

SIX OF THE BEST

A Collection of Spanking Good Recipes

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Introduction

I have enjoyed cooking for as long as I can remember. It has been my main hobby, and an essential element of my working career. Retirement and the lockdowns have provided an opportunity to focus on developing new recipes, and to modify some of my old favourites to give a contemporary feel.

So here is my collection – Six of the Best soups and salads, hot and cold desserts, meat and vegetarian main courses., and a host of extras...plenty of ideas for you to try.

Some are easy, some a little more challenging – but they all look and taste good, whether for informal meals or dinner parties. There are recipes to suit a range of dietary requirements and preferences – vegetarian, vegan and gluten free, as well as meat and fish.

With my experience of working in many different kitchens, I have included some ideas of how to make things easier and to ensure you get great results too.

I hope you enjoy making them as much as I have creating them.

About the Author : a Short History

As is the case for so many people, my earliest experience of cooking was as a child with my mother, in the kitchen at home. Mum was a good cook on a limited budget, and was keen to provide the family with a wide variety of good, interesting things to eat.

I was her willing assistant from a young age. I learnt how to deal with things from the garden: to pod peas and beans, string runner beans, peel and core apples, hull strawberries, and how to prepare them and to cook them. I helped with all sorts of small tasks when the kitchen was busy. Stirring gravy and sauces whilst she nipped out of the kitchen; tasting and deciding with her when something was cooked just right, or needed a little more seasoning; learning how to keep to a timetable that would lead to the perfect Sunday roast with all the trimmings; making pastry, cakes and tarts; how to use

leftovers, as nothing should be wasted, and what could be made in advance and finished off at the last minute, ready to take to the dining table and make things easier – I took it all on board.

During my mid-teens I was often left on my own on Saturday evenings, when I would indulge in a little bit of experimentation in the kitchen. We didn't always have a great range of ingredients to hand, but I could concoct things with rice, curry spices and whatever I was allowed to use up from the fridge, larder and the back of the cupboard.

The late sixties marked the arrival of some novel foods in the shops too. I tried out the instant meals (just add boiling water, and all these freeze-dried vegetables and prawns come to life)! Desserts too – Instant Whip, anyone? Adding extra bits and pieces, looking at what ingredients were declared on the packet, wondering what all the ingredients contributed – I was fascinated.

At school I began to understand the science behind some of the processes that were involved. Then a degree in Food Science gave me a full understanding of food in all its glory, with new aspects such as how to ensure food to eat was safe; the ingredients and styles of foods we eat around the world; processes that were discovered for the preservation of food; human nutrition and the foods that provide what we need.

My career evolved and was mostly focused on the development of new food products for the food industry. I had a wide range of jobs during spells of self-employment too – catering for large groups and parties; cooking from home to supply a local vegetarian deli, cooking at a local recording studio for (often faddy) musicians, and providing interim technical and development help for small food producers.

Developing potential new ideas in industry usually involved **a presentation to retailers and customers**. Six or so brand new ideas was typical: too many things to review could lead to boredom and taste fatigue; too few risked nothing being selected to take forward.

Six recipes for different parts of a meal and for different occasions is how I have chosen to present my collection; now I would like to

share the favourites I have cooked many times over, and some of the new recipes I've developed.

Six Kitchen Essentials for Serious Cooks

Good, reliable and practical kitchen equipment is really helpful if you do a lot of cooking, and if you want to reproduce recipes accurately each time you make them.

Here is my list of the six essentials.

- **A good set of scales** – I recommend electric scales, preferably accurate to 1g. A typical maximum weight is 2kg, which is generally enough for most home cooking.
- **An accurate thermometer** – battery operated is ideal, and it needs to cover a wide range, from below 0°C to check your freezer now and then, to above 100°C for jam-making.
- **A food processor, with a range of tools** – so many recipes require chopping or grating of ingredients, so this gets used frequently in my kitchen. Pastry-making is a lot less time-consuming too.
- **A hand-held stick liquidiser** – for making soups and sauces and thickening liquids: this is a very important tool in the kitchen.
- **Measuring spoons** – many recipes require small quantities of spices, seasonings, starches or liquids. A set of proper measuring spoons is essential, as these are the ingredients that need to be as accurate as possible to deliver perfect results.
- **An electric, hand-held whisk** – for whipped cream and egg whites, cake-making and blending ingredients: a sturdy electric whisk reduces much time and effort.

Six Good Practices in the Kitchen

- **Take your time when cooking, plan ahead, and enjoy it.**
Always read the recipe thoroughly first and work out what you

need to do and when. As well as ensuring you have all the ingredients available, in many cases some elements of the recipe can be done in advance, often the day before. Enjoy your cooking – you are not on *Ready, Steady, Cook* and there is no head chef standing over you shouting orders. Make sure you do not have a train to catch!

- **Be aware of good food hygiene practices.** Use coloured chopping boards for different food materials (you certainly don't want your fruit salad to taste of garlic, or raw chicken juices on your slice of pork pie). Use your thermometer to ensure baked foods have attained a high enough temperature – at least 80°C, or insert a thin skewer into the pie, meat or whatever is being checked. Pastry and cakes: the skewer should come out clean. Chicken and pork: the juices should be clear; beef and lamb: you may wish these to be rare, so the juices may still be pink. Keep the fridge and freezer clean and tidy, and check they're maintaining the right temperatures frequently – near 4°C in the fridge and -18°C in the freezer. Make use of coloured cloths for different functions.
- **Clean up as you go along** – keeping work surfaces free of clutter and soiled equipment makes life much easier. Only put items in the dishwasher when you know they won't be needed again – it's often easier to keep a washing up bowl on the go. Wash your hands frequently too.
- **Select your menu really carefully for a dinner party.** There's nothing more frustrating than being in the kitchen for too long when you would prefer to be chatting to guests. This is when cold starters or a cold dessert come into their own; or a completed side dish made earlier in the day that just needs to be reheated; or vegetables and the main course cooked together in the oven, to be ready at the same time. Some of the appetisers can be offered with a drink, not just at the dining table – just head there for the main course. Write down timings for when things need doing: always use the timer on the cooker (and have a second one to hand) and don't rely on memory.
- **5. Write out the ingredients** if the recipe is a little complicated, and tick off the ingredients as you weigh them out – it's very easy to overlook something.
- **6. Always** hold the handle of a sharp knife in one hand when washing it up and **never** leave it hiding in the soap suds!

APPETISERS

My recipes in this section provide a range to suit everyone. They are mostly vegetarian, plus one with smoked salmon – and with three different fillings, the empanadas offer one meat, one fish and one cheese.

All of them can be made in advance and kept warm where necessary, and well out of the way when other parts of the meal are being prepared.

They can all be presented plated up at the dining table with a salad garnish (or maybe a dip or salsa); some are also suitable to be passed around as a hand-held snack with a drink beforehand – always a useful option.

BAKED MEDITERRANEAN TOMATOES AND PEPPERS WITH GOAT CHEESE

These peppers are full of colour and flavour as an appetiser – and they make lovely, light, lunchtime snacks too.

Vegetarian and gluten free

Serves 4 as a starter

For the vegetable filling

½ a small onion, about 60g

1 large clove garlic

3 or 4 tbsp light olive oil

½ a medium aubergine, about 150g

½ a green pepper and ½ a red pepper, about 100g total

2 heaped tbsp pitted black olives, about 30g

1 tsp salt

A good grinding of black pepper

A good squeeze of tomato purée

1 tbsp chopped fresh oregano or mixed herbs, or ½ tsp mixed dried herbs

1. Peel and chop both the onion and garlic finely, and place in a medium size pan with the oil.
2. Wash, top and tail the aubergine, cut in half lengthwise, and cut into rough cubes of about 1cm.
3. Cut the green and red peppers in half, remove the stalks, seeds and white pith, wash then cut into squares about 1cm.
4. Chop the black olives roughly into quarters.
5. Fry the onion and garlic gently for 2 or 3 minutes, then add the aubergine and peppers. Continue to fry with the lid on the saucepan for about 3 or 4 minutes, stirring once or twice, until the vegetables are softening.
6. Remove from the heat and stir in the olives, seasoning, tomato purée and herbs, and leave aside to cool.

For the tomatoes and peppers for stuffing

4 large ripe but firm tomatoes

2 small green peppers

150g soft goat cheese – a log or rectangular block is ideal

Light olive oil and black pepper, for roasting

Baguette slices to serve

1. With a good, sharp or serrated knife slice the tops off the tomatoes, creating about a 3cm diameter circle. Using a melon baller or teaspoon, very carefully remove the contents of the tomatoes and scrape the insides clean (minus the woodiest parts, the seeds and flesh can be used elsewhere).
2. Cut the peppers carefully in half lengthwise, trying to retain a little of the stem in each part. Remove the white bitter-tasting pith and seeds.
3. Wash the prepared tomatoes and pepper halves and arrange in a suitable shallow, earthenware baking dish. They should fit reasonably closely.
4. Carefully fill each tomato with the cooked vegetable mix to about two-thirds depth. Then fill the peppers similarly, spreading the vegetable mix evenly across and into the cavities.
5. Slice the goat cheese into 8 pieces and place one in each of the tomatoes and peppers. Press gently into the cooked vegetable mix.
6. Pour a little olive oil around and over, season with ground black pepper, and place in a preheated fan oven at 180°C for about 35 to 40 minutes, uncovered. The peppers and tomatoes should still be firm but softening.
7. Serve warm as a starter with crisp thick slices of baguette.

CHEESE AND SPINACH PASTRIES

Vegetarian

Makes 18–20 pastries

You will need two baking trays, and a 7 or 8cm square cutter (or ruler)

For the filling

About 300g spinach or Swiss chard, to give 100g cooked and squeezed

100g ricotta

50g grated mature cheddar

2 spring onions

Finely grated zest of ½ a lemon

½ tsp salt

A good grinding of black pepper

½ tsp mixed dried herbs, or 1 heaped tbsp fresh chopped mixed herbs

1 medium size egg

1. Wash and check over the spinach or Swiss chard, cutting out some of the coarse white parts of stem from the chard if using. Cook for a very few minutes in a little boiling water until softened – chard will take longer than spinach. Drain into a colander and press out as much water as possible, and leave to cool.
2. In a medium size mixing bowl, weigh out the ricotta and grated cheddar.
3. Top, tail and wash the spring onions, slice finely, and add to the bowl.
4. Add the grated lemon zest to the bowl.
5. Add the salt, black pepper and herbs.
6. Whisk the egg in a small bowl with a fork, and add to the other ingredients. Mix thoroughly.
7. Remove the greens from the colander, squeeze out more liquid by hand, and place on a chopping board. Cut horizontally and vertically at roughly ½ cm intervals. Add to the rest of the

ingredients and mix in well.

For the pastry

200g plain flour

Pinch of salt and a good grinding of black pepper

½ tsp paprika

125g butter

25g grated mature cheddar

1 tbsp Greek-style natural yogurt and 1 tbsp water

1 medium size egg, for glazing

1. In a small bowl, weigh out the flour and add the seasoning and spices. Mix in well.
2. Cut the butter into pieces in a large bowl. Add the flour blend and rub in with your fingers to the 'breadcrumb' stage (or use a food processor if preferred).
3. Add the grated cheese and mix in.
4. Add the yogurt and water, and combine using your fingers until the pastry comes together in a ball. Add a very little more water if necessary – it makes quite a stiff dough.
5. Flatten the pastry a little, wrap in clingfilm or plastic bag, and leave somewhere cool for an hour, but not in the fridge.
6. Ensure you have plenty of space on a clean, dry worktop for making the pastries. Lightly flour the surface and place the pastry in the centre. Lightly flour the rolling pin and gradually roll out the pastry to about 30cm square and fairly thin – about 2mm.
7. Using a square cutter or a ruler and sharp knife, cut 7 or 8cm squares. They don't need to be perfectly accurate. Combine the excess pastry by hand, and roll out again to cut more squares. You should have about 20. Carefully separate the squares a little on your work surface.
8. Place a dessertspoonful of the cheese and spinach mix in the middle of each of the pastry squares, adding more to use up all the filling. Using a teaspoon, spread the filling a little towards two opposite corners, not going too close to the edge. Fold one of the other corners across and over the filling, moisten the top with a little water, and fold the fourth corner over that one.
9. Cut two rectangles of greaseproof paper or baking parchment to fit your baking trays, cover the trays and carefully lift the

- pastries on to the paper using a spatula.
10. Whisk the second egg with a fork in a small bowl and glaze the pastries well, using a brush.
 11. Place in a preheated fan oven at 170°C for about 20 minutes, until the pastry is golden brown. Remove from the oven to cool, and transfer to a rack to cool completely.
 12. Serve warmed in the oven or at room temperature, either on their own with drinks as an appetiser, or two or three per head on a small plate with a little salad garnish. A spoonful of lemon, olive and caper dip (see page 51) would be a good too.

EMPANADAS

These Empanadas are fairly large, and two for a starter at dinner (maybe with different fillings) would be just right. If you were to cut slightly smaller circles of pastry, they would be suitable to pass around at a drinks party. They are best eaten either still warm, or reheated in the oven.

The pastry recipe makes about 14 to 16 empanadas of one type

Three different fillings – Tuna and Tomato; Cheese, Potato and Cumin; Pork and Chorizo

You will need a 12cm or 13cm circular cutter

For the pastry

200ml hot water
50g butter
50g olive oil
1 medium egg
250g plain flour
250g self-raising flour
A pinch of salt

1. Measure the hot water from a kettle into a small bowl with the butter and oil, and stir gently until the butter melts. Allow to cool until just warm.
2. Lightly beat the egg in another small bowl.
3. Mix the flours and salt in a large bowl and pour on the buttery water. Stir in the beaten egg and mix well with your fingers until it forms a dough. Knead for a few minutes until well blended, adding a little more flour as necessary to form a firm dough.
4. Cover with clingfilm and leave in a cool place (not the fridge) for about an hour.

1. Tuna and tomato filling

2 hard-boiled medium size eggs

½ a medium onion, about 70g
1 large clove of garlic
2 tbsp light olive oil
A pinch of chilli powder
½ tsp smoked paprika
½ a sweet red pepper, about 50g
150g drained weight tin of tuna steak or chunks in spring water
150g tin chopped tomato
2 tbsp of tomato purée
1 tbsp white wine or sherry
½ tsp salt

1. Place the eggs in a saucepan just covered with cold water. Bring to a simmer, cook for 7 or 8 minutes, drain and cool with fresh cold water.
2. Peel and chop the onion fairly small, about 6 or 7mm. Peel and chop the garlic finely. Fry the onion and garlic gently in the oil for 3 or 4 minutes.
3. Add the chopped red pepper and cook for a further 2 or 3 minutes.
4. Add the smoked paprika and chilli, stir in for a minute, and remove from the heat.
5. Peel the shells from the eggs and dice into fairly large pieces, about 1 cm.
6. Drain the tinned tuna and tip into a small mixing bowl. Break up the tuna with a fork but leave some good size pieces. Add to this the tinned tomato, tomato purée, wine, fried onion mix and salt, and blend in. Add the egg last, mixing in carefully to leave intact visible pieces of egg.

To assemble the empanadas

1. Roll out the pastry on a cool, floured work surface until quite thin, about 2 to 3mm. It's very elastic and keeps shrinking, but persevere with occasional flouring of the work surface and rolling pin, until you have a large sheet in front of you.
2. Cut circles using a 12 or 13cm diameter cutter – I often use a fairly robust yogurt carton top; sometimes I make more, smaller empanadas with a stainless steel 10cm cutter.
3. Spoon 2 tbsp or so of the mix into the middle of each, brush the edges with water, fold over the pastry, and press the edges

- firmly together. Use a fork to seal the edges well. Fill as generously as you can, leaving a 1cm edge to seal.
4. Carefully lift them from the work surface and place them on a lightly oiled baking sheet a little bit apart. Brush the tops with light olive oil, and sprinkle a very little paprika on top using a small, fine mesh sieve.
 5. Bake in a preheated fan oven at 180°C for 20 minutes, until the pastry is lightly coloured. Ease them off and on to a rack when they're cool enough to handle and allow to cool fully.

2. Cheese, potato and cumin filling (vegetarian)

1 large potato, about 200g
100g mature Manchego cheese
100g mature cheddar cheese
1 small onion, about 80g
1 large clove of garlic
2–3 tbsp light olive oil
½ tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp paprika
¼ tsp chilli powder
2 tbsp chopped parsley or coriander

1. Scrub the skin of the potato, cut into about six pieces, and boil for 12–15 minutes until cooked but still slightly firm. Drain, cool, and dice into smaller pieces, about 10mm maximum.
2. Grate both cheeses and add to the potato.
3. Peel and dice the onion fairly small, about 4 or 5mm. Finely chop the garlic. Heat the oil in a small pan and gently fry the onion and garlic to soften, about 4 or 5 minutes.
4. Add the cumin seeds and spices and fry for a further minute, stirring constantly.
5. Remove from the heat and add to the potatoes and cheese, add the chopped parsley or coriander and blend well in.
6. Use in exactly the same way as the tuna and tomato filling. If you decide to make both variations, sprinkle some cumin seeds on these empanadas to ease identification!

3. Pork and chorizo filling

1 small onion, about 80g

1 large clove garlic
½ a sweet red pepper, about 50g
50g chorizo cooking sausage
2 tbsp light olive oil
1 medium egg
20g pitted green olives
200g minced pork
1 tbsp white wine or sherry
1 tbsp breadcrumbs
About ½ tbsp tomato purée
½ tsp salt and ½ tsp ground black pepper
1 tbsp chopped parsley

1. Peel and chop the onion into 4–5mm pieces. Peel and finely dice the garlic.
2. Halve the red pepper, remove all the pith and chop into pieces about 4–5mm.
3. Dice the chorizo sausage into similar small pieces.
4. Gently fry the onion, garlic, chorizo and red pepper together in the olive oil in a small pan for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until softened.
5. Lightly beat the egg.
6. Chop the green olives into roughly 5mm pieces, and mix with all the remaining ingredients in a small bowl until well blended. Blend in the fried ingredients, and finally the egg until all is well mixed.

CHEF'S TIP

Cooked empanadas freeze well. Defrost fully before reheating in a preheated fan oven at 120c for 10 minutes.

The empanadas are complimented very well by the Lemon, Olive and Caper Dip (see page 51)

GLAMORGAN SAUSAGES

Glamorgan Sausages, which are based on traditional recipes, can be rolled smaller than described here, kept warm and served with a cocktail stick and dip too. They make an excellent starter with a tangy tomato and sweet pepper salsa (see page 54) and a few green salad leaves.

This is also an excellent vegetarian alternative to pork sausages at breakfast time! Great with fried or grilled tomatoes and a fried egg on the side.

Vegetarian

Makes 12 sausages

130g Caerphilly or Wensleydale cheese

50g mature cheddar cheese

½ small onion, about 40g, or ¼ of a leek, about 50g

130g homemade white or wholemeal breadcrumbs

1 heaped tsp English mustard powder

½ tsp salt

A good grinding of black pepper

1 heaped tbsp of chopped parsley and chives

1 medium egg

100ml double cream

Polenta, for dusting (or breadcrumbs – either Panko or home-made)

1. Grate both cheeses and mix together in a medium size bowl.
2. Grate the onion and add to the cheese. If using leek, slice then chop the leek very finely.
3. Add the breadcrumbs, mustard powder, salt, black pepper and chopped herbs and mix them all well together.
4. Crack the egg into the cream and whisk lightly together with a fork. Tip into the dry ingredients and mix in gently. Using your fingers, work the mix together lightly, and split into four even parts on the clean work surface or board.

