

Lifestyle TIPP BY ESTHER KERN



EDIBLE INSECTS – AN OVERVIEW

Since 2016, three insects have been approved as foodstuffs in Switzerland: crickets, grasshoppers and mealworms. However, most people have never actually used them in cooking. So is it worth giving them a try?

As a general rule, people here in Switzerland are not used to eating insects and first have to overcome their revulsion at the prospect. Most palatable are grasshoppers and crickets that have been roasted or fried in oil and then salted. They can be eaten as snacks, just like nuts. Prepared in this way, the insects tend to have a nutty flavour. If mealworms are added to a vegetable soup for extra protein, you can hardly even taste them.

While the insects were difficult to get hold of at first, they are now more widely available. For example, they can be purchased from Essento (www.essento.ch), a Swiss start-up that is dedicated to edible insects.

Insects are still rarely used in Swiss restaurants. However, things are quite different in northern Europe. For example, Noma, one of the world's best-known restaurants, serves a walnut and grasshopper cream topped with pumpkin seed tofu and decorated with rose petals. The Nordic Food Lab in Copenhagen has experimented widely with insects in recent years. For example, the experts have produced fermented garum from grasshoppers. But what is garum? Usually it is a fermented fish sauce, but in this case it is made from grasshoppers instead of fish. That is a very good way of using grasshopper protein. Garum can be used to flavour food, giving it a good deal of umami, in other words a strong, savoury taste.

There will surely be even more developments in the use of insects in food in the years to come. The knowledge gained by researchers in Europe can be applied in countries where insects are an important source of protein. So even if eating insects does not catch on widely in Switzerland, it is still a valuable field of research.