

say what you think stay calm go outside! be tolerant knowledge is power I can do anything never go to bed on an argument invest in friends avoid negativity be independent totes emosh why why why? don't be a doormat love yourself be true to your heart believe in yourself colour brings joy question authority decisions decisions accept and move on don't aim for perfection be thankful love and respect nature know yourself be persistent don't be a victim money is not success Giles' law be comfortable in your own skin you choose break traditions and make your own music heals choose friends who make you feel good take the credit just say no! laughter is the best medicine life is a learning journey be proud of your age wear a smile life is not a competition do what makes you happy U R awesome remember to listen respect be adventurous be satisfied be active hello, I'm... it's ok not to have a plan keep smiling it's fine to complain... sometimes be your own cheerleader be determined get creative be kind to yourself keep talking where are the WIIFMs? think thrice before you post ask! looks are overrated don't worry be happy 'like this!' failure is great one thing at a time materialism disappoints see the good what's inside counts most no belfies have an opinion just do it! consider the consequences ask a friend sorry not sorry seek help party like a child share be resilient be kind to our planet if at first you don't succeed... confidence is key sleep is sacred accept a compliment why take drugs? do your own thing don't let a little problem grow let it go! trust in people say what you think stay calm go outside! be tolerant knowledge is power I can do anything never go to bed on an argument invest in friends avoid negativity be independent totes emosh why why why? don't be a doormat love yourself be true to your heart believe in yourself colour brings joy question authority decisions decisions accept and move on don't aim for perfection be thankful love and respect nature know yourself be persistent don't be a victim money is not success Giles' law be comfortable in your own skin you choose break traditions and make your own music heals choose friends who make you feel good take the credit just say no! laughter is the best medicine life is a learning journey be proud of your age wear a smile life is not a competition do what makes you happy U R awesome remember to listen respect be adventurous be satisfied be active hello, I'm... it's ok not to have a plan keep smiling it's fine to complain... sometimes be your own cheerleader be determined get creative be kind to yourself keep talking where are the WIIFMs? think thrice before you post ask! looks are overrated don't worry be happy 'like this!' failure is great one thing at a time materialism disappoints see the good what's inside counts most no belfies have an opinion just do it! consider the consequences ask a friend sorry not sorry seek help party like a child share be resilient be kind to our planet if at first you don't succeed... confidence is key sleep is sacred accept a compliment why take drugs? do your own thing don't let a little problem grow let it go! trust in people say what you think stay calm go outside! be tolerant knowledge is power I can do anything never go to bed on an argument invest in friends avoid negativity be independent totes emosh why why why? don't be a doormat love yourself be true to your heart believe in yourself colour brings joy question authority decisions decisions accept and move on don't aim for perfection be thankful love and respect nature know yourself be persistent don't be a victim money is not success Giles' law be comfortable in your own skin you choose break traditions and make your own music heals choose friends who make you feel good take

A FLAVOUR JUNKIE'S GUIDE TO COOKING GROWING AND HAPPINESS

Charlotte Derry

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INTRODUCTION

Why flavour junkie? Because I LOVE FLAVOUR! A good friend coined the phrase a good few years ago and I thought, that is exactly what I am. When I was growing up, vegetables were a soggy pile of cabbage usually, at the side of the plate. Salad only ever consisted of floppy leafed lettuce with tasteless tomatoes and cucumber; salad cream the only dressing option. Thankfully, times have changed and I have learned that food can be so much tastier AND healthier too!

The concept behind this book was to combine three elements. It is first and foremost about the recipes. They are designed to be wholesome, healthy food for everyday consumption which tastes great and is straightforward to cook. Secondly, it is about growing vegetables and fruit. This is entirely optional, but is, I think, good for the mind, body and soul. Thirdly, it is about trying to capture and share all those little messages I have been drip-feeding my children as they grow up to help them to lead happy and fulfilling lives and to make their way in our increasingly complicated world. I call these happy hacks – ideas on how to live a happy life, which, although originally conceived for my children, are relevant to everyone.

For me, the cooking and growing of vegetables is impossible to separate. My meal plans always start with ‘What needs eating out of the garden?’ I always squeeze as much veg as I possibly can into a dish. Whilst I am not vegetarian and do not wish to limit myself to being vegetarian, I certainly do not regard meat as the centre of every meal and there are lots of vegetarian options and recipes in this book. When I do use meat, I always try and buy the best quality available, preferably from a local butcher. I have intentionally left quantities a little bit vague when the exact quantity is not critical to the success of the dish and tried to avoid weighing out ingredients where possible to make it quicker and easier. It is well worth investing in a set of cup measures.

The order of the book is set out according to the harvest times of vegetables throughout the year, starting with the welcome fresh sprouts of sprouting broccoli in March.

There are recipes with flavours from far-flung places like teriyaki chicken noodle soup and Mexican bean stew and also more familiar favourites like Bolognese sauce and chilli con carne which I have ‘vegged up.’ I have used ingredients that I didn’t know existed when I was younger, many which are great for a reduced meat diet: puy lentils, chickpeas, tofu, quinoa and quorn. There are also many main course salads which were a revelation when I first discovered the concept of converting a salad from an uninspiring accompaniment to centre stage, loading it up with tasty and varied ingredients. I normally find it easiest to

assemble these on individual plates ready for eating, but if you are feeding a crowd with a selection of salads, larger platters work too.

Whilst I like to eat healthily, I also have rather a sweet tooth. There is no way I could write a cookbook without a pudding and treats section! It is best not to eat these everyday but we all need treats sometimes. Some, but not all, feature fruit. Most basic baking techniques are covered somewhere, from making béchamel (white) sauce, pastry and cakes to meringues.

