

Cauliflower Cake

1 small cauliflower, outer leaves removed, broken into 1½-inch/3-cm florets (1 lb/450 g)
 1 medium red onion, peeled (6 oz/170 g)
 5 tbsp/75 ml olive oil
 ½ tsp finely chopped rosemary
 7 eggs (scant 1 lb/440 g)
 ½ cup/15 g basil leaves, chopped
 1 cup/120 g all-purpose flour, sifted
 1½ tsp baking powder

½ tsp ground turmeric
 5 oz/150 g coarsely grated Parmesan or another mature cheese
 melted unsalted butter, for brushing
 1 tsp white sesame seeds
 1 tsp nigella seeds salt and black pepper

Having lived in Britain for more than sixteen years, there are certain names and phrases with which I am perfectly familiar: Doctor Who, Ring a Ring o' Roses, Curly Wurlies, Blue Pate, and cauliflower cheese, to name just a few, but I have no clue as to their meaning. This is mostly a disadvantage because I miss out on all sorts of innuendos and references, but occasionally it works pretty well for me. When it comes to cauliflower cheese, for example, what to me sounds like the most indulgent and comforting of dishes has to an alumnus of the British school system a stomach-turning echo of drearily soft florets swimming in a puddle of greasy water. So when it comes to cauliflower and particularly when cheese is involved, I need to work extra hard to convince my readers that this is something they might want to eat. Well, I think I've got a winner here.

Serve this cake as a light supper alongside a makeshift salad of sliced cucumber, dill, mint, a little sugar, cider vinegar, and canola oil. Wrapped well, this cake will taste even better the next day.

Preheat the oven to 400°F/200°C.

Place the cauliflower florets in a saucepan and add 1 teaspoon salt. Cover with water and simmer for 15 minutes, until the florets are quite soft. They should break when pressed with a spoon. Drain and set aside in a colander to dry.

Cut 4 round slices, each ¼ inch/5 mm thick, off one end of the onion and set aside. Coarsely chop the rest of the onion and place in a small pan with the oil and rosemary. Cook for 10 minutes over medium heat, stirring from time to time, until soft. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool. Transfer the onion to a large bowl, add the eggs and basil, whisk well, and then add the flour, baking powder, turmeric, Parmesan, 1 teaspoon salt, and plenty of pepper. Whisk until smooth before adding the cauliflower and stirring gently, trying not to break up the florets.

Line the base and sides of a 9½-inch/24-cm springform cake pan with parchment paper. Brush the sides with melted butter, then mix together the sesame and nigella seeds and toss them around the inside of the pan so that they stick to the sides. Pour the cauliflower mixture into the pan, spreading it evenly, and arrange the reserved onion rings on top. Place in the center of the oven and bake for 45 minutes, until golden brown and set; a knife inserted into the center of the cake should come out clean. Remove from the oven and leave for at least 20 minutes before serving. It needs to be served just warm, rather than hot, or at room temperature.