5. Split each quarter into three parts, and mould into small sausages 5–6cm by 3cm.
6. Sprinkle polenta or breadcrumbs on to a large plate, and gently roll the sausages one at a time to cover, then place on another plate. Complete all 12 sausages, cover and refrigerate until required.
7. To serve, shallow fry on a low to medium heat in vegetable oil or light olive oil and butter with frequent turning, until golden brown all over.

CHEF'S TIP

I always keep a stock of breadcrumbs in the freezer. Use a sliced, good quality loaf of bread, either wholemeal or white, and allow it to go stale over a couple of days. Open it out and let it dry a little overnight if you are trying to hasten the process. Cut off the hard crusts (you can leave on the softer ones), break into pieces, and reduce to crumbs in the food processor. If there are a lot of larger crumbs, sieve them out using a colander and give them a second processing.

Spread the crumbs out over a tray in a thin layer to allow them to dry out more for a few hours before freezing in bags.

Glamorgan sausages will freeze and thaw very well. Freeze them on a tray, well separated, and then place them in a bag to store. (Freezing them separately means you can defrost as many as you need at a time). Defrost fully before frying.

LENTIL PÂTÉ

This recipe has the option of being made as a loaf and sliced – it was a development of mine many years ago for a vegetarian deli.

Presented in white ramekin dishes with a little salad decoration to the side, it makes a lovely starter for vegetarian and meat-eaters alike. This is made as two cooked components, the lentil base and the vegetable base. These are combined before filling into ramekins for a second cook in the oven. It can be made 2 or 3 days before needed.

Vegan and gluten free

You will need eight ramekin dishes, 100ml capacity – 8cm diameter and 4cm height

For the lentils

150g red lentils

100g green lentils

500ml water

½ a vegan vegetable stock cube

½ tsp salt

1 tbsp polenta

1. Put all the ingredients, except the polenta, into a heavy non-stick saucepan. Bring to the boil, and cook on a low heat, covered, for 20 minutes. Stir regularly to prevent the lentils from sticking, especially towards the end of the cooking time.
2. Add a very little more water towards the end if necessary, but aim to have a thick purée with some green lentils still visible. Take off the heat and leave to cool.
3. Blend in the polenta thoroughly.

For the vegetables

1 small or ½ a medium onion, approx. 70g

1 clove garlic

1 small courgette, about 100g

1 small carrot, about 50g

½ small stick celery, about 50g
100g tin chopped tomatoes
1 tbsp tomato purée, about 20g
4 tbsp light olive oil
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp chilli powder
½ tsp ground paprika
1 tbsp chopped fresh mixed herbs or 1 tsp mixed dried herbs
Pumpkin seeds or flaked almonds, for decoration
Salad and lemon slice for garnish

1. Peel the onion and garlic, and top and tail the courgette and carrot. Roughly chop all the vegetables and place in a food processor.
2. Add the tinned chopped tomato and tomato purée, and process in bursts until puréed but with small visible pieces of vegetable, scraping down the sides a couple of times.
3. Pour the olive oil into a medium frying pan and add the vegetable purée, the salt, chilli and paprika. Fry gently, stirring regularly, for 10 minutes. Add the chopped herbs and stir in. Leave to cool.
4. Blend the lentil mix and vegetables in a bowl until well mixed. Fill the 8 ramekins. Sprinkle the tops with pumpkin seeds or sliced almonds, and brush with a little more oil.
5. Heat a fan oven to 170°C. Place the ramekins on a baking tray, and bake for 20–25 minutes. Remove from the oven and leave to cool.
6. Keep refrigerated, but remove from the fridge a couple of hours before required. Serve the ramekins as a starter with a little green salad garnish, a thick slice of lemon for squeezing and crusty bread.

CHEF'S TIP

This recipe also works very well in a 500g/500ml capacity loaf tin. Add 2 tbsp of polenta in the mix instead of just one. Use a loaf tin non-stick liner, and cook in the oven for 40 minutes. Chill thoroughly and remove from the tin before serving as thick slices.

SMOKED SALMON, PRAWN AND WATERCRESS RINGS

Makes 4

You will need 4 mousse rings, 70mm diameter (or 60mm square mousse rings)

100g fresh cooked or frozen extra large prawns

2 medium or large eggs

100g pack smoked salmon slices

Small bag of washed watercress

Salt, ground black pepper and paprika

100g crème fraîche

2 tsp chopped chives

1 lemon, quartered

Baguette slices for serving

1. Put frozen prawns (if using) onto a plate to defrost at room temperature.
2. Place the eggs in a small saucepan, cover with water, and bring to a simmer. Cook for 7 minutes, drain and cool in fresh cold water.
3. Place the rings off centre on four medium-sized plates, large enough for space for salad on the side.
4. Chop the smoked salmon into small pieces. Place a quarter into each ring, and carefully spread to the edges of each using a teaspoon, pressing lightly to form an even layer.
5. Remove most of the stems from about half the bag of watercress. Reserve the other half. Place the leaves in an even layer on top of the smoked salmon in each ring. Press down gently with a teaspoon.
6. Remove the shells from the eggs and chop into about 5mm pieces. Place in a small bowl, season well with a pinch of salt and ground black pepper, and weigh the crème fraîche into it. Add the chopped chives and blend all thoroughly with a spoon, keeping visible pieces of egg. Spoon a quarter of the mix into each ring, carefully spreading an even layer.
7. Place the plates in a fridge for at least 1 hour. When well chilled, carefully remove the steel rings, top each with a

quarter of the prawns, and decorate with a little paprika using a fine sieve.

8. Place a small bunch of the reserved watercress on the side, and a quarter of a small lemon for squeezing if liked.
9. Serve with slices of warm baguette.

SOUPS

Soups are ever-popular with a wide range available in the supermarkets, but they are very easy to make at home.

These days it is rare to have a soup first course before embarking on a large main course, as part of a formal three or four course meal. They are more often consumed as a light meal with chunks of wholemeal bread or sourdough. Most of my soup recipes are designed with this in mind – meals in their own right, some with beans or lentils to add protein and make them more substantial. Whilst soups are usually associated with winter eating, some of these are light and summery too.

Three recipes were developed some years ago when I supplied a local vegetarian deli with a range of home-cooked products – the requirement here was that they should be vegan and gluten free.

If you are meat eating and have a good home-made stock available, then by all means use it to replace the vegan stock. If everyone is gluten tolerant, then the rice flour may be substituted by wheat flour – just use a little less in the recipe.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH, COCONUT AND LEMON GRASS SOUP

A smooth but hearty soup, with an Eastern flavour.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 6

You will need a hand-held stick liquidiser, or a food processor/blender.

1 medium onion, about 150g

1 large clove garlic

700ml water

2 medium or 1 large potato, about 250g

2 medium or 1 large carrot, about 150g

1 butternut squash, weighing about 700g

200ml coconut milk (½ tin)

125g red lentils

1 level tsp salt

1 vegan vegetable stock cube or 1 tbsp vegan bouillon powder

1 large clove garlic

½ tsp chilli powder

1 small or half a large stem of lemon grass

2 fresh or 4 dried lime leaves, or grated zest of about ½ a lime

Fresh coriander leaves, for garnish

1. Peel the onion and cut into quarters. Cut across the quarters into roughly 2 cm slices. Peel and chop the garlic clove.
2. Peel and cut the potatoes into large chunks, peel the carrot and slice into 1cm pieces.
3. Top and tail the squash, and place the wide end on the chopping board. Carefully cut off the skin down to the orange flesh. Cut in half vertically, and scoop out all the seeds and fibrous part of the squash. Chop into large chunks.
4. Add all the ingredients (except the coriander leaves) to a large saucepan with lid.
5. Bring to the boil and simmer for 20–25 minutes, covered. Stir occasionally.
6. Allow to cool a little, then remove the lemon grass and the

- lime leaves if using.
7. Liquidise thoroughly using a hand liquidiser or processor.
 8. Serve hot with a little chopped fresh coriander for garnish.

CHEF'S TIP

When using tinned coconut milk, be aware that the coconut fat often separates out in lumps, leaving behind a watery liquid. Always ensure it is mixed well together, either by shaking the tin before opening or by carefully mixing the two components in the tin.

CHICKPEA AND SWEETCORN CHOWDER

A chunky winter chowder.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 6

**You will need a hand-held stick liquidiser, or a food processor/
blender**

1 large onion, about 150g

1 large or 2 medium potatoes, about 250g

1 large carrot, about 150g

4 tbsp light olive oil

½ tsp ground turmeric

Ground black pepper

800ml water

1 vegan vegetable stock cube or 1 tbsp vegan bouillon powder

¼ red sweet pepper

1 rounded tbsp cornflour

1 rounded tbsp rice flour

1 x 330g tin of sweetcorn, drained

1 x 400g tin of chickpeas, drained

1 tsp salt

Chopped parsley, for garnish

1. Peel and dice the onion, potato and carrot into approximately 1cm pieces.
2. Heat the oil in a large non-stick saucepan, and gently fry the onion, potato and carrot for a few minutes until slightly softened. Add the turmeric and a good grinding of black pepper, and stir-fry for a further minute.
3. Add the water and stock cube (or bouillon powder), bring the pan to the boil, cover and simmer for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Meanwhile, dice the red pepper fairly small, about 5 or 6 mm pieces.
5. Take the pan off the heat and remove about a third of the vegetables and some of the liquid to a bowl. Reduce to a coarse purée with a hand-held liquidiser.

6. Mix the cornflour and rice flour to a smooth paste with a little cold water, add to the purée, and liquidise for a few seconds to blend in well.
7. Return this mix back to the pan of soup, and add the diced red pepper, sweetcorn and chickpeas. Bring back to a simmer for 3–4 minutes.
8. Add salt to taste.
9. As a chowder this should be fairly thick, but add a little more water or stock if preferred. Serve with a little chopped parsley to decorate.

COURGETTE SOUP

A bright and colourful summer soup. Fresh chicken stock in this recipe gives this soup a subtle background flavour. For a meat-free version you could use a lightly flavoured vegetable stock using one vegetable stock cube or equivalent bouillon powder. This is a lovely subtle soup as it is, but a spoonful of Greek yogurt adds a hint of creaminess and a slight tang.

Gluten free

Serves 6

1 litre chicken stock – fresh or use water plus a chicken stock cube

1 small onion, about 80g

1 large potato, about 150g

3 medium courgettes, about 400g in total

A good grating of nutmeg

1 tsp salt

A good grinding of black pepper

50g butter

1 heaped tbsp rice flour

2–3 small sprigs of fresh mint, finely chopped

1 tbsp parsley, finely chopped

Greek yogurt to serve, if liked

1. Pour the stock into a large saucepan.
2. Peel and cut the potato into 4 or 5 pieces, peel and slice the onion, and add both to the pan.
3. Wash, top and tail the courgettes, and chop two of them roughly. Put these to one side. Dice the third courgette more neatly into small pieces of about 5mm.
4. Grate the nutmeg and add to the stock with the salt and a good grinding of black pepper. Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 10 minutes.
5. Add the two rough chopped courgettes to the saucepan. Bring back to a simmer for a further 5 minutes and remove from the heat.
6. In a small saucepan, melt the butter and gently fry the small pieces of diced courgette for 5 minutes.

7. Ladle about 100ml of liquid from the soup into a small bowl or a measuring jug, leave to cool for a couple of minutes, then sprinkle on the rice flour. Mix in with a spoon and tip back into the soup pan. Blend the contents with a hand-held liquidiser.
8. Add the small diced fried courgette, chopped mint and parsley and stir in gently to serve.
9. Stir in Greek yogurt, if required.

CHEF'S TIP

The rice flour may be substituted by 1 level tbsp of wheat flour, if gluten is acceptable. Rice flour does provide a nice, light texture though.

LEEK, BACON AND FLAGEOLET BEAN SOUP

A soup with smoked bacon – a flavour that carries so well. A perfect lunchtime meal with crusty multigrain bread. Bacon can be omitted in this recipe, and vegetable stock used for a vegetarian version. Substitute the cream with a non-dairy milk for vegan.

Gluten free

Serves 6

1 stick of celery, about 100g

2 medium red-skinned potatoes, about 300g

1 large leek, about 200g

4 rashers of smoked back bacon, about 100g

4 tbsp light olive oil

800ml chicken stock – fresh or use water plus a chicken stock cube

1 tsp salt

A good grinding of black pepper

1 tbsp each of cornflour and rice flour

1 x 400g tin of flageolet beans

4 tbsp double cream

1. Clean and cut the celery in half lengthwise, then into small slices, 5 or 6mm thick.
2. Scrub the potatoes and cut into pieces roughly 1cm square.
3. Top and tail the leek, leaving some of the green leaves but not the coarse outer leaf. Clean well and cut in half along the length, then slice fairly thinly across.
4. Remove any rind, then cut the bacon into pieces about 1–2 cm.
5. Heat the oil in a large saucepan and gently cook the celery for 10 minutes, covered, stirring occasionally. Add the potato and bacon and stir-fry for a further 5 minutes.
6. Pour roughly half the chicken stock into the pan. Add the salt and black pepper.
7. Using a hand-held liquidiser, briefly blitz the flours in the remaining stock, and tip this into the saucepan. Bring to the boil, stirring regularly, cover and simmer for 10 minutes.
8. Add the tin of flageolet beans, including the liquor.
9. Stir in the cream, and bring back to the boil to serve.

TOMATO AND CANNELLINI BEAN SOUP

Another bright and colourful summer soup.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 6

2 medium sized onions, about 250–300g in total

3 cloves garlic

4 tbsp light olive oil

A pinch or two of chilli powder

800ml water

1 x 400g tin chopped tomatoes

1 vegan vegetable stock cube or 1 tbsp vegan bouillon powder

100g dried green lentils

2 bay leaves

1 large or 2 small courgettes, about 200g

2 small sprigs of rosemary

1 x 400g tin cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

1 tsp salt

Chopped parsley, to garnish

1. Peel and dice the onion into about 1 cm pieces. Peel and finely chop the garlic.
2. Heat the oil in a large saucepan, add the onion and garlic and cook gently for about 7 or 8 minutes to soften, stirring frequently. Stir in the chilli powder and stir-fry briefly.
3. Add the water, tinned tomatoes, stock cube or bouillon powder, lentils and bay leaves. Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Stir occasionally.
4. Top and tail the courgettes, and dice into about ½ to 1cm pieces. Add these with the rosemary, bring back to the boil and simmer 5 minutes.
5. Stir in the beans, and bring back to the boil. Remove the bay leaves and rosemary. Add salt to taste.
6. Serve hot with a sprinkle of fresh chopped parsley.

WINTER SPICED SWEET POTATO AND PARSNIP SOUP

A smooth, lightly spiced, warming winter soup.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 6

You will need a hand-held liquidiser or a food processor.

2 sweet potatoes, about 500g

2 parsnips, about 250g

1 large onion, about 150g

1 medium orange

800ml water

1 vegan vegetable stock cube or 1 tbsp vegan bouillon powder

80g red lentils

¼ tsp of mixed spice

¼ tsp powdered ginger

¼ tsp chilli powder

1 whole piece of star anise

1 tsp salt

4 tbsp light olive oil

1. Peel the sweet potato and parsnip, and roughly cut into chunks and slices.
2. Peel the onion, cut into quarters then slice across at about 1cm width.
3. Zest the orange finely. Cut the orange in half and squeeze the juice into a small bowl.
4. Pour the water into a large saucepan, add the stock cube or bouillon powder, the orange zest, the lentils, all the vegetables, the spices, piece of star anise and salt.
5. Bring to the boil and simmer gently for about 20 minutes until the vegetables are cooked, stirring occasionally.
6. Stir in the orange juice and the olive oil.
7. Remove from the heat, allow to cool a little and remove the star anise. Liquidise with a hand-held liquidiser, or use a food processor to achieve a smooth consistency.

8. The soup can be quite thick, depending on the exact weight of the vegetables – add a little more water if required.

SALADS

The recipes I have developed here demonstrate a wide variety of types of salad, and flexible uses. All are full of nutritious, interesting ingredients; some are lighter eating, some are satisfying light meals in their own right.

BEETROOT, BARLEY AND APPLE SALAD

A simply stunning salad, with vibrant colour and sweet and sour spicy flavours to suit. Keeps up to 5 days in the fridge.

Vegan

Serves 4

75g whole grain barley, or pearl barley

150g cooked beetroot (not in vinegar)

1 large, crisp eating apple

½ tsp salt

1 tsp caraway seeds

½ tsp five spice

¼ tsp chilli powder

2 tsp finely chopped fresh ginger

2 tbsp light olive oil or vegetable oil

1 tbsp white wine vinegar

3 tbsp apple juice

2 tbsp lemon juice

1. Rinse the barley in cold water. Tip into a medium saucepan, add about 500ml fresh water, bring to the boil, cover and simmer gently for approximately 45–50 minutes. Stir once or twice and add more water if necessary. Test that the barley is cooked but still retaining a little bite.
2. Drain into a sieve and run cold water through the grains to cool them. Tip into a suitable medium size bowl.
3. Dice the cooked beetroot into about 1cm cubes and add to the barley.
4. Wash and core but do not peel the apple, and dice into similar sized pieces. Add to the bowl and mix together.
5. Add the salt, spices and chopped fresh ginger, the oil, vinegar and juices, and mix the whole thoroughly. Leave for a few hours in a cool place before serving to allow the flavours to develop.
6. If keeping until the next day, refrigerate overnight but remove the salad for 2 or 3 hours before serving at room temperature.

CRUNCHY BEAN AND LENTIL SALAD

This salad - with a great crunchy texture - and the Moroccan salad that follows are based on recipes I made from my home kitchen for several years for a local vegetarian deli. They were designed partly to be light take-away snacks. Both have a substantial carbohydrate element with rice or bulgur wheat, so are quite filling, but also contain plenty of vegetable components. They will keep up to 5 days in a fridge. **Note this recipe contains nuts.**

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 6

2 or 3 tsp spice mix – a blend of salt, fennel seeds, ground coriander, black pepper, chilli pepper. [See below.]

200g cooked kidney beans (or a little under one tin, drained and rinsed)

200g cooked basmati rice

200g cooked green lentils

1 large stick of celery, about 100g

1 medium carrot, about 100g

80g walnut pieces

1 small to medium red onion, about 100g

1 clove garlic

1 heaped tsp vegan vegetable bouillon powder (or ½ a vegetable stock cube)

3 tbsp of light olive oil

1 tbsp lemon juice

1 tbsp red wine vinegar

For the spice mix

Blend 2 tsp of salt, 2 tsp fennel seeds, 1 tsp ground coriander, 1 tsp ground black pepper and ½ tsp chilli powder in a small bowl. Use about 2 to 3 tsp in the recipe, depending on how spicy you like it. Keep the rest in an airtight container for a later occasion.

For the salad

1. If you are using a tin of beans, rinse the beans in a sieve under cold water.
2. Using a large bowl, mix the rice, green lentils and kidney beans. The rice should be firm and not sticky: I simmer it for exactly 9 minutes, drain and rinse the rice in cold water immediately to cool. The lentils should also be on the firm side.
3. Trim, wash and slice the celery stick into pieces of about 7 or 8mm. Cut in half lengthwise first if the stick is large. Add to the bowl.
4. Peel and dice the carrot into pieces about 7 or 8mm square.
5. Chop the walnut pieces if necessary to about the same size or a little bigger. Add the carrots and walnuts to the bowl.
6. Peel and dice the red onion to a similar size, and finely chop the garlic. Add to the bowl together with the bouillon powder (or a crumbled stock cube) and 2 or 3 level teaspoonfuls of the spice mix and blend in well.
7. Add the olive oil, lemon juice and red wine vinegar. Carefully mix in, taking care not to mush the beans and lentils.
8. Keep the salad in a cool place for a few hours to let the flavours develop before serving, stirring carefully once or twice.
9. If keeping until the next day, refrigerate overnight but remove the salad for 2 or 3 hours before serving at room temperature.