This book is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to growing vegetables and fruit. That would be a whole separate book. For each vegetable or fruit, I have given the key information that you need to get growing. I have included tips and tricks which I have learned from growing for the last 15 or so years and which you may not find in mainstream gardening books. The important thing about growing is that you don't have to be an expert. There is no magical mystical knowledge required and if it all goes wrong, it's no big deal... you can try again next time. If you can get your hands on a bit of ground, some pots on a patio or even a window box, just have a go! Relish the successes and be prepared to learn from the bumps in the road.

The happy hacks are ideas that have occurred to me as I have proceeded through life. They are pointers - some general, some specific - to prompt you to think about what you do, how you treat yourself and others and the choices you make. Every so often I hear, read or think something which really resonates. I want to remember it, share it and remind my future self to apply it. What these ideas are all really leading towards is trying to help you lead the happiest life you can. When I say happy, I don't mean short term excitement but an enduring sense of peace and contentment that makes you satisfied with your place in the world. For years, these ideas have been accumulating in my head and it has only been through writing this book that I have collected them all together in one place. If we could all take these to heart and follow the general principles then I genuinely believe we would individually be happier and the world would be a better place.

This kind of thinking has never been more relevant than today when mental health issues are spiralling and life is becoming more complicated and intense year by year. Social media operates at warp speed, sucking us all in and drawing us into a kind of virtual reality. It is so easy to forget what is important and lose track of how to navigate through life. Before you know it, the machine of life can chew you up and spit you out again. Mental wellbeing and resilience is an ongoing challenge and is of fundamental importance to everyone.

I have kept the happy hacks short and snappy. Where there is something to explain, I have explained it but I don't believe in labouring the point unnecessarily.

Who is this book for? Anyone and everyone. I wrote it as a mum, always thinking about how I could encourage my children through life's ups and downs. It is just as relevant to

young adults starting to make their way in the world; mothers like me trying to instill the right values and attitudes in our children from the very start; teenagers learning about and questioning the world as they become more independent and for anyone at any stage of life wanting to eat well and feel better about themselves.

I can't help thinking that rediscovering the simple and fundamental link between the soil, nature, growing our food and cooking the results of our labours will help us to stay grounded and maintain a sense of balance and calm. The ongoing satisfaction and fulfillment gained from sowing seeds, nurturing the plants, harvesting and then eating the result gives a life-affirming sense of sustained positivity and hope for the future that is hard to find in our high-speed world of instant gratification. When you are thinking about plants, growing and gardening, you are always looking ahead. This simple focus on small steps into the future is a powerful life force which can make it easier to live life, day by day.

Grow, nurture, reflect, eat, appreciate and look to the future with hope.

There is an old Chinese proverb which says:

If you want to be happy for a short time, get drunk.
If you want to be happy for a long time, fall in love.
If you want to be happy forever, take up gardening

 Vegetarian dish

MAINS

- Say what you think** SALMON LAKSA WITH SPROUTING BROCCOLI
- Stay calm** WARM SPROUTING BROCCOLI SALAD ▼
- Go outside!** OMA'S BROCCOLI SALAD
- Be tolerant** ASPARAGUS AND MOZZARELLA SALAD ▼
- Knowledge is power** HOT SMOKED SALMON AND ASPARAGUS SALAD
- I can do anything** FRIED COURGETTES ▼
- Never go to bed on an argument** COURGETTE PLATTER SALAD ▼
- Laughter is the best medicine** FETA, COURGETTE AND CHICKPEA SALAD ▼
- Avoid negativity** COURGETTE RATATOUILLE ▼
- Be independent** COURGETTE LASAGNE ▼
- Totes emosh** COURGETTE AND PESTO MUSH
- Life is a learning journey** COURGETTE TORTILLA ▼
- Don't be a doormat** DIJON CHICKEN WITH ROASTED VEGETABLES
- Love yourself** BROAD BEAN AND CHICKPEA FALAFEL ▼
- Be true to your heart** BEETROOT AND FETA SALAD ▼
- Believe in yourself** GARDEN SALAD ▼
- Colour brings joy** RAINBOW NOODLES WITH TOFU ▼
- Question authority** CHILLI CON CARNE
- Decisions decisions** BOLOGNESE SAUCE
- Accept and move on** LASAGNE
- Don't aim for perfection** HOLIDAY BEAN CASSEROLE
- Be thankful** SAUSAGE AND LENTIL CASSEROLE
- Love and respect nature** SALADE PAYSANNE
- Know yourself** HALLOUMI AND RED PEPPER SALAD ▼
- Be persistent** THAI BEEF SALAD WITH BROAD AND FRENCH BEANS
- Don't be a victim** CHIPPY POTATOES ▼

