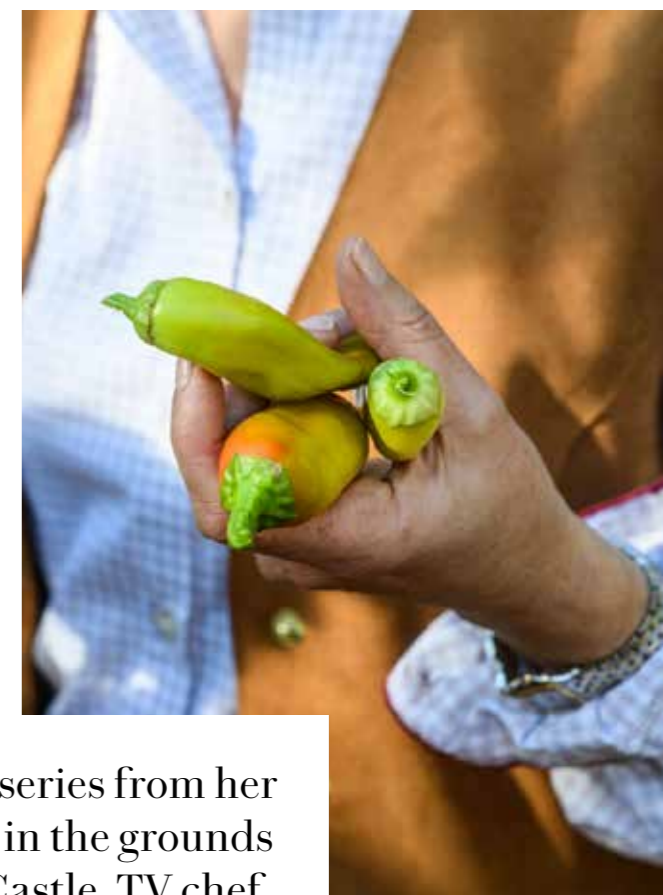
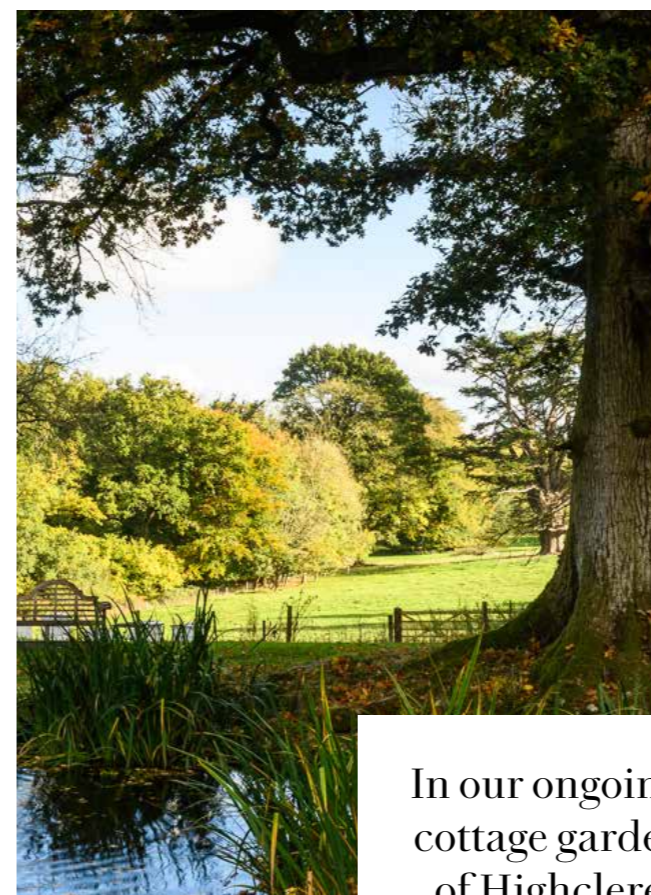




AUTUMN
AT Broadspear



In our ongoing series from her cottage garden in the grounds of Highclere Castle, TV chef Clodagh McKenna cooks up a storm for an alfresco soirée

WORDS BY **KATE LANGRISH** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JASON INGRAM**
PRODUCTION BY **PATRICIA TAYLOR**





It takes more than a bit of cloud to stop chef and television presenter Clodagh McKenna from entertaining outdoors at this time of year: “Even on a dull day, the light shining through autumn leaves is like sitting beneath a canopy of gold. And if you’re lucky enough to get one of those hazy days, well, there’s nothing better. It’s so beautiful.”