MOROCCAN SALAD

This salad will keep up to 5 days in a fridge.

Vegan

Serves 6

200g bulgur wheat

400ml boiling water for the wheat

7 or 8 soft dried apricots, about 40g

1 heaped tbsp sultanas

about 100ml boiling water for the apricots and sultanas, to cover

2 to 3 level tsp of a spice mix – a blend of cumin seeds, salt, ground black pepper, chilli, ground ginger and turmeric (see below) or use a commercial Ras el Hanout spice mix

1 small onion, about 80g

2 cloves garlic

Half a red and half a sweet green pepper

4 tbsp of light olive oil

1 heaped tbsp flaked almonds

1 heaped tbsp pumpkin seeds

2 heaped tbsp sunflower seeds

1 tbsp white wine vinegar

1 tbsp lemon juice

Flat-leaved parsley or coriander leaves to garnish

First, prepare the bulgur wheat and fruit.

1. Weigh the bulgur into a fairly large size bowl, pour the boiling water over and leave to absorb for about an hour, stirring occasionally. The water should mostly be absorbed.
2. Chop the dried apricots into pieces of about 6 to 8mm. Place in a small bowl together with the sultanas, and pour over sufficient boiling water to just cover the fruit. Leave to absorb for an hour or so and pour off any excess water.

Next, make the Ras el Hanout spice mix

In a small bowl mix about 1 level tsp of each of the spices and 2

level tsp of salt. This works well and has a distinct chilli bite, with the turmeric giving quite a strong yellow colour to the salad – alter the proportions in the mix as you prefer. Put any remaining mix in a jar with a tight fitting lid to use later.

Making up the salad

1. Peel and chop the onion fairly small.
2. Peel and chop the garlic finely.
3. Take the pith out of the pepper halves and chop into 8 -10mm pieces.
4. Spoon the olive oil into a medium frying pan and gently fry the onion, garlic and peppers for 3 minutes just to slightly soften.
5. Add the spice mix and stir-fry for about a minute – use 2 tsp of spice mix for a lightly spiced flavour, or 3 tsp for a slightly hotter taste. Remove from the heat to cool.
6. When the bulgur wheat has absorbed the water, add the lightly fried vegetables to the bowl and mix well in. If there is still some excess water remaining, carefully drain the wheat granules first.
7. Add flaked almonds, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds and soaked fruit and mix well in. Finally stir in the white wine vinegar and lemon juice.
8. Best served after a few hours at room temperature to allow the flavours to develop. Sprinkle a little chopped flat-leaved parsley or coriander over the salad to serve.
9. If keeping until the next day, refrigerate overnight but remove the salad for 2 or 3 hours before serving at room temperature.

EAST ASIAN SALAD

This salad is clearly inspired by a vegetable stir-fry mix, and as such is great served with cold salmon or prawns, thin sliced cooked meats, warm fried haloumi or cubes of quorn.

Vegan and gluten free

At its best the day it is made.

Serves 4 to 5

175g pack baby sweetcorn – about 12 sweetcorn

1 ½ tsp salt

200g pack trimmed fine green beans

300g pack bean sprouts

1 sweet red pepper

4 spring onions

2 cloves garlic

A piece of fresh ginger; about 3– 4cm long

1 tsp hot chillies in oil (or 1 hot chilli pepper)

3 tbsp rice wine vinegar

4 tbsp toasted sesame oil

Chinese leaves

2 tsp caster sugar

Fresh chopped coriander, to garnish

1. Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil. Add 1 teaspoon of salt, then carefully drop in the baby sweetcorn. Set a timer for 2 minutes, then add the green beans and cook for precisely 3 minutes more.
2. Turn off the heat, and with a slotted spoon quickly remove all the vegetables into a large sieve or colander. Run the vegetables under cold water for a few seconds. Tip out on to a large chopping board to dry off and cool fully.
3. Bring the pan of hot water back up to the boil and add the bean sprouts. Cook for precisely 1 minute, tip into the sieve or colander, and refresh under cold water.
4. Dry all the cooked vegetables a little using kitchen paper towel. Cut the sweetcorn along the length into halves, then

across about one third away from the stalk end. Cut the beans roughly in half. Place beans, corn and bean sprouts in a large mixing bowl.

5. Clean the red pepper, remove the core and pith, and slice thinly. Cut into lengths about the same as the green beans, and add to the bowl.
6. Clean, top and tail the spring onions, slice finely, and add to the bowl.
7. Peel the garlic and the ginger and chop both very finely.
8. Chop the pickled or fresh chilli very finely and add all to the mix.
9. Add the rice wine vinegar, toasted sesame oil, the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp of salt and the sugar, and mix all together. Leave for an hour or so, stirring occasionally to coat the vegetables in dressing.
- 10.** Before serving, tear about 10 Chinese leaves into pieces of about 4 or 5cm, chopping the white stems a little smaller, and place in a large serving bowl. Pile the dressed salad into the middle and sprinkle some chopped coriander over to decorate.

SUMMER SALAD

This summer and the winter salad below speak for themselves, making full use of a range of seasonal vegetables. Although nearly all can be bought from the supermarkets throughout the year, I have made full use of vegetables grown locally, and more usually associated with the specific seasons. Great recipes if you grow your own!

This makes a great lunchtime snack, full of colour and texture, or cheese may be added as a vegetarian meal – crumbled feta is particularly good.

This salad will keep for 2 days in the fridge, but is at its best the day it is made.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 6

300g cooked small new potatoes
150g green beans
¼ cucumber, about 100g
½ yellow pepper
4 spring onions
1 x 240g tin chickpeas, drained weight
1 level tsp salt
¼ tsp chilli powder
A good grating of black pepper
4 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp lemon juice
2 tbsp white wine vinegar
2–3 sprigs of fresh mint
150g cherry tomatoes

1. Cut the cooked potatoes into halves or quarters and place in a large bowl.
2. Top and tail the green beans and cook in boiling water for 3 minutes. Drain and cool in cold fresh water. Cut into lengths of about 2 or 3 cm, and add to the potatoes.

3. Dice the cucumber, washed but skin on, into pieces about 1cm cubed, and add to the potatoes.
4. Rinse the drained chickpeas briefly under cold water and add to the bowl.
5. Cut the washed yellow pepper into similar size pieces, trim and wash the spring onions and cut into roughly 1cm lengths (including the green leaves), and add all to the mix.
6. Add the seasonings, olive oil, lemon juice and vinegar, and blend the whole lot to coat with the dressing.
7. Chop the mint leaves and cut the cherry tomatoes into quarters, add and mix in carefully to keep the tomatoes intact.
8. Best served at room temperature.

CHEF'S TIP

For a variation, substitute the potatoes with cooked penne pasta. Increase the dressing quantities as the pasta will absorb the liquid. Sprinkle on some Tabasco or Worcester sauce and a little more salt to give a bit of a kick.

WINTER SALAD

This recipe contains nuts

Vegetarian and gluten free

At its best the day it is made

Serves 6

2 heads of chicory, ideally 1 red and 1 white

3 medium sized carrots, about 200g

2 sticks of celery, about 200g

1 red-skinned apple

About 10 green grapes and 10 red grapes

100g broken Brazil nuts

½ tsp salt

1 tsp cumin seeds

¼ tsp ground chilli powder

2 tsp lemon juice

2 tbsp Greek yogurt

2 tbsp light mayonnaise

A quarter of a red onion

1. Wash the chicory and break off as many outer leaves as possible. Tear into quarters or thirds, and place in a medium size mixing bowl. Slice across the core of the chicory thinly and add to the leaves.
2. Top, tail and peel the carrots. Cut into pieces about the size of matchsticks.
3. Clean the celery and cut into roughly 5 mm slices, and add all to the bowl.
4. Peel the red onion and chop finely. There should be about 2 tbsp. Add to the bowl.
5. Wash and core the apple and cut into pieces about 1 cm square.
6. Wash then cut the grapes in half.
7. Spread the Brazil nuts out on the chopping board, chopping any large pieces, and tip all the fruit and nuts into the mix.
8. Add the salt and spices, the lemon juice, yogurt and mayonnaise, and blend the whole lot carefully with a large

- spoon until well mixed in and coated with dressing.
9. Leave in a cool place for a couple of hours to allow the flavours to develop, stirring every now and then.

DIPS

Dips have a versatile set of uses. Great to pass round with a range of dippers to guests at a drinks party – and children love them too! A spoonful of a good lemony dip is very complimentary with fried fish, fries and potato wedges - whilst a spicy salsa works well with a grilled steak, chicken, haloumi or beefburger. For a light vegetarian lunch, hummus with warm pitta bread is hard to beat.

HUMMUS

This excellent recipe I made for many years for sale at the vegetarian deli. We eat it for a lunchtime snack with fresh bread and salad, as well as a centrepiece with pre-dinner drinks and nibbles. Although it's better made with your own cooked chickpeas, it's still very good using tinned.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 4 as a light meal, 6 as an accompaniment

You will need a food processor

*1 x tin chickpeas, 240g drained weight (or home cooked)
40g cooking liquor or liquor from tin
juice of ½ a large lemon, about 30g
2–3 cloves garlic
40g dark tahini
100ml (80g) light olive oil (not extra virgin)
½ tsp salt
½ tsp ground cumin
¼ tsp ground chilli powder (or just a pinch if you prefer things less spicy)
¼ tsp ground white pepper
Toasted pine kernels and extra virgin olive oil for garnish*

CHEF'S TIP

In my experience, soaking the chickpeas overnight and cooking them next day does give a slightly superior texture – but using a tin still makes a very nice, tasty hummus. Either way, keep the cooking liquor or the liquid from the tin. (Any extra cooked chickpeas can be used in soup recipes, or added to stews and salads.)

1. Mix the cooking liquor and lemon juice in a jug.
2. Peel and cut the garlic cloves into chunky pieces.
3. Put the chickpeas, garlic, tahini, olive oil, salt and spices into a food processor and blitz until well chopped, but still with visible small pieces. Stop processing and scrape down the sides.
4. Start up again and gently pour the lemon juice and chickpea

liquor into the processor while it's running. It will thicken up as it processes and the oil emulsifies – you may need to stop and scrape down the sides once more.

5. Taste the hummus and add a little more lemon juice if needed. Add more of the cooking liquor if you prefer a softer, creamier consistency – the texture will thicken up on chilling.
6. Spoon into in a suitable bowl for serving, with a few pine nuts and a swirl of extra virgin olive oil to decorate.
7. Always serve at room temperature, not straight from the fridge.

LEMON, OLIVE AND CAPER

A simple blend of soured cream and mayonnaise makes a good base for all sorts of dips – my recipe, making use of two of my ‘Little Extras’ from the store cupboard, is not only good on a potato crisp with a drink in hand but also is super with grilled fish and chips, or as simple dip for fries or roast potato wedges.

Vegetarian and gluten free

Serves 4

2 slices salted lemons, plus some of the preserving oil (see page 146)

4 pitted green olives

100g soured cream

100g light mayonnaise

1 tbsp capers

1 tbsp chilli jam, about 20g (see page 144)

1 tbsp chopped chives

1. Chop the lemons and olives into pieces about the size of the capers.
2. Blend all the remaining ingredients together an hour or two before using.

MANGO AND PASSIONFRUIT DIP

I spent many a happy day developing new ideas using soured cream for a dairy company in Somerset. Speculatively, the company launched a range of 'Sweet Dips' which tasted excellent but, in spite of some good market research, did not stay on sale for long. Here's one of them though for you to try. The flavours are divine, and offer something very different!

Use as a dip with sourdough 'soldiers', sourdough crisps, breadsticks (not salty), slices of apple or a crisp pear. Great on fresh pineapple pieces as a dessert too.

Quick and easy

Vegetarian and gluten free

Serves 4 to 6

Ideally you will need a food processor with small bowl attachment

½ a ripe mango

80g ricotta – of good quality and smooth texture

30g golden caster sugar

80g soured cream

½ a large passionfruit

1. Peel and cut the fruit from the mango. Reduce to a coarse purée in a small processor, or by mashing. Place in a small bowl.
2. Add the ricotta and sugar, and blend in thoroughly using a hand whisk.
3. Add the soured cream and the passionfruit scraped from its skin – I like the seeds too, but you may prefer to pass it through a small sieve.
4. Blend thoroughly, spoon into a suitable small bowl for dipping, and chill for a few hours to thicken up.

PESTO AND RICOTTA DIP

If you make my homemade pesto (see ‘Little Extras’, page 142) or have a jar in the fridge, this dip looks and tastes great. Ideal for dipping with rye crispbreads, olive thins and potato chips.

Gluten free – can be made suitable for vegetarians

Serves 4 to 6

70g soured cream

100g ricotta – preferably of good quality and smooth texture, not too grainy

100g homemade pesto (see p.00 including vegetarian option)

1. In a small bowl, blend the soured cream and ricotta well together. Blend in the pesto.
2. Keep refrigerated, but remove from the fridge for an hour or two before serving.

SPICY TOMATO AND SWEET PEPPER SALSA

This salsa is ideal for dipping with nachos, thin cheese biscuits or melba toasts, but try it spooned onto the side of a plate of sliced meats, cheese and green salad too – it lifts the colour and flavour perfectly.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 4 to 6

100g (¼ tin) chopped tomatoes
2 medium to large ripe tomatoes (or 8 cherry tomatoes), about 100g
1 small red onion, about 80g
½ a red and ½ a yellow sweet pepper
1 clove garlic
2 hot chillies
A few sprigs each of coriander leaves and parsley
1 level tsp caster sugar
½ tsp salt
1 tbsp lemon juice
2 tsp white wine vinegar
1tbsp olive oil
A good grinding of black pepper

1. Tip the tinned chopped tomatoes into a sieve and drain. (Save the liquid for another recipe.)
2. Cut the fresh tomatoes into small pieces, approx 6–7mm, or cut the cherry tomatoes into quarters then across into eighths.
3. Chop the onion and sweet peppers into similar size pieces.
4. Chop the garlic and chillies very finely – with seeds if you like a good, spicy heat.
5. Chop the coriander and parsley.
6. Combine all the ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Cover and leave in a cool place for use later in the day or in the fridge overnight.
7. This is best left for a few hours for the flavours to develop.
8. Serve at room temperature.

TOASTED HAZELNUT AND GORGONZOLA DIP

This is another recipe with an Italian theme – the strong flavours are moderated by the background of ricotta and natural yogurt, and thick enough to be eaten with nice, crisp grissini sticks, toasted sourdough fingers, slices of apple or pieces of celery.

Note that Gorgonzola cheese, like Parmesan, is made using natural rennet by Italian law. If a vegetarian version is preferred, use Bath Blue cheese or Stilton.

Gluten free

Serves 4 to 6

60g hazelnuts

A little olive oil

Pinch of salt

Coarse ground black pepper

100g ricotta – preferably of good quality and smooth texture, not too grainy

100g natural full fat Greek yogurt

60g strong flavoured Gorgonzola piccante

1. Place the hazelnuts in a small frying pan with a very little olive oil. On a medium heat, toast the nuts, turning and stirring them regularly. Add a pinch of salt and a good grinding of black pepper when the hazelnuts are beginning to brown.
2. Tip them on to a chopping board and spread them out to cool. Chop the nuts into coarse pieces, no greater than about 5 or 6mm.
3. In a small bowl, blend the ricotta and yogurt together. Mix in the cheese and blend in well using a fork, finally add the hazelnuts and stir again.
4. Keep refrigerated, but remove from the fridge for an hour or two before serving.

VEGETARIAN MAINS

My six recipes here provide a range of main courses which should cater to all tastes.

I have included two vegan recipes, both dishes developed for sale at a vegetarian deli, made in the kitchen at home for several years and also gluten free; two very different pies with pastry; a frittata, also gluten free; and a lasagne with plenty of tasty cheese.

BUTTERBEAN AND LENTIL GOULASH

This is vegan and full of good, protein rich ingredients and with lots of colour, flavour and interest. You don't need to be vegan to like this!

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 4

1 large onion, about 200g
2 cloves garlic
Light olive oil, or vegetable oil
1 medium carrot, about 150g
1 stick celery
1 level tsp salt
½ tsp chilli powder
1 heaped tbsp paprika
1 small glass of red wine
200ml water
½ x can chopped tomatoes, about 200g
50g red lentils
1 vegetable stock cube, or 1 level tbsp of stock powder
A good squeeze of tomato purée
½ green pepper
3 large or 6 small chestnut mushrooms
1x 400g can butterbeans (235g drained weight)

1. Peel and quarter the onions and slice thinly. Skin and chop the garlic fairly small. Using a large saucepan with a lid, pour in enough oil to cover the base. Add the onions and garlic and fry gently for 10 minutes with the lid on, stirring occasionally.
2. Peel and cut the carrot into roughly 3–4mm slices.
3. Trim the ends of the celery stick, wash thoroughly and cut into 3–4mm slices.
4. After 10 minutes when the onions and garlic have softened a little, add the carrot and celery. Continue to fry gently for exactly 10 minutes, stirring two or three times.
5. In the meantime, measure out the salt and spices and mix together in a small pot. Measure the red wine, water, and

tinned tomatoes into another container. Weigh the lentils and add to the liquids with the stock powder or crumbled stock cube.

6. Stir the spice mix into the frying vegetables, increase the heat a little, and stir-fry for about a minute. Add the liquids and lentils, and a squeeze of tomato purée. Stir until the pot comes to the boil, turn the heat right down, cover and simmer for exactly 10 minutes.
7. Cut the pepper into chunky slices and mushrooms into thick slices or quarters. Add to the saucepan and simmer exactly 10 minutes.
8. Mix in the drained can of butterbeans and simmer for a couple of minutes.
9. This is good served with pasta or gnocchi.

CHEESE AND SPINACH PIE

This pie is loosely derived from the many types of similar pies I have eaten in Crete. It's always a popular, robustly flavoured and substantial main course. It is definitely one of my favourites.

It is good eaten hot, warm or cold.

Vegetarian

Serves 6

You will need a rectangular pie dish approximately 23 x 18cm.

For the pastry

*225g wholemeal or white plain flour
225g white self-raising flour
A pinch of salt and a grinding of black pepper
150g butter
75g baking margarine
2 tbsp Greek yogurt
2 tbsp water
1 egg, for glazing*

For the filling

*A knob of butter and a little oil for frying
5 spring onions, or a small onion, or about ¼ of a leek
1 chilli pepper
1 large clove garlic
Roughly 350g cooked, well drained and well chopped coarse
spinach or Swiss chard, or a mix of spinach or chard and
other greens, e.g. spring cabbage or Savoy cabbage (around a
total of 700g–800g raw)
100g grated mature cheddar cheese
100g full fat soft cheese
200g feta cheese or Greek crumbly salad cheese
2 medium eggs*

About 2–3 tbsp fresh chopped herbs – parsley, oregano, thyme, rosemary
A few leaves of dried sage – ideally Greek
Zest of ½ lemon

Make the pastry

1. Rub in the flours, salt, black pepper, butter and margarine by hand or in a food processor, until the ‘breadcrumb’ stage is reached.
2. Add the yogurt and the water, and either rub or pulse in. The mix will come together into a manageable ball – add a very little more water if necessary. Wrap loosely and place somewhere cool while you make the filling.

Make the filling

1. Melt the butter and oil over a low heat in a small saucepan.
2. Slice or chop the spring onions, onion or leek (or a combination), add to the pan and fry gently.
3. Chop the chilli pepper and peeled garlic very fine and add to the pan. Stir and cook just for 2 or 3 minutes so that the vegetables are slightly softened, then turn off the heat.
4. In a large bowl, mix the chopped, cooked spinach greens with the grated cheddar cheese and soft cheese. Crumble the feta cheese over and mix in gently.
5. Add the cooked onion, garlic and chilli, 2 lightly beaten eggs, all the herbs and lemon zest, and gently blend in.