Money is not success BEAN CHAKCHOUCKA ▼

Giles' law RUNNER BEAN, PUMPKIN AND COCONUT CURRY ▼

Be comfortable in your own skin TUNA PIE

You choose CHICKEN OR CHICKPEA LENTIL CURRY

Break traditions and make your own THAI GREEN CURRY

Music heals THAI CABBAGE SALAD WITH SEARED SALMON

Choose friends who make you feel good THAI STYLE CHICKEN OR PRAWNS

Take the credit HERBY SALSA VERDE ▼

Just say no MOROCCAN PUY LENTIL SALAD ▼

Laughter is the best medicine BASIL PESTO ▼

Be proud of your age GINGER PUY LENTILS WITH COD

Wear a smile SOUTH INDIAN PRAWN CURRY

Life is not a competition PEAR CHUTNEY ▼

Do what makes you happy TOMATO AND PESTO TART ▼

U R awesome CHICKEN FAJITAS WITH REFRIED BEANS

Remember to listen SPINACH DAL ▼

Respect SPINACH, COURGETTE, FETA AND QUINOA SALAD ▼

Be adventurous TERIYAKI CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

Be satisfied MOROCCAN CHICKPEA STEW ▼

Be active PUMPKIN, PEA AND FETA SALAD ▼

Hello, I'm...PUMPKIN, LEMONGRASS AND COCONUT SOUP ▼

It's ok not to have a plan MEXICAN BEAN STEW ▼

Keep smiling ROAST PARSNIPS OR CELERIAC ▼

It's fine to complain...sometimes ASIAN SLAW ▼

Be your own cheerleader CHEESY LEEKS ▼





Sprouting broccoli

The key to sprouting broccoli is to sow the seeds straight into the soil on or soon after 1st June and leave the plants in the ground over winter. You can sow them in a temporary location and move them to their final location when they are about 20cm tall. They won't grow much over the winter months but they will be ready to burst into life in spring. Be sure to cover the plants with plant protection mesh or netting as soon as they have germinated and produced their first leaves. You are protecting them against butterflies and birds, so netting with holes around 5-7mm is perfect; you don't need a fine insect mesh (which tends to have approx. 1.35mm holes). Butterflies (Cabbage Whites) can sometimes sneak under the netting and lay their eggs on the underside of the leaves so inspect regularly to spot (and remove) any caterpillars. The netting also protects against pigeons. As the plants get bigger, they may need some support so tie them into short bamboos to help them stay standing throughout the winter months. Keep the netting covering them as there are plenty of pigeons around all winter even if there are no butterflies! When the weather warms up in the spring, the plants wake up and will welcome you with lovely fresh florets. Pick the florets when they are deep purple by snapping off about 15cm lengths with your fingers. Lower down the stem can be tough and chewy so when you are harvesting, just let the sprout snap where it wants to then you will get the tastiest tender portion. After a few weeks of harvesting and as the weather gets warmer, the purple sprouts will get smaller, shorter and skinnier and will burst into yellow flower before you know it. You won't get any more sprouts out of the plants once they have started flowering.

Say what you think

SALMON LAKSA WITH SPROUTING BROCCOLI

SERVES 4

FOR THE FLAVOUR PASTE

2 red chillies (remove the seeds if you don't like it too hot)

4 cloves of garlic, peeled

1 thumb-sized piece of fresh root ginger (approx. 30g), peeled and cut into chunks

1 tsp coriander seed

½ cup coriander stems, leaves and roots (if available)

20ml sesame oil

FOR THE LAKSA

2 salmon fillets, each one cut lengthways into 3 or 4 long strips

3 cups sprouting broccoli, washed

Juice of one lemon

3 x 50g creamed coconut sachets

1.8 litres of vegetable stock

Approx 10ml fish sauce (to taste)

2-3 bundles of buckwheat noodles (depending how hungry you are)

½ cup mint leaves

Put the salmon strips into a bowl with the lemon juice to marinate at room temperature while you make the rest.

Whizz the ingredients for the paste to a pulp with a stick blender. Add a bit of water if you need to, to help the blender along.

Tip the paste into a large, deep pan and fry for 1 minute over a medium high heat. Add the creamed coconut, stock and broccoli and simmer for 10-15 minutes until the broccoli is very tender.

Meanwhile, cook the noodles in a separate pan of boiling water according to the packet instructions.

Take the laksa pan off the heat and stir in the fish sauce and salmon for a few seconds. As it is sliced quite thinly, it cooks remarkably quickly in the hot soup without needing to be boiled. Don't be tempted to give it an extra cook as you will lose the melting tenderness of it.

Divide the noodles between four deep bowls and ladle over the soup, salmon and broccoli. Sprinkle over the mint leaves and eat straight away.

Variation

If you don't have sprouting broccoli then you can substitute with either normal broccoli or pak choi. These will need to be cooked in the broth in the same way as the sprouting broccoli. I sometimes also like to add a cup of beansprouts at the end as I am serving into the bowls.

“ Say what you think. Why not? I have learned that sometimes a bit of diplomacy is worthwhile in sensitive situations but we all have a right to an opinion, so speak up! ”



Stay calm

WARM SPROUTING BROCCOLI SALAD

For the pine nuts, I normally toast a whole pack in a dry frying pan over a medium heat. Keep shaking them and watch them carefully as they can burn very quickly. The toasted pine nuts stay fresh for weeks in an airtight container in the cupboard. Just add a sprinkle when you need it.

Dijon dressing is a store cupboard staple. Combine 150ml olive oil, 120ml white wine vinegar, a tablespoon of Dijon mustard and a grinding of salt and pepper in a clean jam jar. Give it a vigorous shake. I make up a big jar and leave it in the cupboard where it will keep for months.

SERVES 4

2 cups sprouting broccoli

1 bag of salad leaves or 2 Little Gem lettuces, washed

200g blue cheese (St Agur is my favourite) roughly chopped

2 avocados, peeled and roughly chopped

½ cup toasted pine nuts

Dijon dressing to serve

Steam the sprouting broccoli until tender. It is definitely nicer cooked a bit longer than normal broccoli so that it is tender to bite.

Lay out the salad leaves in a bowl, platter or individual plates, spread over the sprouting broccoli and then scatter over the avocado, cheese and pine nuts.

Drizzle over the Dijon dressing.

“**Stay calm.** Panicking never helps. Keep a cool head, stay calm and you will be in a better position to consider the situation and make good decisions. Staying calm is also a very wise move in an argumentative situation. If you say something in the heat of the moment, it is hard to take it back. Stay calm and think before you speak.”



Go outside!

OMA'S BROCCOLI SALAD

This recipe is from a good friend's Austrian grandmother 'Oma' (which means grandmother in German). It is a surprising salad which breaks one of my cardinal rules: never put raisins in savoury dishes. Also, broccoli is hardly ever served raw, but it just works!. This salad is great with sprouting broccoli out of the garden but it is just as good with supermarket broccoli. In fact, I confess I probably make it more often with the supermarket variety as I like it in summer and it goes brilliantly with anything you might barbeque.