Autumn is Clodagh’s favourite time of year at Broadspear, the home she shares with husband Harry in the grounds of Highclere Castle. She loves the colours, from the coppery tones of the orchard to the vibrant hues of dahlias in the cutting garden. But, most of all, she loves the bountiful supply of produce in her walled vegetable garden. “Growing vegetables has been a steep learning curve for me over the past six years, but seeing how a small seed I planted back in spring has turned into a gigantic pumpkin is so satisfying,” she says.

But it’s not just super-sized pumpkins: each raised bed offers a bumper harvest of its own. The browning husks of sweetcorn indicate they’re ready for Clodagh to drop them on the barbecue and enjoy with a bit of butter, while the dark green leaves of the curly and Tuscan kales that have taken up space all summer are now earning their keep. Along the old garden walls, red-, white- and blackcurrants dangle like jewels, while the greenhouse is a jungle of grapes, ripe tomatoes and chillis that have spent months building up their heat. Fortunately, Clodagh’s enthusiasm for entertaining means friends and family are more than happy to help make a dent in this seasonal glut.

Her autumnal gatherings take place in woodland just beyond the walled vegetable garden. Clodagh sets up a long wooden table, simply decorated with vines and foliage, in her favourite spot beneath an old lime tree: “This is a very special place for me as Harry proposed beneath this tree, and we then held our wedding reception in these woods.” To ward off the evening chill, Clodagh piles chairs with blankets and cushions and lights a big firepit. “Cosiness is key,” she explains. “If you’re eating outside at this time of year, every course needs to be warming. You want hearty food that feels like a big hug.” Guests are served soups made with root vegetables from her garden – curried parsnip and chunky minestrone – in mugs that keep hands warm. Meanwhile, a chilli or stew gently simmers in a large pan suspended over the fire. Clodagh uses slow-cook ▶



“Growing vegetables has been a steep learning curve for me over the past six years, but seeing how a small seed I planted back in spring has turned into a gigantic pumpkin is so satisfying”



cuts of the couple's Broadspear beef in her stews. "I get the fire going two or three hours before people arrive. It means the meat can be gently cooking away to become beautifully tender. It also avoids all your guests cursing you for getting smoke in their eyes because you've tried to light a fire while they're sitting there!"

Even the drinks help keep everyone toasty. Clodagh's favourite is a mulled apple juice made with orange peel, cloves "and a drop of brandy for those who need it". Although she has an orchard of fruit trees, the juice has come from a single tree in the walled garden: "We found it when we first started clearing the garden. It's very old and we thought it might be dead or dying, but after careful pruning it's had a new lease of life. Last year, it was absolutely covered in apples. We climbed up on ladders to pick every one. We then took them to a local press and got 86 bottles of juice from that one tree."

As evening draws in, Clodagh turns on strings of lights that zigzag along a path through the woods, and lights candles in vintage lanterns she's collected over the years. As people gather around the glowing embers, wrapped in blankets, there's a relaxed feel to these outdoor soirées. "There's something about being sat around a fire – it's very convivial," Clodagh says. "It feels really special and gives me a warm feeling. Although that might also be the brandy in the mulled apple juice!"

LOOK OUT FOR our winter visit to Broadspear in the next issue. Find out more at clodaghmckenna.com or follow @clodagh_mckenna.