Finishing off

1. Place the pastry ball onto a floured board or work surface and press to form an oval. Cut about ⅓ for the lid and put to one side. Roll out the main part of the pastry fairly thin to fit your chosen pie dish. Butter the dish and line with the pastry, press any gaps together with a little water to bind, and pile in the filling leaving 1cm or so of pastry clear around the rim of the dish.
2. Roll out the remaining pastry to form the lid. Brush the edges of the pastry with a little water. Place the lid over and press the edges well together to complete the pie. Cut two or three 5–

6cm diagonal slashes across the lid, and brush with a little beaten egg to glaze.

3. Bake in a fan oven at 170°C for 50 minutes to 1 hour, checking with a thermometer that the centre is at 80°C, or cooked such that a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. The pastry should be lightly browned.
4. Leave to cool for about 15 minutes and serve warm or at room temperature.

CHEF'S TIP

The pie will reheat very successfully. Cover and heat in a low oven at 150°C for 25–30 minutes, or warm up slices in the microwave for about 30 seconds on a high setting.

CHICKPEA AND LENTIL TAGINE

This is similar to the Butterbean and Lentil Goulash: vegan and full of good, protein rich ingredients and with lots of colour, flavour and interest.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 4

***Spice mix:** 1tsp each of salt, ground cumin, ground coriander; ½ tsp cinnamon and turmeric; ¼ tsp chilli powder*

1 large or 2 medium onions

2 cloves garlic

Light olive oil or vegetable oil

50g dried apricots

40g orange lentils

40g green lentils

½ x can chopped tomatoes

500ml water

1 vegetable stock cube (vegan if required) or 2 tsp stock powder

1 green pepper

70g mixed black and green pitted olives

2 or 3 slices salted preserved lemons (see page 146), or 1 small lemon zested into shreds

1 x 400g can chickpeas, 240g drained weight

1. Mix the spices together in a small bowl – your ‘ras el hanout’ in North Africa. Vary the proportions to your own taste, but the suggested mix works well.
2. Peel and cut the onions into halves or quarters, then slice across into 5mm or so slices. Skin and chop the garlic.
3. Pour enough oil into a large saucepan or stock pot with lid to cover the base. Add the onions and garlic and gently fry for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Meanwhile, cut the dried apricots into halves if small, or quarters if large. Weigh out the lentils together.
5. Tip the spice mix into the pan with the onions and garlic, and stir-fry for a couple of minutes. Add the apricots, lentils, tomatoes and water. Crumble in the stock cube. Bring to the

- boil, cover and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
6. De-seed and remove the pith from the pepper, cut into slices about 4 x 1cm. Add to the pan. Stir in and simmer a further 5 minutes.
 7. Halve the olives lengthways, chop the preserved lemon slices if using or zest a lemon in coarse shreds. Add to the pan together with the chickpeas and simmer very gently for a final 5 minutes. Check the consistency and add a little more water if necessary. Leave to stand a couple of minutes before serving.
 8. The tagine also reheats perfectly, and can be frozen. Thaw completely before reheating, either by microwave or in a saucepan.

CHEF'S TIP

This is perfect served with Bulgar wheat – for 4 people, weigh 200g bulgar wheat into a suitable microwavable bowl, add a pinch of salt, and pour over 450ml boiling water. Leave to stand, stirring occasionally, until all the water is absorbed. This can be done in advance and reheated in the microwave oven.

COURGETTE, CHEESE AND TOMATO FRITTATA

The frittata featured every week in the deli. Full of protein and flavour, a small slice with a green salad makes a great lunch; or it can be served as a main course with a more substantial salad, keeping it gluten free if needed. The Crunchy Bean and Lentil Salad (page 38) would go well as an accompaniment.

This will keep in the fridge for 3 or 4 days, but does not freeze well. Slices reheat perfectly in the microwave oven.

Vegetarian and gluten free

Serves 4

You will need a 23cm frying pan with metal handle suitable to go in the oven.

200g cooked potato
1 medium sized onion, about 150g
1 clove garlic, chopped fine
2 medium sized courgettes, about 150g
2 small or 1 large tomato, about 60g
4 tbsp light olive oil
6 large eggs
100g natural cottage cheese
60g grated mature cheddar cheese
½ tsp salt
A pinch or two of chilli powder
2 tbsp chopped parsley

1. Preheat a fan oven to 170°C.
2. Cut the cooked potato into roughly 1cm cubes. Peel and chop the onion fairly fine, about 4 or 5mm. Peel and chop the garlic very fine.
3. Clean, top and tail the courgettes, and slice about 5mm thick.
4. Slice the tomatoes about 5 mm thick.
5. Heat the oil in the frying pan and add the diced onion and garlic. Gently cook with occasional stirring for 5 minutes, then add the diced courgettes and continue cooking and turning the

mixture every now and then until the courgettes are beginning to soften (about another 5 minutes). Remove from the hob and allow to cool a little.

6. In the meantime, crack the eggs into a large bowl and beat with a fork or hand whisk until well mixed. Stir in the cottage cheese, cheddar cheese, salt and chilli powder until well mixed. Add the diced potato and chopped parsley and mix in.
7. Tip the slightly cooled fried onion and garlic into the egg mix, and stir well in.
8. Return the pan to the hob, add some more olive oil and swirl around the pan ensuring it is well oiled. Tip the frittata mix back into the frying pan on a medium heat. Smooth the surface and dot the sliced tomatoes over, cutting the slices in half if necessary.
9. Cook for 3–4 minutes, turn the heat off, and carefully place the frying pan in the oven.
10. Cook for 18–20 minutes until slightly browned on top, remove from the oven and leave to stand for a few minutes.
11. Using oven gloves throughout (the handle of the frying pan will be very hot), loosen the edges of the frittata with a spatula or knife, and place a suitable flat baking tray over the pan. Carefully invert to leave the frittata on the tray.
12. Place a suitable flat serving plate over the frittata and invert again to leave the tomatoes on top.
13. Serve hot, warm or cold with salad and crusty bread.

SPINACH, CHEESE AND TOMATO LASAGNE

This lasagne recipe makes a super alternative to a traditional meaty version. A rich tomato and sweet pepper sauce, the spinach or mixed greens layered together with feta and cheddar cheese – these strong colours and flavours create an appetising main course. Switch to gluten-free pasta if preferred.

Vegetarian

Use gluten-free lasagne if preferred

Serves 6

You will need a rectangular earthenware dish, ideally 26 x 18cm, suitable for the oven

For the spinach

About 700–800g raw spinach to yield 350–400g cooked. I use spinach beet, or spinach with other green leaves (spring cabbage, Swiss chard, turnip tops, sprout tops, overgrown rocket, etc.)

About 250ml water

Fresh herbs – parsley, oregano, chives, thyme, rosemary, basil, sage (whatever is available)

Pinch of salt

For the tomato sauce

1 small onion – about 120g peeled

2 cloves garlic

2 hot chillies (or 1 if you want less heat)

4–5 tbsp light olive oil

1 medium carrot, about 100g

1 medium parsnip, about 100g

½ yellow pepper

1 x 400g can chopped tomatoes

½ tsp salt

½ glass wine (any colour) and the same of spinach cooking liquid

For assembly of the lasagne

1 x 200g block of feta or Greek crumbly salad cheese

100g grated extra mature cheddar cheese

9 sheets of egg lasagne (green or white)

To prepare the spinach

1. Chop the washed leaves roughly and heat with the water in a large saucepan, bring to a medium boil, and cook for about 5 or 6 minutes until beginning to soften and turn dark green.
2. Tip into a colander over a large basin to collect the cooking water. Let it cool, pressing with a fork occasionally to extract more of the liquid. Put the cooking water to one side for later use in the sauce and final stages.
3. When cool enough, tip the greens out on to a chopping board and chop with a large knife, horizontally and vertically at about 2cm. Squeeze a bit more liquid out if it looks wet.
4. Chop the herbs and mix 1 or 2 tbsp into the spinach greens with a pinch of salt and leave for later use.

Prepare the tomato sauce

1. Chop the onions fairly small – 5–10 mm pieces.
2. Finely chop the garlic and chilli pepper (or two chillies, depending on whether you like things spicy).
3. Heat the olive oil in a medium saucepan, tip in the onion, garlic and chillies and fry gently for 5 minutes, stirring a couple of times.
4. Peel and slice the carrot and parsnip into about 10mm pieces. Add to the saucepan and place on the lid. Fry, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes.
5. Cut the pepper into similar size pieces and add to the pan, then add the can of chopped tomatoes, the salt, spinach water and wine.
6. Bring to the boil and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat.

To assemble the dish

1. Spoon about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the tomato sauce into the base of the dish and spread it evenly. Place three sheets of lasagne over, without overlapping.
2. Spread the spinach and herb mix over the lasagne evenly. Place three sheets of lasagne over. Spoon another $\frac{1}{3}$ of the sauce evenly over that.
3. Crumble the feta cheese or Greek salad cheese over the sauce. Don't worry about leaving some larger chunks as well as well crumbled cheese. Place another three lasagne sheets over.
4. Spread the rest of the tomato sauce over the lasagne, and finally sprinkle 100g grated extra mature cheddar cheese over the surface.
5. Spoon some of the spinach cooking liquor around the edges – maybe 4 or 5 tbsp. Keep the rest.
6. Cook in a preheated fan oven at 170°C for 45 minutes until the cheddar cheese is melted and golden brown. Pour a little more spinach water around the edges if it looks dry.
7. Serve with a good green salad and some pitta or flat bread.

LEEK AND CHESTNUT PIE

Finally, this pie with mushroom and lentils is more delicate and has milder flavours. It is good eaten hot or cold.

Vegetarian

Serves 5–6

You will need a 20cm diameter loose-bottomed tin, about 4cm deep

50g green lentils

About 400ml water

2 leeks, about 400g

1 large clove garlic

50g butter

120g brown mushrooms

2 tbsp chopped fresh parsley and thyme

1 pack of long-life cooked chestnuts, 180g

150 ml (½ x 300ml pot) of full fat crème fraîche

2 medium eggs plus 1 egg for glazing

½ tsp salt

A good grinding of black pepper

500g shortcrust pastry, bought or homemade (if using ready rolled pastry, two sheets will be needed)

1. First weigh the green lentils into a small saucepan with a lid, and add the water. Bring to the boil, cover, and simmer very gently for 15 minutes. Drain and set aside (this can be done the day before and kept refrigerated).
2. Meanwhile top and tail the leeks, and cut off any coarse green parts. Wash thoroughly and slice thinly.
3. Peel and chop the garlic finely.
4. Melt the butter in a large saucepan. Brush a little of the melted butter around the base and side of the baking tin. Then tip the leeks and garlic into the saucepan, set the timer for 7 minutes, and fry gently, stirring two or three times.
5. Wash and slice the mushrooms and add to the pan after the 7

- minutes and cook all for a further 5 minutes, until both leeks and mushrooms are softening.
6. Take the pan off the heat, mix in the chopped fresh herbs, and tip the whole into a medium size bowl.
 7. Preheat a fan oven 170°C.
 8. Chop the chestnuts roughly into quarters and add to the leeks and mushrooms. Mix in the crème fraîche and cooked lentils. Leave to cool a few minutes.
 9. Lightly beat 2 eggs and add to the bowl together with the salt and black pepper. Mix in.
 10. If you have a 20cm round greaseproof circle, then place this on the buttered base of the baking tin (this isn't essential but does help).
 11. Cut the pastry into two, one piece slightly larger than the other. Roll out both pastry pieces fairly thinly into rounds and line the tin with the larger, ensuring the pastry comes up and over the sides a little. Spoon the filling evenly into the shell.
 12. Brush a little water around the edge and carefully place the small pastry piece over. Press and pinch together all round to seal. Trim off some of the excess. Brush with the third egg, lightly beaten.
 13. Cut two roughly 10cm parallel slits across the centre of the pie, and place the tin on a baking sheet into the oven.
 14. Bake for about 45–50 minutes until the pastry is turning a light brown. Remove from the oven and carefully insert a thermometer into one of the slits to check that the centre has reached 80°C, or insert a thin skewer and ensure it comes out clean. Return to the oven for a few more minutes if required.
 15. Let the pie cool for about 10 minutes before removing from the tin, and carefully lift it off the base and paper. This may be easier if you invert the pie on to a baking sheet, remove the base, then invert again on to a plate to serve.

MEAT AND FISH MAINS

My six recipes here comprise two fish and four meat. I have included two pies (one with pastry, and one with a mashed potato topping), with a couple of meaty stews, to give a range of styles and flavours.

BEEF, CHORIZO AND SWEET PEPPER STEW

This beef and pork stew with sweet peppers is rich and spicy with a smoky tomato and paprika sauce, but of course you can leave out the chilli and some heat will be provided by the chorizo alone.

Serves 6

You will need a large non-stick frying pan, and a lidded casserole that is suitable for the hob.

500g diced beef braising steak

2 tbsp plain flour

½ tsp salt

A good grinding of black pepper

1 medium to large onion

2 large or 4 small cloves of garlic

1 hot red chilli

4 rashers thick cut smoked back bacon, approx. 100g

2 or 3 medium sized carrots

1 stick of celery

4 cooking chorizo sausages, approx. 200g

5 or 6 tbsp light olive oil for frying

1tbsp ground smoked paprika

250ml (a large wine glass) of red wine

400ml stock – beef, vegetable or chicken. Use hot water and a stock cube unless you have homemade stock

A sprig of fresh thyme and rosemary, and 2 or 3 bay leaves

½ tin chopped tomatoes, about 200g

1 red and 1 yellow sweet pepper

1. Pick over the diced beef and cut out any really fatty or gristly bits. Mix the flour, salt and ground black pepper in a medium size bowl and add the beef, mixing well by hand to coat all the pieces with seasoned flour.
2. Peel and cut the onion into quarters, then slice across not too thinly, 4 or 5mm thickness.
3. Peel and chop the garlic finely.
4. Remove the stem end of the chilli pepper and chop finely.
5. Cut the smoked back bacon in half lengthwise then into strips

- about 7 or 8mm wide.
6. Top and tail the carrots and scrub under cold water. Cut across into about 10mm slices.
 7. Clean the stick of celery and cut similarly.
 8. Slice the chorizo sausage into pieces about 7 or 8mm wide. Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan and gently fry the chorizo for 5 or 6 minutes, turning once or twice.
 9. Remove the chorizo with a slotted spoon and place in a large casserole dish with lid, suitable for use on the hob.
 10. Tip the onion, celery, bacon, garlic and chilli into the oil in the frying pan and continue to cook gently, stirring occasionally, for about 5 minutes. Remove with the slotted spoon into the casserole, leaving as much oil as possible behind.
 11. Fry the coated beef for 5 minutes, turning a few times to brown. Add the smoked paprika and continue stirring over a gentle heat for a couple of minutes. Tip all this into the casserole, scraping out the residue.
 12. Deglaze the frying pan with the red wine and add to the casserole.
 13. Add about half the stock and the chopped tomatoes, and heat the casserole to a simmer, stirring occasionally. Add the carrots, thyme, rosemary and bay leaves. Cover the casserole with a lid. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 40 minutes.
 14. In the meantime, cut the two sweet peppers in half, remove the core and pith, and slice into 10mm wide slices – cut some in half but leave plenty of quite big pieces of pepper. Add to the casserole, return to a simmer, and cook for a further 30 minutes, covered. Stir occasionally and add further stock as necessary.
 15. Check and adjust the seasoning, and cut and assess a piece of the beef to ensure it is tender.
 16. Serve with rice or mashed potato, and a green vegetable such as broccoli or beans.

CHICKEN LEGS WITH SALTED LEMONS, GARLIC AND CHILLI

This recipe has always been a favourite of mine, and is an easy main course to get ready in advance, and then leave in the oven while you concentrate on a more elaborate dessert perhaps. You will, however, need to have made the salted, preserved lemons (see the 'Little Extras' on page 146) at least two or three weeks beforehand, or bought something similar ready-made.

Serves 4–6

You will need a large earthenware dish about 30 x 20cm suitable for the oven.

*4 free range medium size chicken bone-in thighs and 4 drumsticks,
skin on – total weight about 900g*

6 bay leaves

4 large cloves of garlic

4 hot red chilli peppers

8–10 slices of salted lemons, plus oil from the jar

Light olive oil

About 16 pitted black olives

3 sprigs of fresh rosemary

1. Cut two deep slits in each of the chicken thighs and drumsticks, down to the bone, and place the joints in a single layer in your chosen dish.
2. Tuck the bay leaves underneath the meat, well spaced apart.
3. Peel and slice the garlic cloves into roughly 2mm slices.
4. Cut the chillies similarly, with the seeds if you like the heat.
5. Press a slice or two of garlic into each of the slits in the chicken pieces, and slices of chilli to follow.
6. Place the slices of salted lemon in amongst the chicken pieces, and drizzle about 4 or 5 tbsp of the lemon oil from the jar over the chicken. Add a little more plain light olive oil if necessary. Cover and leave to marinate for a couple of hours in a cool place, or overnight in a fridge.
7. Preheat a fan oven to 180°C. Cover the chicken dish with foil and bake for 45 minutes.

8. Remove from the oven and remove the foil. Turn the chicken pieces. Baste the oil over the chicken and return to the oven for 15 minutes, without foil.
9. Remove from the oven again and baste with oil, add the olives and rosemary, tucking in amongst the pieces, and roast for a further 15–20 minutes to brown the skin – increase the oven temperature to 200°C if necessary.
- 10.** Serve with boiled rice or bulgur wheat and a crisp green salad. Scrape the oil and lemon pieces from the dish to spoon over the rice.

RISSOLES

I always loved my mother's rissoles, which she would make with leftovers of roast meat joints (especially lamb, which she did not like sliced cold with salad. That was strictly for chicken, ham and beef). This is an updated version of this post-war classic. I've kept the recipe fairly simple, but with cream and a little onion the texture is soft, and the background savoury note enhances the meat nicely. Leftover turkey meat post Christmas is an excellent base (and once made they can be frozen for later when turkey has more novelty value)!

I like to coat the rissoles in polenta, which I always keep in the store cupboard. Use Panko or home-made breadcrumbs if preferred.

Makes 12 rissoles – serves 4

You will need a meat mincer or a food processor to chop the meat finely

400g cooked turkey, lean lamb or ham

½ a small to medium onion, about 60g onion

40g butter

2 medium eggs

100ml double cream

40g breadcrumbs, made from gluten free bread if preferred

½ tsp salt

A good grinding of black pepper

1 tbsp chopped parsley or mixed fresh herbs

Some polenta for coating (or Panko crumbs)

1. Cut the cooked meat into cubes, roughly 1–2 cm, so that they will go through the mincer easily. Remove any big bits of fat or sinew and mince all the meat with a medium-holed plate – definitely not too fine, to leave some texture. Tip into a large mixing bowl.
2. If using a food processor, pulse the machine carefully so that the meat is finely chopped but does not become a paste.
3. Peel and chop the onion finely and sweat for about 10 minutes in the butter until softening and changing colour. Add to the meat.

4. Lightly beat the eggs and add to the bowl, with all the other ingredients, except the coating. Mix well together. It should form a reasonably firm texture that binds together, but add a little more breadcrumbs or cream as necessary.
5. Split the mix into quarters, and form 3 rissoles from each quarter by hand, rolling into a classic cylindrical shape. They should be 7 or 8 cm long x 3cm diameter.
6. Roll them one at a time in polenta or Panko crumbs shaken into a shallow dish, and place on a plate. Refrigerate to firm them up, then shallow fry, turning occasionally, until golden brown all over.
7. They can be frozen very successfully by placing on a tray lined with greaseproof paper before freezing. Once frozen, place in a bag suitable for storing in the freezer, and use as required – ensure they are completely defrosted before frying.