SERVES 8-10 as a side dish

One large head broccoli, chopped into very small florets

½ cup raisins

½ cup spring onions or red onion, finely chopped

4 rashers of bacon

½ cup sunflower seeds

½ cup parmesan, grated

½ cup Dijon dressing

2 tbsp mayonnaise (reduced fat is fine)

Chop the bacon finely and fry in olive oil. Drain on kitchen roll to remove excess grease.

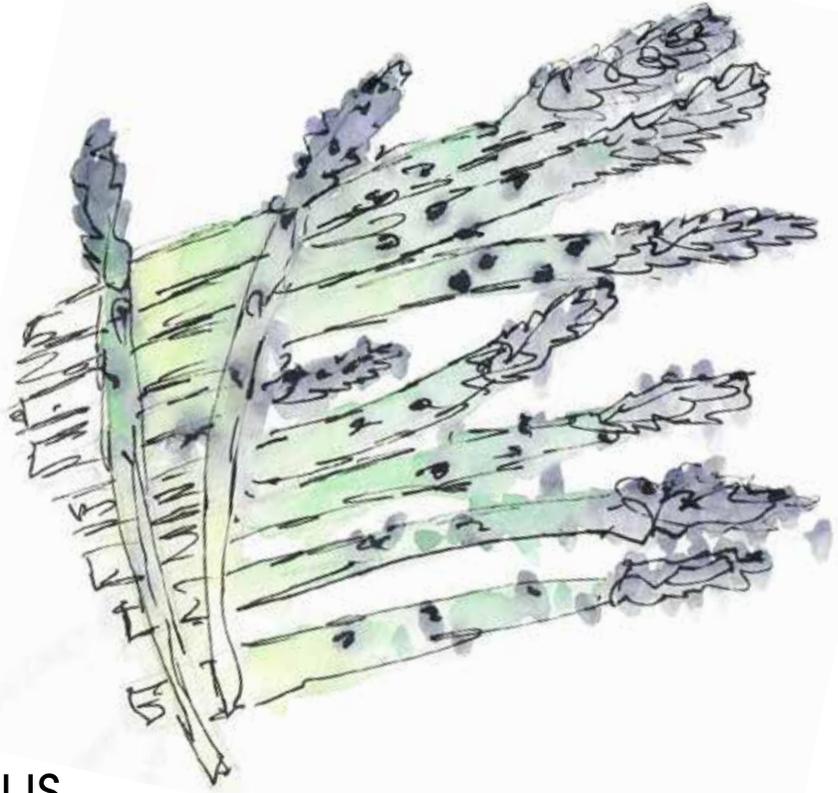
Prepare all of the ingredients, making sure you chop the broccoli into small florets. Combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and mix thoroughly.

Combine the Dijon dressing and mayonnaise in a bowl. Whisk thoroughly with a hand whisk to remove any lumps. Add the dressing to the salad, mix thoroughly and let it sit for a while to help the flavours to mingle. You can keep this in the fridge for a few hours before serving.

“ **Go outside!** Just do it! Listen to the sounds, smell the smells and breathe deeply. Fresh air always makes you feel better. Wrap up warm if it is cold. Wear your waterproofs if it is raining. There is no such thing as bad weather...just the wrong clothing! ”







Asparagus

Asparagus is a perennial crop so it sits in the ground for years. Do grow it if you have the space. It likes a sunny spot. It is very undemanding and SO much tastier than the supermarket version. Cut the spears when they start growing in spring and continue harvesting until the end of June. During the harvesting period, cut all the stems as they poke up through the soil but make sure you stop by the end of June so that the plant gets a chance to grow and store up energy for next year. The only thing to look out for is the little red asparagus beetle which unfortunately likes asparagus as much as I do. If you are unlucky and they find your patch, make sure you pick them off to reduce damage to your crop. You will have to look hard to catch them all and they sometimes seem to jump off and disappear. If you keep picking the stems as soon as they are ready to harvest, then the beetles have less chance to get established.

Be tolerant

ASPARAGUS AND MOZZARELLA SALAD

SERVES 4

2 large handfuls of asparagus
1 bag of salad leaves or 2 Little Gem lettuces
2 packs of parma ham, fried and roughly chopped
A punnet of halved cherry tomatoes
2 avocados, roughly chopped
2 large balls of buffalo mozzarella, roughly chopped
½ cup toasted pine nuts (see p14)
1 tbsp olive oil
Dijon dressing to serve

Steam the asparagus until tender, or even better, grill it on the barbeque with a spray of olive oil. Barbequing it really brings out the flavour.

Pour the olive oil into a frying pan and fry the parma ham in a single layer until it goes crispy. Break or chop it into pieces.

Lay out the salad leaves in a bowl, platter or individual plates, spread over the asparagus and then scatter over the tomatoes, avocado, parma ham, mozzarella and pine nuts. Buffalo mozzarella is MUCH nicer than the normal stuff – don't compromise!

Drizzle over the Dijon dressing.

Variation - sprouting broccoli and mozzarella salad

Sprouting broccoli is a great substitute for the asparagus in this salad. As with the asparagus, you can either steam or barbeque. Another option is to roast in the oven with a drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkle of salt for about 20 minutes at 200°C.

“ **Be tolerant.** Accept and embrace people from any and all backgrounds, regardless of race, age, religion, gender, sexual preference. Life is too short to hate. ”



Knowledge is power

HOT SMOKED SALMON AND ASPARAGUS SALAD

SERVES 4

4 fillets of hot smoked salmon
(sometimes called lightly smoked salmon)

4 eggs, poached or soft boiled

2 Little Gem lettuce, washed

2 avocados, peeled and chopped

1 tsp lemon juice

A bunch of asparagus

1 tbsp olive oil

Cooked new potatoes (optional, if you are extra hungry)

Dijon dressing to serve

Firstly wash your lettuce and chop the avocado. Squeeze some lemon juice over the avocado to stop it turning brown.

