



CORRECT LINE COOKING

Berried Treasure

I came across a beautiful word in the dictionary the other day: framboesia. I assumed this would be something particularly lovely. A cross between a crepe and a soft place perhaps, or a raspberry-flavoured slice of heaven. Maybe a particularly beautiful soufflé, or the colour one blushes after climaxing. In fact, framboesia refers to yaws—that is “a contagious bacterial skin-disease of tropical countries, with raspberry-like excrescences”. Nothing ambrosial about that.

But brushing this unpleasant experience aside, I opened a book with the unambiguous name of *Strawberries* by Pamela Allardice (Hill of Content, about \$22.50). The cover of this text boasts naked cherubs playing with ribbons and strawberries against a background of clouds, and the author's description reveals that “Pamela is a true romantic. She is married to Greg and they live in a house named ‘Follow Your Heart’ with their baby Edward”. I think I preferred the tropical diseases. Nevertheless, the book contains a wealth of interesting information and recipes between the rather kitsch illustrations by Simone Bennett.

The strawberry seems to have represented all things to various peoples

around the world, apart from the notions of cuteness which this book favours on its cover. Allardice points out that they have been regarded as aphrodisiacs and as symbolising “perfection and righteousness in allegorical art works”, such as in mediaeval representations of Mary. The book has a small section on the history of strawberry cultivation and belief, mostly in Europe (“Strawberry Lore”), and tips on their cultivation. The greater part of *Strawberries* is devoted to ways of consuming the blessed fruit, as both food and an ingredient in beauty and health preparations. One of the older beauty tips makes recent worries about animal ingredients seem a bit effete:

To Cure Excessive Ruddiness of the Face

It is good overnight to anoint the face with hare's blood and in the morning to wash it with strawberry and cowslip water, the juice of distil'd lemon, juice of cowcubers or to use the seeds of melon or kernels of peaches beaten small.

I can't actually say that I have tried this 17th century facial, and being blessed with a non-ruddy complexion, I don't feel called upon to rush out with the shotty. I suppose after looking at your face caked in hare's blood overnight, it would seem less ruddy when one finally washed the stuff off. But strawberries are slightly astringent, and their fruit and leaves have been used for everything from teeth whitener to skin toner.

Many of the recipes for skin preparations are less harrowing than the one given above, and would certainly be more fun to try. Mashed strawberries, raw honey and natural yoghurt mixed together are supposed to remove wrinkles, if left on damp skin for 10-15 minutes—although the “delicate eye area” (where wrinkles tend to hang out) is to be avoided. The health preparations include mouth ulcer and cystitis tonics, but I haven't actually been organised or afflicted enough to attempt this yet.

The rest of *Strawberries* is devoted to matters culinary. My major problem with recipes involving berries is that, at their very best, they don't need anything at all done to them. Their texture and flavour are quite perfect. And some of the uses given here, such as “Strawberry Bortsch” seem almost desperate. I'd need to have several tonnes of excess berries before I tried that. However, here's one of the recipes which is well worth attempting.

Yagody

This is a traditional Russian dish. To be truly authentic, the strawberries should be the small, wild variety and freshly picked.

1 punnet strawberries, washed and hulled
250ml sour cream
30g sugar
1/4 tspn almond essence
1/2 tspn vanilla essence
cinnamon

Beat cream, sugar and essences with electric mixer for 15 minutes or until mixture has doubled in size. Fold berries through mixture and sprinkle with cinnamon. Chill well.

Strawberries is a must for an addict and a fun book for those who like the heavenly fruit. Still, I can't help feeling that the book was designed as a present for a maiden aunt (if such a creature still exists) rather than as something one would buy to read or use. Perhaps that's because strawberries seem a lot sexier to me than they apparently do to Pamela Allardice, not to mention the annoyingly chaste pastel drawings of near Victorian respectability. The underbelly of the berry is not revealed in this text, and it's all a bit fluffy. But still, after my experience with framboesia, perhaps I should be grateful that the only skin condition discussed here—outside wrinkles and ruddiness—is Anne Boleyn's strawberry-shaped birthmark. There's a lot to be said for the safety of scones and jam.

Penelope Cottier.