SPICED LAMB WITH APRICOTS

This lightly spiced, slightly sweet and sour lamb stew was inspired by subtle Middle Eastern flavours.

Serves 4

You will need a large non-stick saucepan with lid, or lidded casserole that is suitable for the hob.

1 heaped tbsp plain flour
1 tsp salt
½ tsp ground black pepper
1 heaped tsp each of ground cumin and coriander
600g diced shoulder of lamb
4–5 tbsp light olive oil
2 medium sized or 1 large onion, about 250g
2 large cloves garlic or 4 small cloves
10 whole dried apricots, about 75g
6 sun-dried tomatoes halves, about 25g
3 bay leaves
About 12 pitted green olives

For the stock

500ml water
1 lamb or chicken stock cube
2 tsp dark Muscavado sugar
1 tbsp tomato purée

1. **First, prepare the lamb for cooking.** Blend the flour, salt, pepper, cumin and coriander in a medium size bowl. Trim the lamb of any excess fat and gristle. Mix all together by hand to coat the meat thoroughly.
2. Heat the oil in a large saucepan or lidded casserole dish, add the lamb and cook on a medium heat to brown all over, turning and stirring the pieces regularly.
3. Peel and cut the onions in halves or quarters. Cut the onion into 3– 4 mm thick slices. Peel and chop the garlic finely. Add all to the meat and continue cooking for a few minutes to soften the onion.

4. Cut the dried apricots into halves or quarters depending on size.
5. Chop the sun-dried tomatoes into pieces about 2cm square.
6. **Prepare the stock.** Boil a kettle of water and measure out 500ml into a jug. Break the stock cube over and mix in. Add the sugar and tomato purée and stir to dissolve.
7. Pour the stock into the pan and add the chopped apricots, sun-dried tomatoes and bay leaves, and stir well in.
8. Simmer very gently for about an hour and a quarter until the lamb is tender, stirring occasionally. Keep covered, but if the dish appears too liquid, remove the lid for part of the cooking time. Cut the green olives in half and add at the end to heat through.
9. Serve with rice or bulgur wheat, and a green vegetable such as broccoli or beans.

SALMON AND RICOTTA PIE

Soft and creamy salmon in a puff pastry case. The flavours with a hint of herb and lemon are subtle and complimentary so this pie is always popular. If you buy a packet of puff pastry sheets, this will make it very easy to prepare. Ideally use an all-butter ready-rolled puff pastry sheet, usually weighing 320 or 340g. Follow the instructions on the packet, removing the pastry from the fridge 10 or 15 minutes before using. Alternatively, use an all-butter puff pastry block (usually 375g).

Serves 4

About 300g skinless salmon fillets
2 medium eggs
1 spring onion
1 spring onion
A handful of small 'cooking spinach' leaves
Grated zest of ½ small lemon
3 heaped tbsp breadcrumbs
½ tsp salt
A good grating of black pepper
100g crème fraîche
125g ricotta (½ a 250g tub)
1 tbsp chopped dill (or tarragon)
1 x all butter ready rolled puff pastry sheet

First, make the pie filling

1. Remove the skin from the salmon if necessary. Dice the salmon into approximately 2cm cubes and place in a medium size bowl.
2. Beat one of the eggs lightly and pour it into the bowl with the salmon.
3. Clean, top and tail the spring onion, chop finely and add to the salmon and egg.
4. Wash the spinach leaves, shake off excess water and tear larger leaves in half. Add to the bowl.
5. Add the grated lemon zest, breadcrumbs, salt, black pepper, crème fraîche, ricotta and dill, and gently mix in thoroughly

with the fish.

To assemble the pie

1. Unroll the pastry sheet, leaving it on its greaseproof paper base, and place the whole on a suitably large non-stick baking tray or sheet. Carefully spoon the filling on to one half of the sheet, leaving about 2 cm around the edge clear. With a pastry brush, dampen the edges on 3 sides with water. Lift the other half of the pastry sheet over to cover the filling and press down the edges with your fingers. Using a fork, press again around the 3 edges to seal them well.
2. If you are using block pastry, remove from the fridge for 10 minutes then roll out on a floured board to about the thickness of a £1 coin, providing a rectangle about 30 x 25cm. Carefully lift it onto baking parchment, lining a suitable baking sheet or tray. Fill and fold the sheet in half as above and seal. Trim the edges neatly.
3. Beat the second egg with a splash of water to glaze the top of the pie with a pastry brush. Carefully make two diagonal cuts in the pie lid to allow steam to escape.
4. Bake in a preheated fan oven at 180°C for 30–35 minutes until the pastry is a nice, golden brown. Turn off the oven and open the door a little. Leave the pie for another 5 minutes before removing.
5. Very good simply served with buttered new potatoes and a green vegetable.

THAI FISH PIE

I have always liked my fish pie with a Thai-style twist. It's dairy and gluten free to boot, but if the inclusion of dairy products isn't a problem, then substitute butter melted into the mash instead of oil or margarine. A splash of double cream in the sauce also adds a little richness. Some of the pie can be made in advance.

Dairy and gluten free

Serves 4–6

You will need a rectangular dish about 30 x 20cm x 6cm deep, or similar size oval dish, suitable for the oven

125g cooked large prawns
650g potatoes
350g sweet potatoes
30g margarine or vegetable oil
1 level tsp salt
Freshly ground black pepper
2 medium or large eggs
1 stick of lemon grass
1 small hot chilli pepper
500g fish fillets – a mix of salmon, smoked haddock, cod or unsmoked haddock
1 tin coconut milk
3 or 4 lime leaves
125g frozen peas
1 heaped tbsp rice flour
1 heaped tbsp cornflour
1–2 tbsp lemon juice
Tabasco sauce (optional)
Fresh coriander leaves for garnish

1. First, place the frozen prawns in a sieve or colander over a basin to thaw and drain (or defrost overnight in the fridge).
2. Peel both types of potato, cut into chunks and simmer together in water for 15–18 minutes until soft. Drain the potatoes well and tip into a large bowl. Leave to dry and cool somewhat.

Mash using a fork to leave some small lumps, not too smooth. Add the margarine or oil and a pinch of salt and mix in to melt.

3. Cover the eggs with cold water, bring to the boil and simmer 6 minutes. Drain, toss to break the shells, and pour in cold water to cool. Drain and set aside. (This can also be done the day before, and the cooked eggs in their shells kept in the fridge.)
4. Crush the lemon grass gently using a rolling pin, and chop the chilli pepper finely.
5. Place the fish fillets in a frying pan large enough to take them all in a single layer. Pour over the coconut milk to cover, add the lemon grass, chilli and the lime leaves. Bring to the boil and simmer for exactly 4 minutes. Take off the heat and set aside.
6. Cover the peas with water, bring to the boil and simmer for 2 minutes. Drain.
7. Remove the fish from the frying pan with a slotted spoon and place in the bottom of the chosen dish. When cool enough, break up the fish by hand into chunks (not too small). Mix in the prawns.
8. Shell the boiled eggs and cut into halves lengthwise, then quarters, then cut across the quarters into pieces about 1cm square. Add to the dish together with the peas and mix gently.
9. **Next, make the sauce.** Pour the coconut milk used to cook the fish into a measuring jug. Add a little water as necessary to bring the total to about 450ml maximum. Pour into a medium non-stick saucepan, add a level teaspoon of salt and the two flours. Using a suitable hand whisk, stir the mix to disperse the powders, heat and stir constantly until the sauce thickens and comes to a very gentle boil – cook for a minute or two, stirring constantly.
10. Remove the pan from the heat and add the lemon juice. Stir well in, taste and adjust the seasonings as necessary – use Tabasco sauce if you wish to pep it up. Pour over the fish mix and mix very gently to keep the eggs intact. Set aside to cool and let the sauce thicken up – maybe an hour or more.
11. Carefully spoon the mashed potato evenly over the pie. This can be done some time before the meal – cover and leave in a cool place, or refrigerate overnight.
12. Heat a fan oven to 170°C, and place the dish on a middle shelf for about 50 minutes until bubbling around the edges, and

browning slightly on the top. Sprinkle a little coarse chopped coriander or parsley over to serve.

13. This is very good served with fresh green vegetables, such as broccoli, beans or purple sprouting.

CHEF'S TIP

If a gluten-free version is not required, substitute 1 heaped tbsp of plain wheat flour for the rice flour. Use butter to replace margarine or oil if dairy-free is not required.

SIDES

My six side dishes are quite a mixed bag! I have made full use of a wide range of vegetables in four of the recipes, with the two others a little more filling (and with plenty of carbohydrate). They all have flexible uses, and most can be made well in advance to ease any last minute pressure in the kitchen.

BRAISED RED CABBAGE WITH APPLE AND ONION

My version of braised red cabbage – slightly sweet, sour and spicy, the star anise complementing the subtle apple flavour. This is a great side dish for robust flavoured roast pork, beef, turkey, fried sausages and nut roast, and is very nice cold with green salad and cold meats, salami or cheese.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 6

You will need a medium size casserole dish with lid, suitable for both microwave and fan oven

About 400g red cabbage

1 medium or ½ a large red onion, about 150g

½ a medium Bramley apple

1 large clove garlic

½ hot chilli pepper (or a pinch of chilli powder)

1 tsp dark brown muscovado sugar

1 tsp salt

100ml apple or red grape juice

100ml water

1 whole star anise

Lemon juice to taste

1 tbsp light olive oil

1. Slice the red cabbage about 6 or 7mm thick, to a length of 5cm or so.
2. Peel and quarter the onion and slice a similar thickness to the cabbage.
3. Peel, core and chop the apple into about 1cm cubes.
4. Finely chop the peeled garlic clove and chilli pepper if using.
5. Place all the raw ingredients into the casserole dish, add the sugar, salt, juice, olive oil and water and mix in. Tuck the piece of star anise into the centre of the mix.
6. Heat in the microwave for about 3 minutes on high, stir, and heat again for 2 minutes.
7. Remove the casserole and place in a preheated fan oven at

180°C for 30 minutes. Remove the lid and stir the mix, then return the casserole to the oven, uncovered, for a further 20 minutes.

8. Check that the texture of the cabbage is to your liking, and add a squeeze or two of lemon juice if you prefer a little more bite. Remove the star anise. Place in a warm oven ready for serving, or cool and store in the fridge for up to 5 days.

CHEF'S TIP

This dish can be frozen successfully in advance, and also makes a nice winter salad.

COURGETTE, FENNEL AND TOMATO BAKE

This recipe has a seasonal aspect, inspired by a surfeit of courgettes and tomatoes during the summer on our allotment. It is full of flavour with a good sauce element, and makes a great partner for plain grilled meats and fish, or fried haloumi slices. Perfect with a chunk of wholemeal bread to mop up the juices. It is easy to reheat, or eat warm – and great at a barbecue.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 4

You will need a baking dish about 30 x 20 x 8cm

3–4 tbsp olive oil

2–3 courgettes, about 400g

1 small or ½ a large bulb of fennel, about 100g

¼ large onion, about 60–70g

3–4 medium tomatoes

1 clove garlic

¼ tsp chilli powder or 1 fresh hot chilli

¼ whole lemon, or 2 thick slices from a whole lemon

1 tbsp chopped fresh parsley, thyme and rosemary

1 tsp salt

About 100ml water

1. Lightly grease the base of the baking dish with a little of the oil.
2. Top and tail the courgettes and slice into rounds about 5–7mm thick.
3. Peel and slice across the onion into 5 – 7mm slices.
4. Cut off the base and tops of the fennel, and cut into quarters. Lay each quarter on a cut side and slice thinly, about 5mm.
5. Slice the tomatoes into 5–7mm slices, removing any woody parts of stalk.
6. Finely peel and chop the garlic, chop the lemon fairly small, and chop the chilli pepper.
7. Layer the courgettes, onion, half the tomatoes, fennel, lemon, garlic, herbs, salt and chilli, finishing with a second layer of

tomatoes. Pour the remaining olive oil over, and add water to come near to the top of the vegetables.

8. Bake, covered, at 180°C in a preheated fan oven for 30 minutes. Uncover, press vegetables lightly into the juices, and cook a further 15–20 minutes.
9. Serve hot or warm. This will reheat very well in a microwave oven.

CREAMY LEEK AND POTATO BAKE

This also has a seasonal aspect, this time inspired by a surfeit of leeks in the winter. It is filling and full of flavour too, going well with plain grilled meats and fish. The bake can also easily be reheated. It is also very good on its own, either hot or cold with salad.

Vegetarian

Serves 6

You will need a baking dish about 20cm square and 8cm deep

2 or 3 medium red-skinned potatoes, about 500g

2 good sized leeks, about 300g

¼ of a sweet red pepper

75g Red Leicester cheese

75g breadcrumbs, white or wholemeal

2 tsp cumin seeds

1 tsp salt

A good grating of black pepper

300ml single cream

1. Scrub the potatoes and cut them into quarters, about 4cm in dimension. Cook in boiling water for about 15 minutes until just done but firm; drain and leave to dry and cool. Cut each piece of potato into 4 or 5 slices.
2. Clean the leeks and remove the root end and most of the green leaves, especially the tough outer leaves. Cut into 15–20mm slices. Cook in shallow boiling water for 5 minutes, drain in a sieve or colander and leave to cool. Press lightly to ensure the leeks are not too watery.
3. With the pith removed, slice the red pepper into strips of about 5mm, then across to give rough squares.
4. Grate the cheese coarsely and mix well with breadcrumbs and cumin seeds.
5. Place half the potato in a single layer on the bottom of the baking dish. Season with salt and pepper.
6. Sprinkle over all the red pepper, then the cooked leeks. Season again.

7. Place the remaining potato in another layer, and pour over the single cream. Press the potato into the liquid lightly with a fork.
8. Finally cover with the cheese and breadcrumb mix in an even layer.
9. Place in a preheated fan oven at 200°C for about 25 minutes, until the gratin is beginning to brown a little and you can see the cream bubbling here and there about the edges.

ROAST ROOTS

Roast roots are perfect to simply put in the oven with the main dish, needing a minimum of attention while you are cooking green vegetables or making gravy at the last minute. Although this is more of a winter dish, there are nonetheless plenty of variations that can give it a summery twist – baby carrots and chunks of courgette, whole shallots or baby onions, the odd cherry tomato and summer herbs thrown in after turning small new potatoes midway through cooking.

Vegan and gluten free

Serves 4

Quantities here are only a guide – it often depends on what vegetables you have available, and what size roasting dish. These quantities suit a dish about 30 x 20cm.

1 sweet potato

2 small or 1 large parsnip

1 carrot

2 or 3 medium red-skinned potatoes

1 large clove garlic

2 or 3 bay leaves, a sprig or two of fresh rosemary and thyme (or 1 tsp dried mixed herbs)

1 medium red onion

2 sticks of celery

Light olive oil

Coarsely grated sea salt and black pepper

1. Peel the sweet potato and cut into 4 pieces roughly the same size.
2. Top and tail the parsnips and carrot and scrub clean, cutting each into 2–4 pieces depending on size and shape.
3. Clean the potatoes, also leaving the skins on. Cut each lengthwise into 4 or 6 wedges.
4. Peel and chop the garlic, and wash the herbs.
5. Peel the red onion and cut into quarters.
6. Top and tail the celery sticks and cut each into 4 pieces.

7. Place the potatoes, sweet potato, carrot and celery pieces into a large pan of boiling water for 4 minutes. Add the parsnip and boil for a further 1 minute. Remove from the heat and drain. Spread out in the chosen roasting dish to cool a little and dry.
8. Drizzle some light olive oil over the root vegetables and toss them carefully to coat. Tuck the herbs here and there underneath, sprinkle the garlic over, and position the quartered onion around the dish. Grate plenty of salt and black pepper over.
9. Place in a preheated fan oven at 180°C, uncovered. Turn the vegetables after 20 minutes, drizzling a little more oil over as necessary. Cook for a further 15–20 minutes or so until the potatoes are beginning to brown, turning once more.

ROSEMARY POLENTA

This is quite filling, but portion size can always be made smaller for greater flexibility. It is best prepared and chilled in advance, then fried, grilled or baked when close to serving the meal.

Vegan and gluten free

Makes 6 wedges

You will need a 20cm diameter springform tin, or a loose-bottomed cake tin

4 tbsp light olive oil

650ml boiling water

½ tsp salt and a good grating of black pepper

A vegan vegetable stock cube or 1 tbsp vegan bouillon powder

150g polenta

3 sprigs of rosemary, leaves cut into 3–4mm lengths

*1 tbsp of other herbs, e.g. parsley, thyme and chives, chopped small
– or ½ tsp mixed dried herbs*

1. Brush the base and sides of the tin with a little of the olive oil, and line the base with greaseproof paper/baking parchment, cut into a round. Brush oil over the baking parchment.
2. Have the water boiling in a medium size non-stick saucepan. Add the salt, pepper, stock cube or bouillon and the rest of the olive oil. Stir to dissolve the stock cube.
3. Sprinkle in the polenta, stirring constantly with a non-scratch whisk or a wooden spoon. It thickens fairly immediately. Add all the herbs and stir in.
4. Turn the heat right down and continue cooking for 6 minutes. Stir regularly and keep the heat low so that the polenta doesn't stick.
5. Turn off the heat, spoon the polenta into the tin and spread evenly.
6. Cool, tip out of the tin on to a clean chopping board, remove the paper and cut into 6 wedges. Place the wedges in a suitable container and keep in the fridge until required.
7. Fry gently on both sides in a little oil until golden brown to serve, or brush with oil to grill. The wedges are good on a

barbecue too.

CHEF'S TIP

The polenta wedges can be stored in the fridge in an airtight box lined with greaseproof paper for up to 3 days, before being fried ready to serve.

SWEET POTATO CAKES

These cakes are also quite filling, but portion size can always be made smaller for greater flexibility. They too can be prepared and chilled in advance, then fried, grilled or baked when close to serving the meal. Dusting the potato cakes in polenta ensures they remain gluten free, but breadcrumbs or Panko crumbs can be used and wheat flour in the mix too if you don't have to be gluten free.

Vegetarian and gluten free

Makes 8 cakes

2 large potatoes, about 500g

1 large sweet potato, about 200g

1 large or 2 medium parsnips, about 100g

1 tbsp Greek yogurt

½ tsp paprika

1 tsp salt

A good grating of black pepper

1 tbsp chopped parsley or coriander

1 heaped tbsp rice flour or cornflour

Polenta – about 6–8 tbsp, for coating (or breadcrumbs if preferred)

A little light olive oil, for frying

1. Peel, chop and cook the potatoes, sweet potato and parsnips together until soft – about 15–20 minutes. Drain the pan and allow the vegetables to dry out in a large bowl. Mash fairly thoroughly with a fork, leaving some small pieces so not too puréed.
2. Blend in the yogurt, paprika, salt, pepper, and herbs and leave to cool a little more. Blend in the rice or cornflour.
3. Split the mix into quarters by hand on a board or clean work surface. Form two smallish cakes about 6 or 7cm diameter and 2cm deep from each quarter.
4. Sprinkle some polenta into a wide, shallow dish and gently and carefully coat the cakes on both sides and edges. Place on a flat tray and refrigerate, uncovered, until well chilled and firmed up.
5. Either fry for a few minutes on each side in a little light olive

until golden brown on both sides, or bake on a lightly oiled tray in a preheated fan oven for 15 minutes at 180°C, turning once after 10 minutes.