Steam the asparagus until tender or grill on the barbeque.

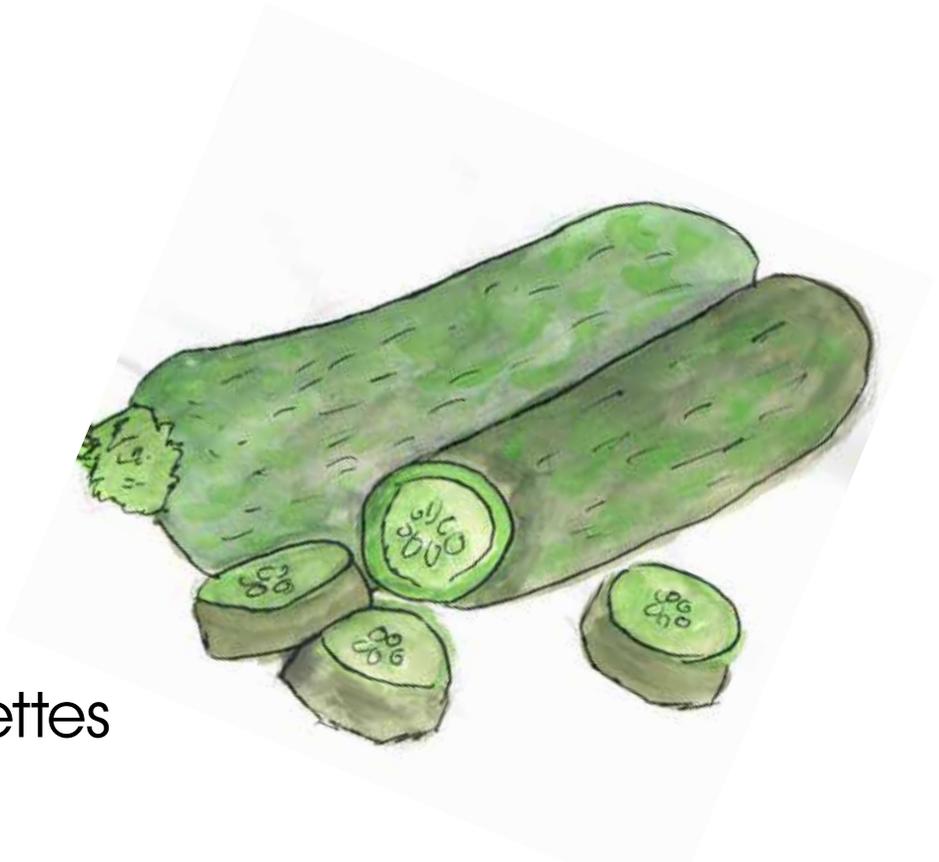
Hot smoked salmon is not the same as normal smoked salmon. It needs cooking! I leave the skin on as it goes lovely and crispy but you can remove it if you prefer. Heat the olive oil in a frying pan and add the salmon. Fry for about 2-3 minutes per side until it is just cooked through. You don't want to overcook it and it doesn't matter if it is still a darker shade of pink in the middle.

Meanwhile, you can poach or boil the eggs. Poaching never seems to work for me so I just boil them and peel them. Arguably they don't look as pretty on the plate but I like a rustic salad! The best way I have found to boil an egg is as follows: prick the end of the egg to stop it cracking, get the water boiling first, lower the eggs into the boiling water gently, simmer for 1 minute, remove from the heat and put the lid on for 6 minutes. Then rinse in cold water to stop them cooking any further. Then you can peel them ready to go on your salad.



“ **Knowledge is power.** Arm yourself with information to help you make good decisions and judgements. The more you know, the better position you will be in to choose. This applies to almost everything in life: shall I try drugs, shall I smoke, what career should I choose, where should I live? And so on. Use the power of knowledge to your advantage. ”





Courgettes

Courgettes are one of the most productive vegetables to grow. Sow the seeds in pots in the greenhouse (or somewhere warm) at the end of April (one per pot as they don't like root disturbance) and plant out from 1 June, after all risk of frost has passed. They are greedy for nutrients and water so when you plant them out, dig an extra big hole and back-fill with farmyard manure if you can. A grow bag is a good alternative but can dry out very quickly in hot weather. Keep a close eye on the watering! If you keep watering throughout the season, the plants will keep on producing courgettes from July/August through to October. Every year I promise myself I won't plant too many. I usually aim for five plants but have a couple of spares just in case. This results in a LOT of courgettes.

Another really important point about courgettes is to keep picking every day or at least every other day. When they are in full production mode, the courgettes grow unbelievably fast and if you leave it a few days you can suddenly end up with a crop of marrows.

Some people rave about stuffing the flowers with ricotta and frying them... I am afraid this falls into the 'too much hassle' bucket for me. There are lots of other things you can do with them...you really can do anything with a courgette!

I can do anything

FRIED COURGETTES

This is the most basic thing I do with courgettes, day after day, in courgette season when I don't fancy cooking anything more complicated. They go with pretty much anything, can be added to a multitude of salads and are quick and easy to handle. They also freeze very well and can then be put into a tortilla (see below). I haven't put quantities as you can scale up or down depending how many you are feeding and what else you are eating them with.

Courgettes, sliced into round slices

Olive oil

Garlic, finely chopped (optional)

Maldon sea salt to taste

Freezes well

Fry the courgettes in a drizzle of olive oil in a non-stick frying pan in a single layer. Turn once they are slightly crispy and a little bit blackened. You may need to do a couple of batches.

