. This is not a time for the slow, sturdy dishes of autumn and winter, so the following recipes are written with that in mind. Although preparation should always be undertaken with summer loving and in the time needed, our seasonal urge is to be out and about whenever possible. It’s time for lazy picnics in the bluebells, chicken leg in hand and clouds trundling overhead, and salad lunches with good things peeking out from behind fresh leaves like wildlife in the hedgerows. There are simple things that need no complication, for those desperate to get an evening session in the pub, and

clean breakfasts now that egg, sausage and a fried slice are inappropriate. Find sumptuous fruit puddings, chilled ices to give you a head cramp and soothing evening coolers to sip in the dying light.

And of course quite a number of recipes are dedicated to cooking over charcoal, as now is the time for tong masters and prodding commanders to take the barbecue helm. Here I offer delightful alternatives to blackened sausages, distressed burgers and curiously raw chicken.

I hope there is plenty in here you will like and preferably eat outside, with condensation running down a bottle of something good (but then again it will probably be pissing with rain).