CHEF'S TIP

The cakes can be stored in the fridge in an airtight box lined with greaseproof paper for up to 3 days before being cooked ready to serve.

HOT DESSERTS

My experience of cooking and developing recipes over the years suggests that hot desserts are the highlight of the meal for many people (especially men). So here are six recipes which I hope will appeal to all those dessert lovers – one steamed pudding, a baked fruit sponge, a fruited bread pudding, some individual muffins to eat hot with sauce, one baked gluten-free almond pudding and a chocolate meringue.

APRICOT, ALMOND AND RICOTTA PUDDING

It took a few attempts to devise a new hot dessert along these lines that was gluten free, as so many recipes include wheat flour or bread. This pudding should satisfy this need, and is a lovely dessert in its own right – other fruits would also work well.

Vegetarian and gluten free

Serves 4

You will need a round baking dish, about 20cm diameter and 4cm deep

Knob of butter

6 ripe apricots

1 tbsp candied peel

120g soft brown sugar, plus 2 tbsp extra

125g (half a 250g tub) ricotta

2 medium eggs

120ml double cream (weighing 100g)

100g ground almonds

2 tbsp fine cornmeal

1 tbsp rum or brandy

2 tbsp flaked almonds

1. Put a knob of butter in the dish and heat in the microwave oven for 15 seconds on high to melt. Use a pastry brush to grease the base and sides of the dish.
2. Preheat a fan oven to 170°C.
3. Cut the apricots in half, remove stones, and place cut side down on the base of the dish. 12 halves of small apricots should cover the base.
4. Sprinkle the candied peel between the apricots, and then sprinkle the 2 extra tbsp of sugar over.
5. Weigh the ricotta and the rest of the sugar into a large bowl.
6. Separate the two eggs and put the whites in a clean, small bowl, and the yolks in with the ricotta and sugar in the other.
7. Using an electric whisk, whip the egg whites on high speed

until well aerated but not too firm. Then whisk the ricotta, sugar and yolks on a lower speed until well mixed and all lumps of ricotta blended in.

8. Add the double cream, the ground almonds, the cornmeal and rum or brandy to the bowl with the ricotta in, and carefully mix in thoroughly on low speed.
9. Using a large metal spoon, fold in half the whipped egg white into the pudding mix. When no lumps of white can be seen, fold in the rest of the egg white until blended in. Spoon the mix over the apricots and gently level the surface. Scatter the flaked almonds evenly over the surface.
10. Place the baking dish in the oven for about 40 minutes. It should be moderately well risen and browning a little at the edges. Remove from the oven and insert a suitable thermometer into the centre to ensure it has reached 75°C, or press gently in the centre to check it is firm to touch.
11. Allow to cool for 10 minutes or so (or leave in a warm oven whilst the main course is eaten). Serve warm with Greek yogurt or cream.

SPICED APPLE AND PEAR CHARLOTTE

This is another straightforward recipe, based on an old English one that used quinces. Substitute quinces for apples if you are lucky enough to get them in early autumn! The recipe can also be prepared in advance and popped into the oven to cook while you and your guests eat the main course.

Vegetarian

Serves 4–6

You will need a round baking dish about 20cm diameter and 4cm deep, or an equivalent oblong dish.

Bramley apples – 2 very large or 3–4 smaller apples, to give 600g of peeled, cored and diced apple pieces

80g granulated sugar

Zest and juice of ½ a lemon

A glass of sherry or sweet white wine (about 70ml) and about half that of water

A few strands of saffron

1 tsp ground ginger

½ tsp mixed spice

2 good sized ripe pears

50g butter

3 or 4 large slices of sourdough bread

2 tbsp Demerara sugar for topping

1. Peel the apples and cut into quarters. Remove stalk ends and cores. Dice into roughly 2cm pieces and place into a medium saucepan.
2. Add the sugar, lemon zest and juice, wine or sherry, water, saffron and spices. Bring to the boil, stirring occasionally, cover and simmer for about 5 minutes until the apple is soft.
3. Allow to cool a little then purée the apple using a hand-held liquidiser, or push through a coarse sieve. Add a little more water if it is very thick.
4. Peel and quarter the pears and remove cores. Cut into pieces about 1.5 to 2 cm, and place in a single layer in the chosen

baking dish.

5. Spoon the apple purée over the pears, stirring very gently to ensure the fruit is covered.
6. Soften about 50g butter, and spread generously on the slices of sourdough bread (crusts on). Cut the bread into rough squares of about 4cm, and place over the fruit with bread overlapping a little. Press gently into the fruit and sprinkle with Demerara sugar all over. The sugar can be mixed with a little more ground ginger if liked.
7. Bake in a preheated fan oven at 180°C for 25–30 minutes. The bread should be crisp and golden brown. Serve with Greek yogurt or thick double cream.
8. This dessert is excellent served cold, as well as fresh from the oven.

CARROT AND ORANGE PUDDING

Carrot and Orange Pudding recipes abound, but this has a generous layer of orange marmalade too which provides a real orange hit – use a good quality, chunky marmalade for best effect. Quietly steaming away for a couple of hours ‘on the back burner’, this is a great dessert that allows the cook to get on with other things and not have to worry about it, apart from checking on the water level now and then.

Vegetarian

Serves 4–6

You will need an earthenware or plastic pudding basin, approximately 1 litre capacity and about 16cm in diameter.

100g self-raising white flour

½ tsp ground mixed spice

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1½ tsp ground ginger

1½ tsp baking powder

1 medium to large carrot, about 150g

1 medium orange

30g butter, plus extra for greasing

100g golden caster sugar

30g light olive oil

2 medium eggs

100g of good quality orange marmalade, medium or coarse cut

1. Weigh the flour into a small bowl, add the spices and baking powder and mix in.
2. Peel, top and tail the carrot and grate it coarsely.
3. Zest the orange finely.
4. Soften the butter in a medium size bowl in the microwave, and beat in the sugar and oil with an electric mixer on low speed.
5. Beat in the eggs until well mixed. Add the grated carrot and orange zest and blend in on low speed. Finally add the flour with spices and blend in until well mixed.
6. Lightly butter the base and sides of the pudding basin. Weigh in the marmalade (about a quarter of a typical 450g jar),

- spreading it fairly evenly across the base. Spoon the beaten sponge mixture on top. Gently level the top of the mixture.
7. Cut a length of kitchen foil to cover the basin with plenty to spare. Fold a tuck about 2 cm wide in the foil, then place over the basin and smooth the foil over the sides. Tie with string, not too tightly.
 8. Place the basin in a steamer, or on an upturned saucer in a large pan with its lid on, with about 2–3 cm of water. Bring the water to a gentle simmer and steam for 2 hours. The pudding expands significantly as it cooks and the foil with a tuck in it allows for that. (Check the water level once or twice and top up as necessary).
 9. When cooked, remove the pudding carefully from the steamer or saucepan. Remove the string and foil.
 10. Loosen the sides of the pudding with a small knife. Place a large plate over and invert, scraping out any remaining marmalade. Serve slices with Greek yogurt, either natural or slightly sweetened with vanilla.
 11. If there are any leftovers, cool and refrigerate. Slices can be reheated in the microwave on high for about 20 seconds.

CHOCOLATE AND ORANGE QUEEN OF PUDDINGS

This is a sumptuous variation on a classic recipe – it takes a little more effort to make but is certain to be a great favourite.

Vegetarian

Serves 4

You will need a suitable round baking dish, about 17cm diameter and 8cm deep.

Small knob of butter

Zest of 1 medium orange

250ml milk, whole or semi-skimmed

50ml double cream

70g dark chocolate, 70% cocoa solids

100g and 25g caster sugar, weighed separately

7 or 8 tbsp fresh breadcrumbs, about 50g

2 medium eggs

1 tsp orange blossom water

100g medium cut good quality orange marmalade

1 tbsp of Demerara sugar for the meringue

1. Lightly butter the dish over the whole of the base and a little way up the sides.
2. Zest the orange finely, and keep for later on.
3. Warm the milk and double cream in a non-stick saucepan gently. Remove from the heat, break the chocolate into small pieces and add to the pan.
4. Add the weighed 25g of caster sugar, and stir with a hand whisk until the chocolate has completely melted, returning to the heat for a short while if necessary (continue stirring the whole time).
5. Add the breadcrumbs and stir in thoroughly. Leave for 5 minutes to cool a little.
6. Separate the eggs, placing the whites in a medium size bowl and the yolks into a small bowl. Mix the egg yolks gently and blend into the cooled chocolate custard. Pour the custard into the pudding dish.

7. Place the dish into a preheated fan oven at 160°C. Bake for exactly 30 minutes and remove from the oven. Leave to stand for 5 minutes and turn the oven temperature down to 140°C.
8. Whisk the egg whites with an electric whisk until beginning to stand in peaks, and whisk in about half the 100g caster sugar until firm and glossy. Fold in the rest of the sugar, the orange zest and the orange blossom water.
9. Gently warm the marmalade in the microwave oven so that it can be spread easily. Spoon and spread over the chocolate custard.
10. Spoon the whisked egg white carefully over the marmalade, sprinkle the Demerara sugar over the surface, and return the dish to the oven for 15 minutes until the meringue has turned a light golden colour.
11. Serve with cream.
- 12.** This dessert may be eaten cold as well as hot. The chocolate custard can also be prepared in advance earlier in the day as far as needing the marmalade to cover and the meringue – it will need an extra 5 minutes in the oven at the end.

PINEAPPLE, COCONUT AND LIME SPONGE PUDDING

My mother was a great one for traditional baked sponge puds with, for example, raspberries from the garden on the bottom. This recipe is a contemporary, fresh variation on the theme.

Vegetarian

Serves 4

You will need a suitable round baking dish, about 17 cm diameter and a minimum of 8cm deep.

110g self-raising flour

1 tsp baking powder

80g coconut milk

2 thick slices of fresh pineapple, to give 200g trimmed and cut pieces

120g lime marmalade

80g butter

110g caster sugar

2 medium eggs

Finely grated zest of 1 lime

50g grated coconut, fresh or frozen

1. Preheat a fan oven to 170°C.
2. Weigh out the flour in a small bowl, add the baking powder and mix together.
3. Weigh the coconut milk into a small jug, making sure the contents of the can of coconut milk are well mixed – sometimes the fat separates out and forms lumps.
4. Remove skin and central core of 2 thick slices of pineapple. Cut the flesh into rough cubes about 1.5–2cm. Place the fruit pieces into the base of the baking dish.
5. Weigh the marmalade into the dish and spread over the fruit. Warm for 1 minute on high in a microwave oven to soften the marmalade, and mix it into the fruit.
6. Soften the butter. In a medium size bowl, blend the butter and caster sugar using an electric whisk until light and fluffy. Whisk in the eggs.
7. Blend in the grated lime zest, the coconut milk and the grated

coconut. (Fresh or frozen is ideal, but desiccated coconut can be used – steep 30g coconut with a tablespoon of boiling water for 15 minutes).

8. Finally, blend in the flour and baking powder and spoon over the pineapple and marmalade.
9. Bake the pudding for about 50–55 minutes. Test with a thermometer or skewer to ensure the centre of the sponge is cooked before serving.
- 10.** Serve with natural Greek yogurt which goes really well with this pudding.

STICKY TOFFEE MUFFINS WITH APPLE TOFFEE SAUCE

Finally, this is a recipe I developed for a friend's birthday party – it can be made in advance and warmed up on the day. The muffins freeze perfectly, and the sauce will keep in the fridge for several days beforehand.

Vegetarian

Makes 8

You will need a muffin tray for baking, and muffin cases

For the muffins

100g chopped, pitted dates
100g apple juice
55g butter
50g caster sugar
15g dark muscovado sugar (1 tbsp)
2 medium eggs
1 tbsp golden syrup
1 tbsp treacle
1 tsp natural vanilla extract
120g self-raising flour
½ tsp baking powder

1. Soak the chopped dates in the apple juice overnight.
2. Weigh the butter into a medium size bowl. Melt the butter in a microwave oven on lowest power for 1 minute, then weigh in the two sugars, and whisk until light and fluffy using an electric whisk.
3. On a low speed, mix in the eggs, syrup and treacle, and vanilla.
4. Mix in the dates and any liquor remaining.
5. Finally, fold in the flour and baking powder.
6. Put 8 muffin cases in a muffin tray and carefully spoon the mix into each. Ensure that the levels in each muffin case are roughly equal and do not overfill.
7. Bake in a preheated fan oven at 170°C for 20 minutes.

- Remove from the oven and leave to cool in the muffin tray.
8. Keep in an airtight container in a cool place – no need to refrigerate – for up to 3 days. They freeze and thaw perfectly.

For the apple toffee sauce (for 8 muffins)

2 medium sized Bramley apples

120g butter

150g soft brown muscovado sugar

1. Peel, core and dice the apples into roughly 1.5cm squares.
2. Melt the butter in a medium frying pan and add the apple pieces. Fry and cook gently for about 5 minutes until the apple pieces are beginning to soften.
3. Add the sugar, increase the heat, and stir for another 2–3 minutes until the sugar has dissolved and the sauce has caramelised. Remove from the heat and leave to cool a little.
4. Remove the muffins from their paper cases and reheat four at a time in the microwave oven for 1 min 30 seconds on 'high' setting for 750 or 800 Watt ovens. Keep warm in a low oven until required. (Alternatively, warm the required number of muffins on a tray in the oven, covered in foil.)
5. Serve with a good spoonful of warm apple sauce and some double cream.

COLD DESSERTS

I have included my all-time favourites here, frequently made in the kitchen. Some are easy to make, others a little more difficult, but all are well worth the effort. Most of these are guaranteed winners at a dinner party and can be made well in advance.

CHOCOLATE, RICOTTA AND AMARETTI POTS

These pots are a variation on a dessert I made for a local café for some years. Not too sweet, this is a beautifully balanced soft creamy chocolate recipe with a crunchy amaretti biscuit topping. The ramekins at the custard stage, before the topping is added, can be put in the fridge for 2 or 3 days before the desserts are required. The topping can also be prepared separately at an earlier stage.

Vegetarian

Serves 8

You will need 8 ramekin dishes of 100ml capacity – 8cm diameter x 4cm height

For the amaretti biscuit topping

12 amaretti biscuits

40g butter

1. Put the biscuits in a medium bowl and crush with the end of a rolling pin. Try to achieve crumbs but with some small pieces of 5–6mm, and not reduce the whole too fine.
2. Carefully melt the butter in a microwave-safe bowl, and stir in the amaretti crumbs until well coated.
3. Place in the fridge for a few minutes, break up any large pieces with your fingers, and keep in an airtight container in the fridge until use (this can be done a few days before you need it).

For the chocolate custard

300ml pot of double cream

150g good quality 70% cocoa solids dark chocolate – dessert or cooking chocolate

1 large egg

50g caster sugar

250g good quality smooth ricotta

3 tbsp rum, brandy or amaretto liqueur

1. Pour the cream into a small microwave-safe bowl, and add the chocolate, broken into small pieces. Place in the microwave oven on high for 1 minute and remove. Stir the mixture until most of the chocolate has melted and blended with cream, return to the microwave and heat on high for a further 30 seconds. Remove and stir again, and the chocolate should all be melted.
2. In another bowl, beat the egg, sugar and ricotta until well blended using an electric hand whisk. Add the rum, brandy or amaretto, then the chocolate cream, and blend in on a slow speed.
3. Start heating your fan oven to 150°C and bring a kettle full of water to the boil.
4. Pour the custard into a 1 litre jug, and carefully fill the 8 ramekin dishes to an even depth. Place the ramekins into one large or two smaller baking dishes.
5. Place the dishes into the oven, and carefully pour hot water around the ramekins to about half way up the sides. Bake for 20 minutes.
6. Turn the heat down to 100°C for a further 20 minutes, remove the baking dishes to a work surface, and carefully remove the ramekins using a tea towel to grip. Leave to cool, then cover loosely and chill in the fridge overnight.
7. Remove the ramekins about 2 hours before serving to come up to room temperature (the texture of the custard will be perfect – straight from the fridge it will be a bit firm).
8. Sprinkle the crunchy amaretti biscuit topping over the ramekins to serve.

CREAMY SUMMER FRUIT DESSERTS

Layered in individual glasses, trifle style, these desserts will improve if made the day before you need them. The choice of cooked fruit is yours – try a seasonal autumn or winter fruit combination for variety. Vary the compôte according to what you have available – some blackcurrants, blueberries or blackberries to substitute for some of the red fruits would be perfect.

Vegetarian

Serves 4

Use whisky glasses, or similar straight-sided or angled glasses, about 200ml capacity.

Homemade fruit compôte, about 300g
3 Savoiardi biscuits (Boudoir, sponge fingers)
4 amaretti biscuits, about 3cm diameter
4 tbsp brandy, rum or fruity liqueur
150ml double cream (half a 300ml pot)
1 tbsp milk, semi-skimmed or full fat
1 heaped tbsp of caster sugar, about 20g
½ tsp of natural vanilla flavouring
100g/100ml Greek-style natural yogurt
Toasted sliced almonds or chopped hazelnuts for garnish

To make the compôte (sufficient for 4 desserts)

100g strawberries
100g raspberries
80ml water (4 tbsp)
2 rounded tbsp granulated sugar, about 40g

1. Cut the strawberries into sizes about the same as raspberries. Place both fruits into a small saucepan with the sugar and water, stir gently and bring to the boil. Cook for 3 minutes, uncovered, briefly stirring once or twice. Remove from the heat and leave to cool.
2. Chill in the fridge before using in the dessert.

To make up the dessert

1. Carefully spoon the compôte evenly into the bottom of the 4 glasses until about one-third full.
2. Break the Savoirdi biscuits or sponge fingers into quarters. Place 3 of these pieces and 1 amaretti biscuit into each glass on top of the compôte, pressing lightly in.
3. Measure out the brandy, rum or liqueur and dribble over the biscuits, 1 tbsp in each glass. Set the glasses aside to let the alcohol soak in.
4. Pour the cream and milk into a suitable medium size bowl, and whip with a hand-held whisk on high speed until it increases in volume and begins to hold its shape. Do not over-whip.
5. Weigh or measure in the caster sugar and the vanilla. Whisk in on a lower speed for about 30 seconds.
6. Weigh or measure in the Greek yogurt, and blend in on the slowest speed for 30 seconds or so. The cream will thicken up.
7. Either spoon the cream over the biscuit very carefully, gently pressing in to avoid air pockets or, for a better finish, fill a piping bag with the cream using a plain nozzle, and pipe on to the dessert.
8. Store (lightly covered) in the fridge for a few hours or overnight until required.
9. Sprinkle some toasted flaked almonds or toasted hazelnuts on top just before serving.

LEMON SOUFFLÉ

This Soufflé needs accuracy, but is a simply beautiful and stunning dinner party centrepiece at the end of a meal. Practice makes perfect. I take little credit for the recipe though – this was my mother's, barely changed! It's well worth the effort.

Serves 6–8

You will need a soufflé dish of 15–16cm diameter and a hand-held electric whisk.

Contains gelatine.

