

BAKED QUINCES

This is a good way to prepare the fruit, which can then be used in sweet or savoury dishes. The easiest way to bake quinces is simply to put them into the oven whole. To use this method you do need to know your fruit is in good condition as you cannot check it first. Wash all the furry down off. Heat the oven to 190°C/Gas 5 and cook until the fruit feels tender when gently squeezed. Depending on the size and ripeness of the fruit this will take between 1 and 2 hours. You want the fruit to remain reasonably firm, so stop before the flesh becomes squishy and begins to fall apart.

Once cooked, you can quarter the fruit and remove the core, or cut it in half lengthwise and scoop the core out. This is best done using a combination of a sharp, pointed knife and a melon baller.

Baked quinces were a favourite pudding of Sir Isaac Newton. You can serve them simply with a caramel sauce or stuffed with a variety of sweet or savoury fillings.

IDEAS FOR STUFFED QUINCES

Two suggestions for stuffed quinces are given on the following pages, but there are several simpler fillings or flavourings that can be added to the halved and cored fruit once it is baked. These might include:

- Chopped nuts: walnuts, pistachios almonds or pine nuts
- Honey
- Cinnamon, vanilla or ginger
- Dried fruit, especially raisins or sultanas
- Brandy or any flavoured spirit
- Freshly squeezed orange or lemon juice
- Diced marzipan

Simply cut the cooked fruit in half, gently remove the core, pile on the filling and return to the oven for 10–15 minutes.

CORONATION QUINCES

At the coronation of Richard III in 1483 the last dish on the menu was 'Quynces Bake'. The instructions state that the quinces should be cored, filled with ginger and sugar and baked in a pastry coffin. Pastry coffins were commonly used in medieval cooking as a container for foods baked in an oven. They might then be decorated, but the were not necessarily eaten – the paste being coarse and dry. This modern variation omits the pastry and adds amaretti biscuits to the filling. They are certainly not authentic, but give the pudding a lovely crunchy topping.

Allow 1 medium sized quince per person.

For each quince

3 crunchy amaretti biscuits, crushed
1 tablespoon soft brown sugar
2 teaspoons amaretto liqueur
1 teaspoon powdered ginger

Preheat the oven to 190°C/Gas 5.

Bake the quinces whole as described above.

Mix the crushed biscuits, sugar, amaretto and ginger together in a bowl.

Remove the quinces from the oven and as soon as you can handle them, cut in half lengthwise. Remove the cores gently so as not to break the halves. Put back on the baking tray cut side up and pile the biscuit mixture on top of the quinces. Return to the oven for 15 minutes, until the topping has become crisp and caramel-flavoured, a truly wonderful combination.

Serve hot with lots of thick cream or ice-cream.