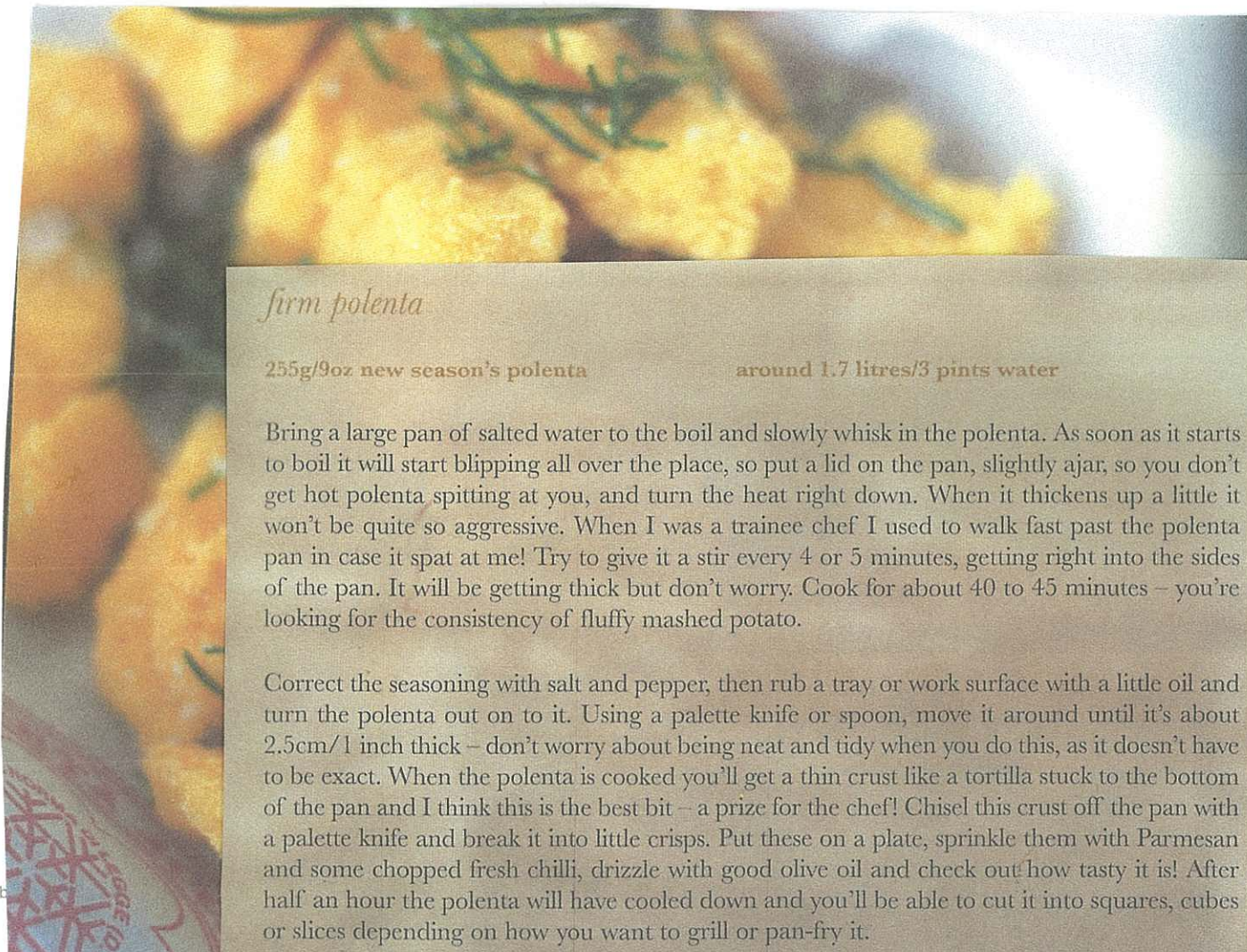




firm polenta

255g/9oz new season's polenta

around 1.7 litres/3 pints water

Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil and slowly whisk in the polenta. As soon as it starts to boil it will start blipping all over the place, so put a lid on the pan, slightly ajar, so you don't get hot polenta spitting at you, and turn the heat right down. When it thickens up a little it won't be quite so aggressive. When I was a trainee chef I used to walk fast past the polenta pan in case it spat at me! Try to give it a stir every 4 or 5 minutes, getting right into the sides of the pan. It will be getting thick but don't worry. Cook for about 40 to 45 minutes – you're looking for the consistency of fluffy mashed potato.

Correct the seasoning with salt and pepper, then rub a tray or work surface with a little oil and turn the polenta out on to it. Using a palette knife or spoon, move it around until it's about 2.5cm/1 inch thick – don't worry about being neat and tidy when you do this, as it doesn't have to be exact. When the polenta is cooked you'll get a thin crust like a tortilla stuck to the bottom of the pan and I think this is the best bit – a prize for the chef! Chisel this crust off the pan with a palette knife and break it into little crisps. Put these on a plate, sprinkle them with Parmesan and some chopped fresh chilli, drizzle with good olive oil and check out how tasty it is! After half an hour the polenta will have cooled down and you'll be able to cut it into squares, cubes or slices depending on how you want to grill or pan-fry it.