1 x 12g packet of powdered gelatine or 4 ½ leaves of gelatine

Water for soaking gelatine

Zest and juice of 3 unwaxed lemons, saving some of 1 lemon's zest for decorating

200g caster sugar and 1 tbsp extra

Whites from 4 medium eggs and yolks from 3 of them

300ml double cream, plus 100ml for whipping and piping as decoration

1. Firstly, prepare the soufflé dish. Unroll about 60cm of baking foil on the work surface. Roll the dish across the foil, make a mark on sufficient foil to be able to go round the dish with some to spare, and cut the foil accordingly. Fold the foil in half and wrap around the dish, folding the join over to hold it, and secure the foil in place with either a rubber band or string. You should have about 5cm protruding above the edge of the dish. Set aside well out of the way.
2. If using gelatine powder, measure 80ml (4 tbsp) of water into a ramekin or small basin and sprinkle the gelatine over the surface. Stir a couple of times to ensure the gelatine is all dampened and set aside.
3. If using gelatine leaves, place the leaves in a suitable rectangular dish and cover with cold water – about 6 to 8 tbsp. Set aside for 5 minutes, squeeze out the leaves and place into another container.
4. Zest two of the lemons using a fine grater and put the zest on

- one side for later. Use a lemon zest parer for the one lemon to be used for decorating the final dessert, if you have one – if not, use the fine grater.
5. Cut the lemons in half and squeeze all the juice (no pips) into a small bowl.
 6. Using a suitably wide saucepan – at least 20cm diameter – heat up about 3–4cm water.
 7. Fill the sink or a washing up bowl with about 6–7 cm cold water.
 8. Weigh the 200g caster sugar into a suitable porcelain or steel basin that will fit comfortably into the saucepan with water (with room to lift out the basin using oven gloves later on).
 9. Add the 3 egg yolks, all the lemon juice and the zest from two lemons to the sugar. Set the basin into the water, heating the water to a simmer while whisking the sugar and liquids gently on low speed with a hand-held electric whisk, or by hand with a balloon whisk. Continue until the egg mixture gets hot and thickens.
 10. Remove the basin carefully using oven gloves and place into the bowl of cold water. If you are using leaf gelatine, at this stage add the squeezed-out leaves to the hot lemon custard and gently whisk into the egg until the gelatine has melted in completely – **this stage is very important**. Continue to whisk occasionally as the mixture begins to cool and thicken. Remove the bowl from the cold water.
 11. If you are using gelatine powder, tip out some of the hot water from the saucepan if necessary so it isn't too deep, and place the ramekin or small basin of soaked gelatine and water into it. Stir occasionally with a teaspoon to dissolve the gelatine as it warms up, ensuring there are no lumps and all is dissolved.
 12. Pour the solution into the egg and lemon mix, scraping out all the liquid. **It is very important to ensure all the gelatine solution is added**. Whisk into the hot lemon custard on low to medium speed ensuring it is really well mixed. Continue to whisk occasionally as the mixture begins to cool. The mixture should thicken up a little. Remove the bowl from the cold water.
 13. Clean the whisk very thoroughly and rinse in cold water. Whisk the egg whites on high speed until forming firm peaks but not too dry. Whisk in the extra tablespoon of caster sugar for 30 seconds.

14. In a separate, large bowl, whisk the double cream on high speed until it begins to thicken and aerate – this may take about 5 minutes. As it thickens, drop the speed, and stop when the cream is holding its shape but is still soft.
15. Add the lemon/sugar/egg yolk mix to the cream, scraping in every bit. Blend carefully with the whisk on low speed.
16. Using a large metal spoon, put about one-third of the whipped egg whites into the lemon cream and fold in. Ensure there are no egg white pockets. Then spoon in the second third of the whites, and repeat. Finally add the last of the whipped whites, and carefully and patiently fold in. This all takes some time and concentration, but is well worth the effort.
17. Spoon the mix into the prepared soufflé dish, avoiding any air pockets as you go. Smooth the surface carefully. Cover with cling film and refrigerate for a few hours or overnight to set.
18. To serve, remove the foil carefully and wipe any soufflé from the edge of the dish. Whip the extra 100ml of double cream until it forms soft peaks. Spoon into a piping bag with either a plain or fluted nozzle. Decorate with the whipped cream rosettes around the perimeter, and some lemon zest scattered in the centre.

PANNA COTTA

My Panna Cotta recipe is always popular: soft textured and rich. As with anything containing gelatine it requires accuracy in following the amounts and the method to achieve the optimum texture – I'm afraid that too firm or too soft just doesn't work. Greek yogurt in the recipe gives this panna cotta a very good flavour and texture.

Contains gelatine

You will need 8 metal pots for turning out the desserts, or 8 deep ramekins

Either 7g gelatine powder – about a heaped teaspoon, just over half a 12g packet (be as precise as possible) – or 2 ½ gelatine leaves

50ml water (about 3 tablespoons) for the powder – in a ramekin dish – or water to cover the gelatine leaves in a small rectangular dish

1 x 600ml pot of double cream

100g semi-skimmed milk

70g granulated sugar

1 level tsp natural vanilla extract

200g Greek or Greek style yogurt (stirred, not set)

1. Sprinkle the gelatine powder on to the cold water in a ramekin dish or small bowl, and leave to hydrate. Stir occasionally with a teaspoon to make sure all the gelatine is hydrating and not clumping.
2. If using gelatine leaves, place the leaves in a small rectangular dish and pour over cold water to cover.
3. Heat the cream, milk and sugar in a saucepan, stirring constantly, until it comes to the boil. Be very careful as it will really foam. Let it just simmer a little for a minute or two. Take off the heat, leave to stand for 2 minutes, then squeeze out the soaked gelatine leaves if using and add to the hot cream.

(If using gelatine powder, add the soaked gelatine and water to the hot cream at this stage – it's very important to scrape all of it into the pan, spooning a little of the hot cream back into the ramekin and stirring it round if necessary).

4. With both methods, keep stirring carefully for 2 minutes to ensure the gelatine is all fully dissolved. A hand balloon whisk is ideal.
5. Stir in the vanilla essence.
6. Cool the pan in a sink or large bowl of cold water for 10 minutes or so, stirring regularly.
7. Stir in the yogurt thoroughly, but be careful not to trap air bubbles – it will thicken up, especially if the yogurt is very cold. Pour into the pots and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or overnight.
8. Take out of the fridge when you start the meal to warm slightly, and de-mould by dipping the pots into hot water. Serve with a nice red fruit compote (see page 148).

CHEF'S TIP

When you are cooking the cream, it may be infused with rosemary, or crushed cardamom – the latter goes well with a poached apricot and dried fruits compôte.

RASPBERRY, WHITE CHOCOLATE AND ALMOND SHORTCAKE

This is a recipe I have developed specifically for the collection. A second chocolate dessert is always popular, but this time white chocolate is made into a creamy ganache, complemented nicely with an almond base and sharp, fresh fruit. Presented as an individual dessert, it tastes as good as it looks.

The almond shortcakes can be made the day before and kept in an airtight container, as can the raspberry purée. The dessert may be assembled a few hours earlier and kept cool or in the fridge – remove for an hour or two before serving.

Vegetarian

Makes 6 individual desserts

You will need an 8 or 9cm round cutter and a baking tray

For the almond shortcake

100g butter

125g plain flour

50g soft brown sugar

75g ground almonds

1 large egg

1 tsp natural almond extract

1 tsp water

3–4 tbsp flaked almonds

1. Weigh the butter into a medium size bowl. Add the flour, sugar and ground almonds, and rub in with your fingers as if making pastry until all is combined.
2. Separate the egg, keeping the white in a small bowl in the fridge to be whipped and used later.
3. Mix in the egg yolk, natural almond extract and 1 tsp water with your fingers, add half the flaked almonds and mix in too. Bring the whole into a ball, flatten slightly, wrap and leave somewhere cool (not in the fridge) for a few minutes.

For the white chocolate ganache

200ml/180g double cream

20g caster sugar

100g white cooking chocolate

½ tsp natural vanilla extract

150g fresh raspberries

1. In a small saucepan, heat the cream and sugar until the first sign of boiling, stirring constantly with a whisk. Remove from the heat immediately.
2. In a medium size bowl, break the chocolate into small pieces. Pour the hot cream over, and stir until all the chocolate has melted.
3. Blend in the vanilla, and leave to cool in the fridge for 30 minutes. The ganache needs to be cool but not cold – about room temperature.
4. **Return to the shortcake** and place it on a very lightly floured surface to roll out carefully with a floured rolling pin until it is about 25 x 15cm, and about 8 or 9mm in depth. Using the circular cutter, judge if you will be able to cut 5 rounds comfortably with enough left over to press together to cut a sixth round. Anything left over can be shaped and baked as cookies!
5. Place some greaseproof paper or baking parchment on a suitable baking tray. Carefully place the rounds on the tray with a few centimetres between each, scatter the rest of the flaked almonds over, and gently press them in with your fingers.
6. Bake in a preheated fan oven at 170°C for 18 minutes until turning light brown, remove the tray and leave to cool.
7. Whisk the egg white until well aerated and holding its shape. Whip the white chocolate ganache (not on full speed) until it begins to whiten and increase in volume – don't over-whip. Fold in half the egg white using a large metal spoon until all visible white has been blended in, then repeat with the second half.
8. Fill the mixture into a piping bag with a fluted large nozzle and set aside.
9. When the shortcake rounds have cooled, carefully lift off onto individual plates or one large serving platter. Pipe the ganache

in a swirl onto each round. Keep for a few hours in a cool place (not the fridge) until you are ready to serve.

For the finishing touch

150g fresh raspberries

1 tbsp water

1 tbsp caster sugar

White chocolate chips

1. Tip half the raspberries into a small bowl with the water and sugar. Blitz with a stick liquidiser to form a well blended and fairly smooth purée.
2. Spoon some purée over each dessert, place 4 or 5 whole raspberries on each (maybe a couple on the side), and sprinkle white chocolate chips to decorate.

WALNUT TORTE

I discovered this recipe on a cookery course holiday – ‘Tasting Italy’ – in Tuscany nearly 30 years ago; it was made with freshly gathered walnuts. It is almost unchanged. I have modified the recipe slightly to take into account the drier walnuts we get here in the shops. This will serve quite a number of diners – but they will come back for seconds, without doubt!

Vegetarian and gluten free

Serves 6– 8

You will need an 8–9 inch (20–22cm) diameter spring-form baking tin, a food processor to chop the walnuts, and a hand-held whisk.

4 very large or 5 large eggs

340g walnuts

1 unwaxed lemon or half an orange

230g caster sugar, plus one dessertspoonful extra for the whites

Light olive oil, for greasing

Icing or caster sugar for dusting

1. If your eggs are kept in a fridge, remove for 2 or 3 hours before using to bring them up to room temperature. The whites will whip much better.
2. Put the walnuts into a food processor and reduce to a coarse texture, just going a little sticky, but not into an oily paste. (Use the pulse control to ensure you don't over-process).
3. Separate the eggs, and beat the yolks with the sugar in a large bowl until pale yellow and foamy. Use an electric whisk on mid speed.
4. Grate the lemon or orange zest finely and mix into the egg yolks and sugar. Add the walnuts and mix well in, on a slow speed. The mix is quite firm at this stage. Add 1 tsp water if the mix is very firm.
5. Beat the whites on high speed in a separate, clean bowl with a spotlessly clean whisk until well aerated, firm but not overdone and dry. Whisk in the extra sugar on a lower speed

- for about 10 seconds.
6. Using a big metal spoon, blend in one third of the whites into the walnut mixture, ensuring the whites are well dispersed and not visible. Blend in the second third, then the final third ensuring it isn't over-mixed this time.
 7. Cut a circle of greaseproof paper or baking parchment and line the base of either an 8–9 inch (20 to 22cm) diameter spring-form tin. Lightly brush the paper with light olive oil, brushing up the sides of the tin a little way too. Pile in the torte mix and smooth gently.
 8. Cook in a preheated fan oven at 160°C for about 35–40 minutes. The top should be golden brown and the torte moderately well risen, and firm to touch in the centre. Push a thin skewer or thermometer carefully into the very centre if you need to check it's cooked – it only needs to be lightly cooked to ensure it stays moist. It should attain a minimum of 75°C.
 9. Remove from the oven and let it cool fully for about 2 hours. Run a knife around the edge of the torte, then unclip and remove the sides of the tin. Carefully invert it on to a flat plate or baking sheet and remove the base and greaseproof/baking parchment from the bottom, easing gently with a flat knife. Turn it back on to a flat plate that you're going to serve it from.
 10. Leave to cool fully, then cover lightly in cling film, and store somewhere cool for use later in the day,. It can be stored for up to 2 of days (it doesn't need refrigerating) before use.
 11. Sprinkle some icing sugar or caster over the top a couple of hours before serving.

CHEF'S TIP

This torte is great with a red fruit compote (see page 148), poached pears, or coffee and kahlua mascarpone cream. (Blend mascarpone with kahlua and a little caster sugar to taste – or use strong black coffee instead of the liqueur).

The torte also freezes very well. Defrost and return to room temperature to serve.

CHRISTMAS SPECIALS

It's always nice to eat something special at Christmas, and not only on Christmas Day. So here are my six recipes for a variety of occasions, most of them suitable to make well ahead of the big event.

CHRISTMAS CRANBERRY AND STRAWBERRY COMPÔTE

Some simple cooked fruit is always good to have available lest anyone is not keen on rich puddings (or hasn't got any more room to eat them!). This Compôte is ideal: fresh seasonal fruit combined with the nation's favourite soft fruit, albeit grown in warmer climes in winter. Served with whipped vanilla creamy yogurt (from the 'Little Extras' recipes, page 150), it fits the bill perfectly.

Vegan and gluten free

For the sauce

100g granulated sugar
20g cornflour (2 heaped dessertspoons)
¼ tsp pectin
250ml water
150ml apple juice

The fruit

250g fresh or frozen cranberries (defrost before starting to prepare the sauce)
250g fresh strawberries

1. **First make the sauce:** blend the sugar, cornflour and pectin in a small bowl and mix together well.
2. Pour the water and apple juice into a small non-stick saucepan.
3. Sprinkle the dry mix into the water and juice, and blend in well with a non-metallic whisk.
4. Heat the saucepan, stirring constantly and carefully with the whisk, until the sauce thickens. Bring to the boil and turn off.
5. Preheat a fan oven to 180°C.
6. Pick over the fresh (if using) cranberries and rinse under cold water. Hull the strawberries and rinse under cold water.
7. Slice any large strawberries in half and leave small ones whole.
8. Place together with the cranberries in a shallow earthenware dish, pour the sauce over the fruit and stir it together to ensure all the fruit is coated. Cover with foil and place in the oven for 30 minutes.

9. Remove from the oven, remove the foil and stir the fruit gently. Reduce the oven temperature to 160°C.
10. Return the dish to the oven, uncovered, for a further 15–20 minutes. Remove and leave to cool before covering and refrigerating.
11. Serve on its own with double cream, whipped vanilla yogurt cream (see ‘Little Extras’, page 150), or over vanilla ice cream.

CHRISTMAS MEAT LOAF

Roast Christmas Meat Loaf, lightly spiced with a minced turkey and pork sausage meat base; it has chestnuts and cranberries too – delivering all the classic flavours in an easy to cook (and slice) format. It's great hot with roast potatoes and vegetables, or cold with salad and in sandwiches.

Contains gluten and nuts

Serves 6

You will need a 1 kg rectangular loaf tin with liner

30g sweetened dried cranberries, about 2 heaped tbsp
3 tbsp apple juice
½ a small onion
½ a small stick celery
50g cooked, prepared chestnuts (Merchant Gourmet is good)
60g (2 slices) of rindless back bacon
1 small carrot
2 medium eggs
300g minced turkey thigh meat
450g good quality pork sausage meat
1 level tsp salt
2 level tbsp of polenta
A good grating of black pepper
1 level tsp mixed spice or ground coriander
1 level tsp ground ginger
About 1 tbsp chopped parsley
2 tbsp double cream
Sliced almonds and light vegetable oil for garnish

1. Chop the dried cranberries a little by hand, place in a small bowl and pour apple juice over the berries to cover. Cover the bowl and leave for a few hours or overnight to soak.
2. Chop the onion and celery into fairly small pieces, 2 or 3mm.
3. Chop the chestnuts a little, leaving some good sized pieces.
4. Cut the bacon into pieces about 5–10mm.

5. Grate the carrot on a coarse grater.
6. Beat the eggs lightly in a small bowl.
7. Combine the turkey leg mince, bacon pieces and sausage meat together in a large bowl, using your fingers to break up the sausage meat if necessary.
8. Add all the dry ingredients plus the soaked cranberries, chopped parsley, cream and lightly beaten egg. Combine everything gently until really well mixed.
9. Line the loaf tin with a non-stick liner, or with greaseproof paper cut to fit. Spoon the mix into the lined loaf tin and level the surface.
10. Sprinkle sliced almonds over the surface, press in gently, and brush with a little light olive or vegetable oil.
11. Cover the loaf with foil and place the tin on a baking tray. Cook in a preheated fan oven at 170°C for 45 minutes. Remove from the oven, remove foil, and cook for a further 45 minutes. Test with a thermometer to check that the centre has attained 80–85°C, or when a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean.
12. Allow to stand in a warm place for 5 minutes before loosening the sides, tip any juices into a small container, and place a baking tray over. Carefully invert the loaf to remove from the tin. Remove the liner. (The juices poured off can be used to make a sauce or gravy).
13. Turn the loaf and slide or lift on to a warm rectangular or oval serving plate. Cut into thick slices with a sharp knife to serve.
14. Alternatively, allow the loaf to cool, then wrap and refrigerate to serve cold. The chilled meat loaf can be sliced quite thinly and makes a great centrepiece with salads.

CHRISTMAS NUT ROAST

This Nut Roast recipe I have made for many years, and it was sold whole and in slices at a local vegetarian deli too. It has an excellent flavour and good nutty texture. The loaf can be eaten hot or cold, and reheats very well in the microwave oven – cut into slices first. It can also be frozen uncooked – so this is perfect to be prepared well before the Christmas rush. Defrost fully before cooking.

You can substitute a vegan egg for the eggs, although I find it doesn't slice quite as well. Do ensure the stock cube is also suitable for vegans.

Vegetarian (this can also be made gluten free and vegan)

Serves 6 to 8

You will need a 1kg loaf tin and liner

100 ml vegetable stock (100ml water with 1 vegetable stock cube)

1 tsp marmite

3 large eggs (or vegan egg substitute)

170g mixed nuts, e.g. Brazils, cashews and walnuts

30g sweetened dried cranberries

1 medium to large sized carrot, about 120g

½ Bramley apple, about 80g

1 medium sized onion, about 120g

160g wholemeal breadcrumbs (made from gluten-free bread if preferred)

1 heaped tbsp polenta

1 tsp dried mixed herbs

1 tsp ground mixed spice

½ tsp chilli powder

½ tsp ground black pepper

1 tsp salt

40g peanut butter, about a heaped tbsp

40g olive or vegetable oil

20g tomato purée (a couple of squeezes)

Flaked almonds, for garnish

1. First, make the stock. In a measuring jug, measure out the water hot from the kettle, and crumble the stock cube over. Stir in the marmite, and stir well to ensure all is dissolved.
2. Lightly beat the eggs in a small bowl.
3. Tip the mixed nuts into a food processor and process for a few seconds.
4. Add the dried cranberries and process a little more, until fairly fine but still with visible pieces of both nut and fruit. Empty the mix into a large bowl.
5. Grate the carrot and cored apple (skin on) in the food processor or by hand. Turn into a small bowl.
6. Chop the onion in the processor. Add the carrot, apple and onion to the nuts and cranberries.
7. Add the breadcrumbs, polenta, herbs, spices and salt and stir well in.
8. Add the peanut butter, tomato purée, olive oil, lightly beaten eggs and stock.
9. Combine everything very thoroughly ensuring the peanut butter in particular is well blended.
10. Line a 1kg loaf tin with greaseproof paper or a loaf tin liner, pile the mix in, ensuring there are no air pockets, and smooth the surface. Sprinkle with a layer of flaked almonds and press gently into the surface.
11. Brush with olive oil and bake in a preheated fan oven at 170°C for about 60–80 minutes.
12. Test with a thermometer to check that the centre has attained 80–85°C, or when a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. The almonds on top should be nicely golden brown.
- 13.** Carefully remove from the tin if serving hot, or leave in the tin to cool before covering and refrigerating.

