



**NZ HERALD VIVA FOOD AMANDA LAIRD**

## ORCHID'S GIFT

Vanilla has to be one of the most glorious scents and tastes on earth. The pod of a tropical wild orchid, the intoxicating flavour of vanilla is most popular in icecream, but turn the page and discover how it can be used in many other ways.

To appreciate the true flavour you need to use a pure product. Pure vanilla extract is worlds apart from vanilla essence. One is grown and dried in the sun while the other is a synthetic liquid - a distant imitation. This is a perfect example of quality versus quantity - though you pay more for the pure product, you also use much less to obtain that authentic, mellow and alluring flavour.

When buying vanilla pods look for plumpness and shine. To use, lay the pod on a chopping board and split open with a sharp knife. The seeds can be scraped out and added to the recipe and the pods can be used to infuse and add depth to sauces and syrups or dried and buried in sugar to use sprinkled over cakes, fruit, yoghurt or on your morning porridge - delicious!

Remember to keep the pods in an airtight container in a cool and dark place - refrigerating can make them harden.

Today I have used vanilla with salmon - a surprisingly complimentary match - in a refreshing canape perfect with drinks. Delicate cakes are made with olive oil and dessert wine then kiwifruit are poached in a fragrant syrup and served with cream.

Enjoy.

### CHEF'S TIP

Check out Heilala vanilla, a New Zealand and Tongan partnership producing organic pods, vanilla sugar, extract and paste of the richest grade grown in the Vava'u Islands while also providing employment to the locals, in turn benefiting the education and village infrastructures. These divine products are available from gourmet food stores, Sabato, Farro, Zarbo and Smith and Caughey in Auckland.

## VANILLA SALMON TARTARE WITH VODKA, CHIVES AND MELBA TOAST

Serves 4 as a canape

300g fillet of salmon  
 Seeds from one vanilla pod or use 1 tsp of pure vanilla paste  
 2 Tbs vodka  
 1 Tbs olive oil  
 2 Tbs chives, finely snipped  
 Juice and zest of one or two limes depending on size - approximately 1 Tbsp of juice and 2 tsps of zest  
 1 x 2 inch piece of cucumber, deseeded and finely diced  
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
 Creme fraiche  
 Sandwich sliced white bread

1. Remove the skin and any bones from the salmon then finely dice. Put in a bowl with the vanilla, vodka, oil, chives, juice and zest. Mix to combine, cover then leave in the fridge for an hour.

2. Just before serving, add the cucumber then season.

3. To make the melba toast, preheat oven to 160C. Remove bread crusts and either cut into quarters or circles using a cutter. Bake in the oven until dry and crisp. Spread the toast with creme fraiche then top with the salmon.



### VANILLA AND DESSERT WINE CAKES

Makes 12

1/2 cup caster sugar  
 3 eggs  
 1 tsp vanilla extract  
 3/4 cup olive oil  
 1/2 cup dessert wine  
 1/3 cup milk  
 1 1/2 cup self-raising flour  
 1/2 tsp salt

#### Syrup

1/2 cup dessert wine  
 1/2 tsp vanilla extract  
 1 1/2 Tbs sugar

1. Preheat oven to 180C. Grease muffin tins and make collars from baking paper to prevent the mixture spilling over while baking.
2. Using electric beaters, beat together the sugar, eggs and vanilla until thick and pale. Beat in the olive oil, dessert wine and milk.
3. Fold in the flour and salt then spoon into the tins and bake for approximately 20 minutes or until done when tested with a skewer.
4. Simmer together the extra dessert wine, vanilla and sugar, while stirring for 5 minutes or until syrupy, then spoon over the warm cakes before serving.



### VANILLA POACHED GOLDEN KIWIFRUIT WITH CREAM

Serves 4

8 golden kiwifruit  
 250g white sugar  
 1 vanilla pod  
 1 cinnamon stick  
 2 bay leaves - preferably fresh  
 4 white peppercorns  
 Cream to serve

1. Peel the kiwifruit, halve and put aside. Put the sugar into a saucepan. Scrape the seeds from the vanilla and add with the pod. Add the cinnamon, bay leaves and peppercorns.
2. Add 1 cup of water and bring to a boil while stirring to dissolve the sugar. When the sugar has dissolved, add the fruit and simmer for 5 minutes. Serve in bowls with a little syrup and softly whipped cream.

