

The good oil on the good life

Author : Michael Vaughan

Yeah, I know that last week spring was the order of the day. And yeah, I know it has still got a ways to run. But what the hell? Next thing you know, it'll be summer anyway.

It's hard to stress enough the importance of spring, of getting some edible stuff into the garden and the subsequent joy of harvesting. A snip here and there not only puts tucker on the plate, but it's good for the plants because it promotes more growth, hence, more things on plates. This week I managed to use some mixed salad greens, some delicious dill, some basil and some mint. A good start, I reckon.

And getting set up for summer salad season (nice alliteration) has partially been taken care of in my kitchen.

Think oils for starters. Now, I'm big on oils. I already have a bottle of basil-infused olive oil, a great addition to pasta, salads, whatever. I have also prepared a dipping oil—done with rosemary and the rind from a slab of parmigiano reggiano. I always keep the rind for that reason.

I just take a bottle's worth of olive oil, a bunch of bruised rosemary (sorry about that) and the said rind, whack it in a pot on the stove and heat it very gently for as long as it takes to infuse the flavours. Then I let it cool overnight (still more flavour), strain it through muslin, put a fresh sprig of rosemary in the bottle and it's done. It's an absolute knockout with fresh bread.

Garlic is another winner. I bought a few heads (yeah, yeah, I'm talkin' garlic here), peeled the cloves and did a confit in olive oil. I very gently heated the oil and left it long enough for the cloves of garlic to become just slightly soft. I then took it off the heat and let it cool overnight. I have a constant supply of pungent garlic for pastas. It's even great just spread on fresh bread with whatever you want. And a never-ending (I top it up as I go) supply of strong garlic oil. (The garlic and the oil are infinitely better than the crap sold in jars in supermarkets.)

On the agenda next is to flavour some oil with lemon, some chilli and whatever takes my fancy at the market or from the backyard production line. As for some vino, this past week I sampled the joys of Logan 2010 Chardonnay from Orange. It's kind of pale and kicks in with a fruity, citrus thing (they say there's other stuff there, but I've got no idea what marzipan smells like). At first taste I furrowed my brow, but it relaxed and finished well, again fruity. It was thoroughly enjoyable.

So too the Boat O'Craigo Rob Roy Pinot Noir from the Yarra Valley, the Ad Hoc Nitty Gritty Pinot Gris 2011 and a special mention to Moppity Vineyards 2010 Sauvignon Blanc. (Yeah, it has been a big week, especially if you count the bourbon during the grand final on telly.) Like last week's TWR sav blanc, this Moppity fella is soft (it's not a full-on assault on the tastebuds), fruity and it's all too easy to find the bottom of the bottle, but I'd recommend any of the four wines.

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