Strawberries with balsamic vinegar and black pepper



A classic dessert:

Try enhancing these flavours with the subtle clove-like notes of basil. If you don't like vinegar, use fresh lemon juice instead.

Slice or quarter 300g strawberries into a bowl and add 1tbsp balsamic vinegar + 1 ½ tbsp caster sugar.

Take 8 large basil leaves and roll them together to make a cylinder, then thinly shred them widthways and add to the strawberries.

Add 4 – 5 grindings of black pepper and gently mix everything together.

Leave to rest in the fridge for a minimum of 30 minutes but no longer than 2 hours. Toss gently before serving and garnish with basil sprigs.

This is a sweet / savoury combination that can either be served with a spread of salads or as a dessert with ice-cream and maybe some shortbread on the side.

For a sweeter combination this is the ideal time of year to try combining strawberries with that summer classic herb, lavender. This gives surprising depth to the fruit flavour. First extract the lavender flavour and aroma:

- Warm 60 ml of gin in a very small bowl and add 1 tbsp English lavender flowers — Hidcote is lovely as it imparts a beautiful dark purple colour.
- Cover the bowl tightly to preserve the lavender aromas and leave to marinate for 45 minutes.
- Meanwhile slice or quarter 300g strawberries into your serving dish and sprinkle over 50g icing sugar.
- When the gin is ready, strain off the spent flowers, and add the liquid to the strawberries, tossing gently to mix and dissolve the icing sugar.
- Leave to rest in the fridge for a minimum of 30 minutes but no longer than 2 hours.
- Toss gently before serving and garnish with fresh lavender heads.

Serve this with vanilla ice-cream or some clotted cream, or just lovely on their own!