CHOCOLATE BEEF CHILLI

Chocolate brings a smoky flavour and velvet texture to this dish. I often use the slow-cook cuts of our Broadspear beef, which are so tender when left to simmer over the fire.

Serves 6

2 TBSP OLIVE OIL	SMALL PIECES
300G MINCED BEEF	1 X 400G TIN CHERRY TOMATOES
1 SMALL ONION, DICED	1 TBSP BROWN SUGAR
7CM-8CM PIECE FRESH GINGER, GRATED	2 TSP FRESH OR DRIED OREGANO
3 GARLIC CLOVES, CRUSHED	2 BAY LEAVES
1 TSP GROUND CUMIN	1 TBSP TOMATO KETCHUP
1 TSP GROUND CINNAMON	50G DARK CHOCOLATE, GRATED
1 TSP DRIED CHILLI FLAKES	400G KIDNEY BEANS
100G PANCETTA	
100G CHORIZO, CUT INTO	

- 1 Heat 1 tbsp oil in a casserole set on a medium hob. Add the beef; fry until browned. Remove with a slotted spoon; set aside.
- 2 Pour the remaining oil into the casserole and stir in the onions, ginger and garlic. Cook for 2 minutes, stir in spices and fry for 1 minute. Add pancetta and chorizo. Cook, stirring, for 3 minutes.
- 3 Return the beef to the casserole; stir well. Add the tomatoes, sugar, oregano, bay leaves and ketchup, with 300ml water. Season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Cover and cook for 1½ hours on a low heat.
- 4 Stir in the chocolate and kidney beans and simmer for 20 minutes. Serve with baked potatoes or basmati rice. ▶



Clodagh's TOP TIPS FOR AN AUTUMN SOIRÉE

Use a firepit to double up as cooker and radiator. I also have a little camping stove that I set up beside the table so that I can reheat soups or drinks.

Put a blanket on the back of each chair so guests can wrap up. I often don't have enough blankets, so I'll put woolly cardigans or jumpers for people to use.

Place hot water bottles on seats. They'll warm up the chair, then guests can

sit with them on their lap or behind their back.

Bring the palettes of autumn to your table.

I like to use vines from the greenhouse along with small branches and ferns. Pumpkins and squash, which come in so many shapes and sizes, add a dash of drama to the table. And figs make perfect place settings – put a slit in the top and a name card in it.

“Being sat around a fire is really special. It’s very convivial”



Mulled Apple Juice (recipe overleaf)

Curried Parsnip and Apple Soup (recipe overleaf)



How to ROAST PUMPKIN SEEDS

Preheat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Rinse the seeds, removing any bits of pumpkin. Dry in kitchen paper. Put the seeds in a bowl and toss in a splash of olive oil to coat. Spread the seeds on a baking tray and roast for 10 minutes.



CURRIED PARSNIP AND APPLE SOUP

A hug in a mug for my friends and family. I love using all the sweet root vegetables, like parsnips, at this time of year, and the curry powder brings an aromatic warmth to the soup.

Serves 4

50G BUTTER	ROUGHLY CHOPPED
1 ONION, PEELED AND	1 TBSP PLAIN FLOUR
ROUGHLY CHOPPED	1 TBSP MEDIUM
1 GARLIC CLOVE, CRUSHED	CURRY POWDER
1 POTATO, PEELED AND	1.2 LITRES HOT
ROUGHLY CHOPPED	VEGETABLE STOCK
3 PARSNIPS, PEELED AND	100ML DOUBLE CREAM
ROUGHLY CHOPPED	50G HAZELNUTS, TOASTED
1 COOKING APPLE,	AND CHOPPED
PEELED, CORED AND	

1 Melt the butter in a large saucepan over a low heat. Stir in the onion, garlic, potato, parsnips and apple. Season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Cover and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the parsnips and apple are tender.

2 Add the flour and curry powder, stirring to coat the ingredients and making sure no lumps form. Pour in the stock, stirring well, bring to the boil, then simmer for 10 minutes.

