

Heads & tales



British cauliflower is taking over the trendiest menus. Rosie Mullender heads to Lincolnshire to find out what makes it so special

Before he started growing it 15 years ago, James Morrell didn't eat much cauliflower. 'I didn't realise how versatile it was,' he says, absent-mindedly snapping a fluffy white floret from a cauliflower head and nibbling it.

'I used to just steam it, but cauliflower is pretty trendy right now - people are making cauliflower steaks, rice and even pizza bases out of it.'

I'm on Marsh Farm in Boston, Lincolnshire, with James, an agricultural scientist for Staples Vegetables, to find out how it grows the cauliflowers stocked on Co-op's shelves.

Fertile grounds

The soil in this area is ideal for growing brassicas, a family of vegetables that includes cauliflower, as well as broccoli, cabbage and kale, which Staples also supplies to Co-op. 'This soil is among the most fertile in the world,' James says. 'In fact, 70% of the UK's brassicas come from Lincolnshire.'

As early as medieval times, farmers started reclaiming soil from the sea, building defences to divert the tide and revealing acres of mineral-rich soil. And here at Staples, an incredible 3,300 acres is devoted to cauliflower.

Seedlings are grown in greenhouses, then matured for seven to eight weeks before being transferred to the fields. Between two and nine months later, depending on the season, a harvesting team will descend on the field, choosing, cutting and trimming heads by hand before placing them in what look like giant yellow tulips on a tractor conveyor belt.

The plastic cups then chug around and into the tractor trailer, where the cauliflowers are packed right there in the field. Next, they're placed in cold storage, ready to be transported to Co-op stores, where they can be found on the shelves as soon as 48 hours after being harvested.

Best of British

'You can't control Mother Nature, but our intention is to supply British cauliflower to Co-op all year round, either here or on >



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James Morrell



FLOWER POWER

Watch our cauli video at coop.co.uk/foodmagazine

meet the producer



Cauliflowers are harvested by hand before being packed in the field, ready to be sent to Co-op stores



meet the producer

our farm on the Isle of Wight,' James says. 'We analyse the soil to make sure our plants get the right nutrition, and grow over 40 different varieties to help with our supply.'

Staples works with seed houses across the world to select the best varieties for Co-op. And they're always looking for the next big thing in the world of cauliflower.

'We have specific fields put aside for trialling new varieties,' says James. 'That way, we know we're always growing the best. Our newest variety is sweet-stemmed cauliflower, which is available in Co-op stores from October.'

Going green

As well as being innovative in the varieties they grow, Staples is environmentally friendly, too. 'Any waste on the field is ploughed back into the soil, and everything else goes into our anaerobic digestion plant,' James explains. 'It's then processed into gas, which provides all our energy, leaving behind a fibrous matter that can be used as compost.'

Even damaged cauliflowers aren't thrown away. 'If the curd – that's the fluffy white part of the cauliflower – gets damaged during the harvest, we'll use it in bags of florets,' he says.

Sheepishly, I admit I've never tried raw cauliflower, so James hands me a floret to try. The texture is incredible – it flakes away into delicious little pieces in my mouth – and it tastes surprisingly sweet. There's none of the bitterness I sometimes associate with brassicas.

All I need now is some Co-op red pepper houmous for dipping.

Before I leave, I ask James for his favourite cauliflower dish. 'I love good old cauliflower cheese,' he laughs. 'It might not be trendy but it really is delicious.'



CO-OP TECHNICAL MANAGER JOHN FEEGE SAYS:

'Staples is as passionate about delicious, quality British cauliflower as we are. Like us, they're committed to supplying vegetables that are the very best.'



Seedlings are planted in the fields after seven to eight weeks

PHOTOGRAPHY WILLIAM SHAW RECIPE PHOTOGRAPHY ADRIAN LAWRENCE FOOD STYLING ANGELA ROMEO PROP STYLING SIMON REES



Cauliflower pizza

Try our recipe for this trendy British cauliflower dish and discover its tasty versatility for yourself.

FEEDS 4 READY IN 45 MINS

- 1 tsp Co-op olive oil, plus extra for greasing
- 1 Co-op British cauliflower, trimmed and grated
- 100g hazelnuts, finely chopped
- 20g Co-op Parmesan, finely grated
- 2 Co-op British free-range eggs, beaten
- 150g Co-op British purple sprouting broccoli
- 265g jar Co-op tomato & herb pizza topper sauce
- 6 slices Co-op sliced chorizo, halved
- 100g Co-op mozzarella, roughly torn

1 Preheat the oven to 220°C/fan 200°C/Gas 7. Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper and grease with a little olive oil.

2 Dry fry the cauliflower for 5-8 mins, stirring frequently, until softened, then transfer to a bowl and set aside. When cooled slightly, stir in the hazelnuts, Parmesan and egg.

3 Tip the mixture onto the baking tray and flatten into an even circle. Drizzle over the oil and bake for 15-20 mins, until firm and golden.

4 Meanwhile, boil the broccoli for 5-6 mins, then drain. When the pizza base is cooked, remove from the oven. Spread over the tomato sauce and top with the chorizo, mozzarella and broccoli. Bake for another 8-10 mins, until the mozzarella is lightly golden.

approx per serving (serves 4)

Energy	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
1870kJ	31.5g	7.8g	10.9g	1.22g
450kcal	HIGH*	HIGH*	LOW	MED
22%	45%	39%	12%	20%

% of an adult's reference intake.
Carbohydrates per serving: 15g