

Summer desserts are at their best when they feel generous but not heavy; fruit at its brightest, flavours that feel familiar but still a little special because we've waited so long for them. I love puddings that can be made ahead, especially when the weather is warm; you want something waiting in the fridge rather than something that needs too much last-minute attention when you'd rather be relaxing. A clear strawberry jelly, a softly baked fruit tart, or a chilled custard tart all have that lovely feeling of effort without the panic. These are the sorts of desserts that suit long lunches, garden tables, family dinners and anything that needs a little flourish with very little fuss.

These recipes here are about simple pleasures done properly: ripe fruit, good dairy, crisp pastry, enough salt and the confidence to let a few strong ingredients do most of the work. They are summery, make-ahead and really very delicious.

Strawberry jelly, shortbread and chantilly cream

This is a beautifully simple summer pudding: clear, softly set strawberry jelly served with crisp golden shortbread and a spoonful of chantilly cream. Fresh strawberries are wonderful here, but frozen strawberries work brilliantly, too, because they give up their juice so generously. As you're not eating them whole it feels less hurtful to use frozen ones over fresh – keep the fresh ones for serving with.

Serves 4. Ready in 5 hours, with chilling time
strawberries 500g, frozen or fresh
water 250ml
caster sugar 75g, or to taste
lemon juice 1 tbsp
gold gelatine leaves 3 (or enough to set 500ml liquid according to instructions)

For the shortbread:

unsalted butter 150g, softened
golden caster sugar 75g
plain flour 225g
fine salt ½ tsp

For the chantilly cream:

double cream 200ml
icing sugar 1 tbsp
vanilla extract ½ tsp

To make the jelly, hull the strawberries if using fresh fruit. Put the strawberries, water, sugar and lemon juice into a saucepan and warm gently until the berries have softened and released their juice. Do not boil hard, as this can make the jelly cloudy.

Remove from the heat and leave to steep for 20 minutes. Strain through a fine sieve or muslin without pressing too hard. Weigh or measure the liquid. You want around 500ml. If you have less, top it up with a little water.

Soak the gelatine leaves for 5 minutes in cold water until soft. Warm a small amount of the strawberry liquid. Squeeze out the gelatine and stir it into the warm berry juice until dissolved. Mix back into the remaining berry liquid. Pour into glasses or moulds and chill for at least 4 hours, or until set.

To make the shortbread, heat the oven to 180C/gas mark 4. Beat the butter and sugar together until smooth. Add the flour and salt, and mix until a soft dough forms. Press into a lined tin or roll out and cut into batons. Chill for 20 minutes.

Bake the shortbread for 18–25 minutes, depending on shape and thickness, until pale golden at the edges. Cool completely.

For the cream, whisk everything together until soft peaks form. Serve a spoonful alongside the jellies (either turned out or in their glasses) with the pieces of shortbread. ➔