3 Pour the soup into a food processor and blitz to a smooth consistency. Return to the saucepan, stir in the cream and gently warm through.

4 To serve, ladle the soup into warmed bowls and garnish with the toasted hazelnuts.

PUMPKIN SEED SCONES

I save the seeds from my pumpkins. Just rinse them and remove any stringy bits, then drizzle with a little oil and roast in a hot oven. They're delicious in these scones or sprinkled on winter salads and soups.

Makes 6

225G WHITE PLAIN FLOUR,	50G BUTTER, CHILLED
PLUS EXTRA FOR DUSTING	AND CUBED
1 TBSP BAKING POWDER	125ML-150ML MILK
PINCH OF SEA SALT	1 TBSP PUMPKIN SEEDS

1 Preheat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan oven) gas mark 7. Lightly dust a baking tray with flour.

2 Sift the flour and baking powder into a bowl. Stir in the salt. Rub in the butter using your fingertips until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Pour in enough milk to make a soft dough, using a fork to bring it all together.

3 Roll out on a floured surface into a round the thickness of 1cm. Cut into six triangles and put on the baking tray. Sprinkle with the pumpkin seeds. Bake for 15 minutes.



MULLED APPLE JUICE

I use apples from our orchard here in Broadspear, which I get bottled at a local apple press. Warmed with spices and sometimes with a splash of Calvados, it tastes like heaven!

Serves 4-6

1 Heat 1 litre of apple juice with a few strips of orange peel, a cinnamon stick and three cloves. Serve with a splash of Calvados for the adults!

STICKY FIGGY CAKE

When we first moved into Broadspear, there was a poorly fig tree that wasn't producing fruit. After a few years of pruning and adding good compost on a regular basis, we now have the most delicious figs at this time of the year. This is my cake to celebrate our beautiful tree!

Makes 12 slices

225G UNSALTED BUTTER,	300G SELF-RAISING FLOUR
PLUS EXTRA FOR GREASING	150G FRESH FIGS, SLICED
300G DATES	FOR THE TOPPING
150G DRIED FIGS	200G ICING SUGAR, SIFTED
350G SOFT LIGHT	360G CREAM CHEESE
BROWN SUGAR	12 FRESH FIGS, HALVED
4 LARGE EGGS	1 ORANGE
2 TSP VANILLA EXTRACT	HONEY, FOR DRIZZLING
2 TSP BICARBONATE OF SODA	

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Grease a 30cm spring-form cake tin.

2 Put the dates, figs and 900ml water in a medium pan and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and leave to cool for 10 minutes. Blend the mixture in a food processor and set aside.

3 Cream together the butter and sugar using hand beaters or free-standing mixer. With the motor running, add one egg at a time, whisking well before adding the next. Whisk in the vanilla. Fold in the bicarbonate of soda and flour, then the fig purée.

4 Pour the mixture into the tin. Arrange the sliced figs on the top of the cake like a fan. Bake for 50-55 minutes. Cool on a rack.

5 Meanwhile, make the frosting by creaming together the icing sugar and cream cheese in a mixer or with a whisk.

6 Spread the icing over the top of the cake. Arrange the cut figs on top and then the orange zest. Drizzle with honey.



Sticky Figgy Cake

FOOD DIRECTOR ALISON WALKER. HOME ECONOMIST KAREN WILLIAMS. HAIR AND MAKE-UP NATASHA FROM ARTLINGTON TALENT

From tree TO TART

Autumn means baking for Clodagh – and she's not short of ingredients: "Alongside the apple and pear orchard we planted, we've been adding fruit trees elsewhere. For the past few years, Harry has given me a plum tree each birthday. We've also planted fig trees." Clodagh uses the apples to make tarts and galettes, while figs are combined with honey from her bees to create a sticky cake. The secret to Clodagh's bakes lies in the ducks that roam around the apple trees. "Duck eggs are perfect. The white gives extra lift and the yolk richness."