CHRISTMAS PUDDING BOMBE

Another alternative to the classic recipe, and for a change from a hot Christmas pudding, how about a Christmas Pudding Bombe? This is always a winner at our dining table. Simple to make, this can be ready in the freezer before you even start the Christmas shopping.

Vegetarian and gluten free

Serves 6

You will need a 1.2–1.5 litre pudding basin

100g dried fruit (a roughly equal mix of raisins, cranberries, sultanas, candied peel and chopped dried apricots is ideal)
20g dark brown muscovado sugar (1 level tbsp)
1 level tsp ground ginger
1 level tsp mixed spice
1 level tsp cinnamon
50 or 60 ml (half a small wine glass) brandy or rum
300ml pot double cream and a splash of milk
8 mini meringues or 2 meringue nests
6 amaretti biscuits (4cm diameter)

1. Mix the dried fruit, sugar, spices and brandy together in a small bowl.
2. The next day, line a 1.2–1.5 litre capacity pudding basin with clingfilm, ensuring there is enough to stretch over the top when filled. It may need two pieces to cover the sides fully.
3. Empty the double cream into a large bowl, and swirl out the last of it with a splash of milk (not too much). Using an electric whisk, whip the cream until about doubled in volume and holding its shape. Do not over-whisk and make the cream too firm.
4. Over a small bowl, break the meringues and amaretti biscuits by hand into pieces – leaving some larger pieces and a range of sizes.
5. Mix the spiced fruit, brown sugar and brandy (which should mostly have been absorbed) into the whipped cream using a large spoon.

6. Tip the broken meringue and biscuit into the cream and fruit, swiftly fold the whole together, then pile spoonfuls into the lined basin. Press well into the base and sides, and flatten the top. Cover with the sides of the Clingfilm and place straight into the freezer. Freeze overnight.
7. To serve, unwrap the top of the bombe and invert on to a plate. Carefully remove the rest of the Clingfilm. Keep in the fridge for ¼ hour or so before serving in slices.
8. This bombe looks and tastes great with a drizzle of cooked red fruit purée over the top and onto the plate. The Christmas Strawberry and Cranberry Compôte is perfect (page 148).

ROASTED HAZELNUT AND CHOCOLATE SHORTBREADS

These biscuits can be eaten on a variety of occasions – as a dessert with a little whipped cream and compôte perhaps, certainly with afternoon tea or morning coffee. They are beautifully light and crisp, delivering plenty of chocolate hit – an indulgent treat. The choice of decoration is yours!

Vegetarian, contains nuts

Makes about 20 shortbreads

You will need one or two baking trays, and baking parchment or greaseproof paper

80g hazelnuts – ready roasted or raw

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1 tsp ground ginger

2 level tbsp cocoa powder

100g caster sugar

150g butter, softened

50g light olive oil

250g plain flour

60g cornflour

80g dark chocolate chips

Flaked almonds, chopped preserved stem ginger, dried cranberries and Demerara sugar, to decorate

1. If using raw hazelnuts, either roast on a baking tray in a fan oven at 200°C for about 10 minutes until the nuts are colouring, or dry fry in a frying pan for several minutes, stirring regularly, until the nuts begin to brown. Cool before using at the next stage.
2. Pulse the roasted hazelnuts in a food processor leaving discernible small pieces, not too fine.
3. Mix the spices and cocoa powder into the caster sugar in a small bowl.
4. In another bowl, mix together the plain flour and cornflour.
5. Soften the butter in a medium size bowl, and blend in the

- sugar, cocoa, and spice mix using a hand-held electric mixer on slow speed. Increase the speed to ensure all is well mixed. Weigh in the oil and blend in.
6. Mix in the hazelnuts, then the flours, on low speed. Blend in the chocolate chips using a large spoon.
 7. Spoon out the mix on to a cool, clean work surface or board. Press the mix then roll gently to about 1–1.5cm in depth.
 8. Cut into about 20 rounds and squares, ideally with 6cm cookie cutters. Roll out the leftovers for a few more.
 9. Lift carefully with a thin spatula or knife on to a baking tray covered with baking parchment or greaseproof paper, ensuring the shortbreads are spaced a couple of centimetres apart, as they will spread somewhat on cooking.
 10. To decorate, gently press some flaked almonds into some, chopped preserved ginger or dried cranberries on others, or simply sprinkle with Demerara sugar.
 11. Chill the tray of shortbreads in the fridge for about half an hour.
 12. Bake in a preheated fan oven at 170°C for 18 minutes. Remove the baking tray from the oven, and allow to cool until the shortbreads can be carefully lifted onto a wire rack.
 13. Store in an airtight container in a cool place.

UNCLE CHARLIE'S CHRISTMAS PUDDINGS

I have made my own Christmas puddings for many years: given them to friends and relatives as presents, and sold a few of them when we ran our mini, bijou Bed and Breakfast. My recipe does not re-invent any wheels, but is a good, fruity version that I think ticks all the boxes.

As a guide, a 400g pudding will serve 2–3 people; 600g serves 4–5; 800g serves 6. Leftovers microwave well. The puddings should be made in October or November to mature, and kept in a cool place.

The mix given here is a little over 2kg. It will be sufficient to make 2 x 600g puddings (basin size 42) and 1 x 800g (size 36), or 3 x 400g (size 48) and 1 x 800g, or 2 x 400g and 2 x 600g.

Vegetarian

80g chopped hazelnuts, or mixed nuts of your choice

60g dried apricots

60g pitted prunes

200g sultanas

200g raisins

30g candied mixed peel

200g self-raising flour

120g breadcrumbs, white or wholemeal

120g vegetarian suet (½ packet)

250g dark muscovado sugar

40g ground almonds

1 tbsp ground ginger

1 tbsp cinnamon

1 tbsp mixed spice

Zest and juice of 1 medium orange

Zest of 1 lemon

1 large Bramley apple, peeled and grated

200ml Somerset cider

1 small glass of brandy, and more for drizzling over each pudding post cooking

4 large eggs

80g treacle

1. Chop the hazelnuts or mixed nuts in a food processor to leave good sized pieces of 5–6mm, or chop by hand. Tip out into a large bowl or a stock pot with a lid.
2. Chop the dried apricots and prunes in the processor, again to leave discernible fruit pieces. Add to the nuts with all the other dried fruits in the bowl or pan.
3. Mix in all the other dried ingredients, the spices, orange and lemon zest and grated apple.
4. Pour over the liquids – orange juice, cider, brandy, and eggs lightly beaten.
5. Add the treacle – somewhat difficult to weigh, but two good tablespoonfuls is about right.
6. Stir all the ingredients together, with a large metal spoon, leave the spoon in the mix and cover the bowl. Return to stir the mix a few times, remove the spoon and leave overnight.
7. Stir well again in the morning.
8. Butter the chosen pudding basins. Cut a small round of greaseproof paper and place on the buttered base (this makes it easier to remove the cooked pudding). Fill with pudding mix to about 1.5–2cm from the rim.
9. Cut pieces of greaseproof paper and baking foil in rectangles, place the foil on the work surface with the greaseproof on top, and fold a tuck of about 2cm to leave a square that will easily cover the pudding basins with plenty to spare.
10. Place over each basin, greaseproof paper down. Press the foil down to hold the cover in place. Tie with string securely around the basin under the outer rim.
11. Steam the puddings for 4–5 hours, remove from the pan or steamer and allow to cool overnight. Remove the foil and greaseproof covers. (If you do not have a steamer, place the puddings on an upturned saucer in a large pan, and pour boiling water from a kettle in to come part way up the side of the pudding basin). Check the water level occasionally.
12. Sprinkle a little brandy over the surface of each pudding and repeat the process of covering with fresh greaseproof paper and foil. Tie securely with string once more. Store in a cool place.
13. Reheat the puddings for 2 hours minimum in a steamer before tipping out to serve.

LITTLE EXTRAS

Here are half a dozen recipes that don't fit into my other categories. Some of them I often make in the kitchen, others less frequently – maybe when I have a glut of certain ingredients available.

APPLE, PLUM AND CIDER CHUTNEY

This recipe was developed for a local pub, using apples and plums from our allotment, and Somerset cider. Make the chutney when plums are plentiful – yellow ones, a little sharper, or red. If apples aren't quite ready at the same time, then just prepare the plums, weigh out enough for a couple of batches of chutney, and keep them frozen.

It goes well with a wedge of local mature cheddar cheese or cold meats, keeps for 6 months in a cool cupboard, and does not need refrigerating.

Vegan and gluten free

Makes about 6 or 7 jars

700g eating apples
500g plums
150g dried apricots
2 large onions, about 400g
260g white sugar
40g dark muscovado sugar
250g sultanas
270ml dry cider (a little under ½ a pint)
270ml malt vinegar
20g yellow mustard seeds (3 or 4 tbsp)
4 large cloves of garlic
A big piece of fresh ginger, about 30g
4–6 hot red chillies

1. Peel, core and dice the apples into approximately 1cm cubes. Place in a preserving pan or large heavy-bottomed saucepan. There should be about 500g prepared diced fruit.
2. Cut the plums in half, remove stones, and halve them again. There should be about 400g or a little over of prepared cut fruit pieces.
3. Cut or chop the dried apricots into 3 or 4 pieces each, and add with the plums to the pan.
4. Peel and chop the onions into about 1cm size, providing about

- 350g onion. Add to the pan with the two sugars, sultanas, cider, vinegar and mustard seeds.
5. Peel the garlic and ginger, and remove any stalks from the chilli peppers. Chop them all fairly finely and add to the other ingredients. Stir well.
 6. Cover the chutney mix and leave overnight. Stir well again the next day.
 7. Heat the pan gently, stirring regularly with a wooden spoon, until the sugar has dissolved. Increase the heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture starts boiling. Turn down the heat and then simmer for 20–30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the chutney begins to thicken up and the colour becomes a little browner. You don't want too much free liquid on the surface. Do not cover the pan during the cooking.
 8. In the meantime prepare several glass jars for the chutney. They should be clean and rinsed, and placed on their sides in an oven at 120°C for 10 minutes. Turn off the oven. Sterilise the lids similarly.
 9. When the chutney is cooked, remove from the heat and very carefully spoon into the warm jars, to a level above the 'shoulder'. A suitable wide necked funnel is a useful tool for this process.
 10. Place a waxed paper circle over the surface (waxed side down), and screw on the lids lightly. Wait until the chutney is cool before tightening up the lids completely.
 11. Label with name and date. Store in a cool place for about a month before using.

BASIL PESTO

I grow fresh basil in the garden every year without fail, and there is always a lot of it all at once. Not only does pesto taste wonderful, but it keeps well in the fridge with a layer of olive oil over the top. Don't confine its use to pasta either: new potatoes or plain cooked runner beans with a dollop of pesto are gorgeous, and it is super in a blend of light mayo and crème fraîche as a dip. Excellent blended into ricotta and spooned on to a baked potato, or as a dip for tortillas. (See the “**Dips**” section for a simple recipe).

This recipe **contains nuts**.

Gluten free (can be made vegetarian – see Chef’s Tip below)

This requires a food processor or small blender

85g of coarse grated Parmesan (or Pecorino for a milder cheese flavour)

4 large cloves garlic

Fresh basil leaves – a lot, to fill about a 1 litre container, lightly pressed in

250 to 300ml extra virgin olive oil (or 50/50 light and extra virgin)

55g of pine nuts and walnuts, 50/50 (or all of one or the other)

½ tsp salt

A good grating of black pepper

¼ tsp chilli pepper or a fresh red chilli (or 2 if you like a good, spicy kick)

1. Grate the Parmesan or Pecorino coarsely.
2. Peel and roughly chop the garlic cloves.
3. Ensure the basil leaves are washed and dried. Place the basil and all the ingredients except the olive oil in a blender or food processor.
4. Add about 250ml of the oil, and blend until the nuts and basil are fairly well chopped. Trickle in more oil gradually until it becomes a fairly liquid paste. Don't reduce to too fine a purée –it needs to be coarse enough to give a rough texture of nuts and Parmesan. Stop and scrape down the sides and give it another quick whiz using the pulse button on the processor.

5. Store in the fridge and use within the week. A little oil across the surface reduces discolouration and extends the life. (It may also be kept frozen successfully).

CHEF'S TIP

If a **vegetarian version** is required, use an 'Italian hard cheese' that's usually sold alongside Parmesan in the supermarket and made without rennet. (By law Parmesan must be made from calves' rennet.)

This also works well with rocket leaves to give a milder flavour.

CHILLI JAM

Chilli jam can be made at any time of year but, if you grow a plant or two yourself, then this is an ideal way to preserve the surplus chillies. Make it as hot as you choose.

Use chilli jam to lift the flavours of all sorts of dishes – pasta, stews, dips, soups, pizzas. Great as an accompaniment to cheese and biscuits.

It's especially useful when one person at the party likes things hotter than others!

Makes about 4 small jars (100–150ml each)

Vegan and gluten free

2 large sweet red peppers

4 or 5 ripe, medium sized tomatoes

4 garlic cloves (or 2 very large cloves)

8–10 hot chilli peppers

300g sugar

100ml red wine vinegar

1. Halve the peppers, remove the seed and pith, chop roughly and place into a food processor.
2. Cut the tomatoes in half and remove any woody parts of stem, then roughly chop and add to the peppers.
3. Remove skins and roughly chop the garlic cloves, add to the processor.
4. Remove the stalk ends of chillies – the number depending on how hot you like it – and add all to the processor.
5. Purée everything until fairly smooth – scrape down the sides once. There will always be some small pieces of pepper.
6. Tip into a medium to heavy saucepan and add the sugar and the red wine vinegar. Bring to the boil, stirring continuously. Scoop off any foam now and then, and cook gently for about 30 minutes, stirring regularly. The jam is

done when it looks sticky and shiny and leaves a trail as you stir it.

7. Leave to cool slightly and pour into clean jars that have been in an oven for 10 minutes at 120°C. Place waxed paper circles on the surface (waxed side down) and close lids tightly when cold.

CHEF'S TIP

Add a peeled knob of ginger to the food processor with the other ingredients, and juice of a lime to the jam when off the heat, for a variation.

SALTED PRESERVED LEMONS

These are so easy to make and so useful. I recommend having a large jar of this on the go at all times, and start another as soon as stocks are low. A simple blend in mayonnaise as a dip or to accompany chips (and fish); cooked with roast chicken; chopped up to give a subtle background lemon flavour; or use the oil in a salad dressing or spinach pies. A really versatile store cupboard item.

For 3 lemons, you will need a screw top jar of about 600ml capacity (mayonnaise jars are excellent)

Vegan and gluten free

3 large or 4 small unwaxed lemons

5 tbsp salt

300–350ml of light olive oil (not extra virgin)

1. Wash the lemons and remove the tough parts at either end. Slice the lemons about 6–8mm thick. A range of slices is useful, but don't make them too thick or thin. Cut the ends in half across to form wedges. Cut a few of the largest slices in half across too.
2. Place the slices from the first lemon in a suitable shallow earthenware dish. Sprinkle 1 or 2 level tbsp salt over the slices.
3. Repeat with the second and third lemons. Cover loosely and leave overnight in a cool place.
4. Next day, tip the lemons into a sieve and wash briefly – just a few seconds under the cold water tap is sufficient. Drain and spread out on a large plate. Either leave to dry for a couple of hours or use kitchen roll to dry the surfaces a little.
5. Pour boiling water from a kettle into the jar you are using, and leave for about 3 minutes to sterilise the surface. Empty the jar and drain well.
6. Drop the lemon slices into the jar, filling gaps with smaller pieces. Press down a little with the handle of a wooden spoon as you go. Pour the oil carefully over the lemons trying to avoid air pockets, finishing with about 1cm over the top of the slices. Tear a section of clingfilm and push down into the oil to ensure the top slices remain covered.
7. Screw on the lid, label the jar with the date, and store in a cool

place for a month before using.

SEASONAL FRUIT COMPÔTES

If you're offered rather too much fresh fruit or see it at a bargain price, then make it into a compôte as it will keep well in the fridge for several days. Here are three to cover those gluts. Use on their own with Greek yogurt or cream, or in layered desserts, or with a slice of yummy walnut torte (page 124). They are great for breakfast on a bowl of cereal.

Once cooled, keep refrigerated for up to 5 days. Allow to come up to room temperature for serving.

Vegan and gluten free

Rhubarb, Ginger and Lemon Compôte

500g rhubarb, trimmed and cleaned, cut into 3cm lengths

100g granulated sugar

40g crystallised ginger, cut into chunks about 6–7mm

30g mixed candied peel

100ml water

Place the rhubarb into a medium saucepan with the other ingredients and mix well. Bring to a simmer, stirring twice only – very gently – while it cooks, and take the saucepan off the heat promptly after 7 minutes. The rhubarb continues to cook as it cools.

Summer Fruits Compôte

250g strawberries

250g raspberries

150ml water

90g granulated sugar

1. Cut the strawberries into sizes about the same as raspberries. Place in a small saucepan with the sugar and water, stir gently and bring to the boil.
2. Cook for 3 minutes, uncovered, briefly stirring once or twice. Remove from the heat and leave to cool.

Vary the compote according to what you have available – some blackcurrants or blackberries to substitute for some of the red fruits would be perfect. The compôte will thicken up a little on chilling.

Apple, Pear and Apricot Compôte

1 large red eating apple (Royal Gala is good)

1 medium Bramley apple

1 firm but not under-ripe pear

6 or 7 dried apricots

100ml apple juice

70ml water

80g Demerara sugar

1 tbsp lemon juice

1 cinnamon stick

1. Core the eating apple and cut into pieces about 1–1.5cm.
2. Peel, core and dice the Bramley apple into pieces, about 1.5cm.
3. Peel, core and dice the pear into pieces about 1.5cm.
4. Chop the dried apricots into half lengthwise then into a third or half across according to size.
5. Weigh the apple juice, water and Demerara sugar into a medium size saucepan, and add both lots of apple chunks and the apricots. Measure in 1 tbsp lemon juice.
6. Break a cinnamon stick into two and add to the pan.
7. Heat the pan to bring the liquids to the boil, turn down the heat and simmer exactly 3 minutes.
8. Tip in the pieces of pear, bring back to a simmer and cook for a further 3 minutes. Turn off the heat and leave to cool, uncovered.
9. Check the flavour of the syrup and add a little more lemon juice to taste. Leave the cinnamon stick in the fruit compote during storage.

WHIPPED VANILLA YOGURT CREAM

People often consider double cream a bit too rich, and some find yogurt a bit sharp. As a luxurious slightly sweetened vanilla creamy topping, this recipe offers an answer, complementing so many desserts. Anyone who likes vanilla ice cream will enjoy this – and that's most of us.

This is a lovely accompaniment to fresh fruit salad, fruit compôtes, pastries and bakes.

Serves 4 to 6

Vegetarian and gluten free

150ml double cream

1 tbsp semi-skimmed milk

20g (1 heaped tbsp) caster sugar

½ tsp natural vanilla flavouring

100ml (or 100g) Greek style natural yogurt

1. Pour the cream and milk into a suitable small basin, and whip with an electric whisk on high speed until it increases in volume, thickens up, and begins to hold its shape. Do not over-whisk – reduce the speed when the cream shows sign of thickening..
2. Weigh in or measure the caster sugar, and add the vanilla. Whisk in on a low speed for a short time.
3. Weigh in or measure the Greek style yogurt, and whisk in on low speed for no more than 30 seconds until blended – the cream thickens up significantly.
4. Spoon the topping into a bowl suitable for presenting at the table, cover and refrigerate until required.

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