If you want to add garlic, fry separately after you have finished the courgettes, in a pool of olive oil and sprinkle over the courgettes to serve.

Variation

Sometimes I cut the courgettes in quarters lengthways, before slicing, so that you have little wedge-shaped pieces. I then put them in the frying pan on a medium high heat with the chopped garlic and a drizzle of olive oil. The advantage of this method is that you don't have to have them in a single layer so you can fit more in the pan. Stir them regularly so that they brown evenly. This is definitely a quicker method for a larger quantity of courgettes.

Alternatively, if you prefer to barbeque the courgettes, then slice along the length to make it less fiddly to turn them. Spray them with olive oil to stop them sticking to the grill. These are a great addition to almost any salad you can think of.

“I can do anything. You really can do anything you put your mind to.”



Never go to bed on an argument

COURGETTE PLATTER SALAD

SERVES 8-10 as a side dish or 4-6 as a main

5 medium courgettes, sliced lengthways

4 red peppers, sliced into strips

1 pack of halloumi, sliced OR goats cheese OR buffalo mozzarella, roughly chopped

Half a jar of sun-dried tomatoes, roughly chopped

3 avocados, chopped into fairly large chunks with a squeeze of lemon juice to stop them going brown

Half a jar of artichoke hearts (optional)

A punnet of cherry tomatoes, halved

½ cup basil leaves, washed and roughly chopped

½ cup toasted pine nuts (see p14)

2 Little Gem lettuces, washed and leaves separated

Juice of one lemon

Olive oil

A large flat platter to serve

Barbeque the courgettes and peppers on both sides, with a spray of olive oil until they are soft and blackened (about 10 minutes, depending on your BBQ).

Barbeque the halloumi until golden brown and crispy. This won't take long, so keep watching it. Halloumi tastes better freshly grilled, so do this just before serving if possible. If you are using goats cheese or mozzarella, it does not need to be barbequed.

Start by spreading the Little Gem in a single layer over the platter. Then layer up everything else, drizzling lemon juice and olive oil as you go. The order doesn't matter but I normally sprinkle the basil and pine nuts on the top.

“**Never go to bed on an argument.** If you are committed to a relationship and want it to work then sometimes you need to take a deep breath and apologise. Don't let bad feelings fester and definitely don't brood on things all night long.”



Invest in friends

FETA, COURGETTE AND CHICKPEA SALAD

The chilli, garlic and onion mix gives this salad a deliciously unctuous texture.

SERVES 8-10 as a side dish or 4-6 as a main

2 red chillis, chopped with seeds removed if you don't like it too hot

6 cloves of garlic, peeled and finely chopped

3 red onions, peeled and finely sliced

150ml cider vinegar

4 courgettes, sliced lengthways

2 red peppers, chopped into wide strips

1 aubergine, sliced lengthways

1 x 400g tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed

½ cup each chopped coriander leaves, flat-leaf parsley and mint

200g feta cheese, roughly chopped

1 tbsp olive oil

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat and add the chillis, garlic and onions. Gently sweat the onion mixture. Once it has softened, turn up the heat and pour over the vinegar. Let it bubble until it has almost all evaporated then take off the heat and set aside. You can do this the day before and leave the mixture in the fridge.

Barbeque the aubergines, courgettes and peppers on both sides, until they are soft and blackened (about 10 minutes, depending on your BBQ). Cut them into bite-sized chunks. Set aside.

To assemble the salad, combine the onion mixture with the vegetables and chickpeas in a large bowl and give it a gentle stir to combine. Then top with feta and herbs.

“ **Invest in friends.** Friends are so important in life. When we are young, it is easy to make friends. Children naturally play with each other and in school or pre-school, before you know it, you have a friend. Children go to school every day so it is easy to maintain the friendship without trying too hard. As we get older, we need to put a bit more effort into making new friends and maintaining relationships with existing friends. If you take your friends for granted and don't get around to seeing them, then sadly friendships can fade away. Good friends make life better and if you keep investing and nurturing the friendship, your friends will be with you for your whole life. ”



Avoid negativity

COURGETTE RATATOUILLE

This is a great way of using up excess courgettes as you can cook a large quantity and it freezes extremely well. I normally use my largest casserole dish and always seem to fill it to the brim.

SERVES 8-10

10 medium courgettes

2 aubergines (I often leave these out and just put more courgettes in instead)

4 red peppers

1 cup French or runner beans, topped, tailed and chopped into 2cm lengths (optional)

3 large onions, finely chopped

6 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 red chilli (optional)

3 x 400g tins of chopped plum tomatoes

3 tbsp herbes de Provence

1 tsp coriander seed, ground in a pestle and mortar

1 vegetable stock cube

Half a bottle (375ml) red wine

1 cup olives (I prefer the large green ones)

1 tbsp olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

You will need a large casserole dish

Freezes well

Pour the olive oil into a large casserole dish. Add the chopped onions, garlic and chilli (if using) to the pan and fry until translucent.

Chop the courgettes, peppers and aubergines into medium-sized cubes and add to the pan.

Add the beans, red wine, herbs, ground coriander, tomatoes and stock cube. Add boiling water to almost cover the veg. Mix well and leave to simmer gently for at least an hour until all the veg is tender.

Add the olives just before serving (they seem to lose their flavour if they are cooked for too long).

Serve with crusty bread, couscous, jacket potatoes, crunchy mash or chippy potatoes (see recipes on page 78)

Variation

If you want you can add some meat to add an extra flavour dimension. Personally I prefer it without as I like the vegetable flavours to dominate. You can choose either a chorizo sausage (reduced fat if available), sliced, then chopped into semi-circles or quarters, chopped parma ham or pancetta. Fry the meat first in the casserole dish until it turns brown and crispy and pour off any excess oil. Then add the onions, garlic and chilli and continue with the recipe above.

