

HALOUMI GRILLED IN VINE LEAVES

SERVES 4 AS A STARTER OR SNACK

16 hand-sized grape leaves, fresh or preserved
2 blocks Cypriot haloumi, each about 200 g, soaked in cold water for 1 hour
1 teaspoon sweet paprika
teaspoon chilli powder
16 thin slices pastrami
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons olive oil
lemon wedges

Haloumi is one of our favourite cheeses: it has a strange, almost rubbery texture and an addictive salty-sweet flavour.

Eaten as is, it can be a little bland, but try dusting it with a little seasoned flour and frying or grilling it, Greek saganaki-style, which transforms its flavour and gives it a lovely crisp-golden coating.

Here is another way of cooking it: wrapped in a layer of pastrami and tangy vine leaves, which char to a gorgeous crunch under the grill.

If you're lucky enough to have a grape vine in your garden, or if you live near a vineyard, summer is the time to go harvesting.

Fresh vine leaves have an incomparable citrus tang, without the often tinny-briny undertone that you find in the preserved ones.

The latter are fine but need a thorough soaking and rinsing before you can use them.

If you are using preserved vine leaves, soak them well, then rinse and pat dry. Fresh vine leaves should first be blanched and refreshed.

After soaking the haloumi, pat dry and cut each block width ways into 8 fat slices.

Mix the chilli and paprika together and dust the cheese very lightly, then wrap with a slice of pastrami.

Lay the vine leaves, vein side up, on the work surface.

Lie the pastrami-wrapped cheese block across the base of the leaf and splash on a drop of extra virgin olive oil.

Roll the leaf over once, then fold in the sides and continue to roll into a neat little square parcel.

Brush each parcel with a little olive oil and cook under a preheated very hot grill (broiler) for a few minutes on each side, or until the vine leaves start to colour and blister.

Serve them straight from the grill with a squeeze of lemon.