“ Avoid negativity. If there are situations you know are bad for you, people who are bad for your karma, then avoid putting yourself in those situations. Create workarounds to keep you out of that negative zone. ”



Be independent

COURGETTE LASAGNE

This is a great way of using up courgettes. The courgettes are sliced along the length and used as a substitute for lasagne sheets, layered up with béchamel sauce and vegetable sauce and then baked. You can freeze this once the dish is assembled, but before baking. This quantity of vegetable sauce makes extra to freeze which you can use either for another courgette lasagne, or eat as a vegetarian chilli.

SERVES 6

5-6 medium/large courgettes, sliced finely lengthways (about 5mm thick)

FOR THE VEGETABLE SAUCE

2 onions, finely chopped

5 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

4 large carrots, diced,

2 red peppers, roughly chopped

1 pack of chestnut mushrooms, roughly chopped

1 large courgette, roughly chopped

4 x 400g tins chopped plum tomatoes

1 x 400g tin kidney or borlotti beans

1 x 400g tin adzuki beans

1 tsp smoked chilli powder or chipotle chilli flakes

2 tbsp herbes de Provence

2 tsp dried oregano

3 tsp smoked paprika

3 tsp paprika

2 tsp vegetable stock powder

A large glass (250ml) red wine

1 cup parmesan cheese, grated

1 tbsp olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 200°C (fan oven).

First make the vegetable sauce. Chop all the vegetables. I often use a food processor to save time (and effort!) You will need to do it in several batches.

Fry the onions and garlic in the olive oil in a large casserole dish over a medium heat until translucent. Add the chopped courgette, carrots, mushrooms and peppers. Add the herbs, spices, tomatoes and beans. Pour in the red wine, add the stock powder or cube and water from the kettle as needed. Stir well to combine everything and simmer over a medium heat until the veggies are soft. This will take 1 - 2 hours.

Now make the béchamel sauce. Melt the butter in a medium-sized saucepan over a medium heat. Once melted, sprinkle over the flour and mix well. Add as much flour as you can combine into the butter until it starts to go a bit powdery. Next add about half a pint of milk. Mix well and keep stirring, still on the heat, until the mixture is smooth. I find it easiest to use a balloon whisk to stir. It will thicken as it cooks. Continue stirring and once thickened, add another half pint of milk. Keep stirring, waiting for it to thicken and then adding more milk. It is important to keep stirring throughout this process as it can very easily burn on the bottom or become lumpy, neither of which is a desirable outcome! Once you have added all the milk, it should start bubbling. Add more milk if you need to so that it is runny enough to pour but still nicely thick. Finally, stir in the mustard powder thoroughly. This process will take about 30 minutes.

FOR THE BÉCHAMEL SAUCE

50g (approx. 2cm slice) butter

Approx. 1 cup plain flour

1.5 - 2 pints semi-skimmed milk

1 tsp Colman's mustard powder

1 pinch of Maldon sea salt

You will need a roasting dish 20cm x 30cm and at least 5cm deep (metal or ovenproof terracotta is fine)

Freezes well

Create the dish with the following layers, spreading them out quite thinly as you go along: vegetable sauce, sliced raw courgette, béchamel sauce, 3 times over, ending with a top layer of béchamel sauce. Sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese and bake in a preheated oven at 200°C for 1 hour until brown and bubbling.



“ **Be independent.** Learn to stand on your own two feet. Life is easier, more satisfying and you will grow more resilient. ”

Totes emosh

COURGETTE AND PESTO MUSH

This tastes a lot better than it sounds and is quick and easy to make. I wish I could think of a better name!

SERVES 4-6

4 medium/large courgettes, cut into chunks

4 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

A pack of parma ham or pancetta (optional)

2 tsp herbes de Provence

A large glass (250ml) white wine

1 red chilli, chopped

6 medium fresh tomatoes, chopped

75g sun-dried tomatoes, chopped

100g pesto (homemade tastes better - see p104)

1 tbsp olive oil

You will need a large deep frying pan

Freezes well

Fry the parma ham or pancetta in the olive oil in a large deep frying pan until it is crispy. Drain off any excess oil and remove the parma ham from the pan. Chop it into chunks and return to the pan.

Add the courgettes, herbs, garlic, chilli and wine into the pan with the parma ham. Cook on a medium heat until everything is soft and the courgettes have mushed down a bit.

Stir in the chopped tomatoes, pesto and sun-dried tomatoes just before serving.



“ **Totes emosh.** Part of being human is to feel emotion. It might be intense - fear, anger, pain, frustration. It’s normal and it’s part of life. Acknowledge the feeling and gradually it will pass. Remember that everyone feels bad sometimes. If they don’t appear to, they make be putting a brave face on it; you may only be seeing carefully selected snapshots of their life on social media; or maybe they are on anti-depressants. ”

Life is a learning journey

COURGETTE TORTILLA

This is a good way of using up leftovers and it is much quicker to cook if you are using leftovers! I often put excess boiled new potatoes (sliced up) and excess fried courgette slices in the freezer and cook this tortilla once I have built up enough. You can vary the vegetables you put in. I am often trying to use up courgettes so that is my go-to option but you could add any of the following: sautéed leeks, steamed broccoli, peas (straight from frozen is fine), fried red peppers...get creative! You can also use pretty much any cheese – blue cheese or goats cheese are my favourites.

SERVES 4

4-5 large courgettes, sliced and fried or barbequed courgette (roasted chunks are fine too)

1 cup cooked French beans

200g salad potatoes (Charlotte are my favourite) boiled and sliced

250g spinach, wilted in butter

2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 red chilli, chopped

100g stilton, or other cheese, cut into chunks

6 eggs

A dash of milk

1 tbsp olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

Salad leaves and a drizzle of Dijon dressing to serve

You will need a large non-stick frying pan which can go under the grill (ie one with a metal handle or removable handle)

First prepare the spinach. If I am using homegrown, I wash it carefully and cut out the stalk which can be a bit chewy. Then wilt the spinach by melting the butter in a large frying pan, adding the spinach and moving it around in the pan with a spatula. It will only take a minute or two to wilt down and the volume will reduce down hugely. Set aside.

Break the eggs into a large bowl and beat, just to break the yolks and combine them. Add the salt and pepper.

Pour in the potatoes, garlic, chilli, courgette, beans and spinach. Stir to combine with the eggs but be careful not to mash up the potatoes. You can use pretty much any cooked, leftover vegetables; this combination is the one I cook most.

Wipe the olive oil around the frying pan and pour in the mixture. Dot over the chunks of cheese.

Cook on the hob over a medium heat for about 10-12 minutes until the edges are going a bit brown. You want the bottom layer to be cooked. Meanwhile, preheat the grill to medium high.

Take the pan off the hob and put under the grill to cook the top layer of the egg mixture and melt the cheese. This should take about 3-5 minutes, but keep an eye on it as it can burn quickly.

If you are feeling brave, you can turn the whole pan out onto a serving dish. Alternatively, cut slices and serve with salad and Dijon dressing.



“Life is a learning journey. Keep learning, keep wondering, keep asking why, keep doing new things, keep expanding your horizons and be open to the wonder of the world. The world is such an enormous and varied place, we will never learn and do everything. The brain keeps making new cells as long as you keep learning new things, even into your nineties. How cool is that? ”

Don't be a doormat

DIJON CHICKEN WITH ROASTED VEGETABLES

SERVES 4

- 4 chicken breasts or 6-8 thigh fillets
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp white wine or cider vinegar
- 3 tsp cumin
- 3 tbsp Dijon mustard
- Juice of one lime
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled
- 1 red chilli, seeds removed if you don't like it too hot
- 1 tsp runny honey
- ½ cup fresh coriander leaves
- ½ cup fresh mint leaves

FOR THE ROASTED VEGETABLES

- 2 courgettes, roughly chopped
- 2 red peppers, roughly chopped
- 2 red onions, quartered
- 1 pack chestnut mushrooms, halved
- 1 aubergine, roughly chopped
- 6 cloves of garlic
- 2 tbsp herbes de Provence
- Olive oil to drizzle
- Maldon sea salt to taste

Cut the chicken into strips if you are using breasts, or if you are using thighs then leave them whole. Blitz all the ingredients for the marinade with a stick blender and pour over the chicken. Refrigerate for at least one hour, but preferably overnight.

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

For the roasted vegetables, prepare all of the vegetables and put in a large roasting pan. Leave the garlic in its skin and dot around the other vegetables. When eating, squeeze it out of the skin and you will find it has transformed into a melting taste explosion. It doesn't matter if the vegetables are not in a single layer as it improves the texture. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle over the herbs and salt. Roast at 180°C for about 1 hour.

Remove the chicken from the marinade and fry, grill or barbeque over the hottest heat you can manage, to get a crispy outside without drying out the inside. Don't overcook as you will destroy the tenderness.



“ Don’t be a doormat. Don’t let anyone walk all over you. ”



Broad beans



Broad beans can be started in pots in the greenhouse in February, much earlier than French or runner beans and can be planted out while it is still chilly in March/April (they don't mind night frosts). This means you get a much earlier crop than other kinds of beans. Plant them out in a double row, 10cm between plants, when they are 10-20cm tall. They will need some support as they get taller so put a 5ft post in each end of the row and tie a horizontal string around the posts to keep the plants from flopping over as they get taller. Water the plants well during flowering and as the pods are developing. Unlike runners and French, they produce a single flush of pods and then the plants give up which makes space in your veg patch for something else! Harvest in July when the pods are fat. Open a pod to check the size of the beans before you pick loads as sometimes the beans may not be big enough. When the plants are developing, they may get a bit of blackfly on the tips and the mature plants often seem to get a rust on the leaves (orangey spots) but neither of these seems to harm the beans. Once you have harvested all the beans, cut down the plants but leave the roots in the ground. All legumes (beans) have the amazing ability to put nitrogen back into the soil which is essential for healthy brassicas (cabbage, broccoli, etc.). I plant my sprouting broccoli in between the old broad bean roots to make the most of this bonus.

As the beans are ready to harvest in a single flush, I find it best to eat a few fresh but freeze most of them. They freeze really well if you blanch them first. To do this, bring a large pan of water to the boil, tip in the podded beans, bring back to the boil and simmer for about 2 minutes then drain and rinse immediately in cold water to stop the cooking process. Spread the beans out on a tray and put straight into the freezer. Once they are frozen, you can tip them into a freezer bag and then take out a handful as and when you need them. If you have lots of beans, you may need to cook them in more than one batch as the beans should have plenty of space in the pan. If this is the case, remove the beans with a slotted spoon and use the same water for the second batch.

Broad beans are best when combined with a selection of other flavours - either in a salad or they are also surprisingly good in a stir-fry with Asian flavours. Some people advise double podding them, but I pod them straight out of the fluffy pods (which look like such a lovely comfortable home for the little beans!) and cook from there. I don't bother with double podding a) because I can't be bothered and b) because I like them just as they are out of the big pods.

Love yourself

BROAD BEAN AND CHICKPEA FALAFEL

When I first tried making this falafel I used tinned chickpeas believing that it wouldn't make any difference. I was wrong! Tinned chickpeas makes a very soggy mix which falls apart very easily during cooking. Dried chickpeas makes a much firmer mix with a great texture. You do need to soak the dried chickpeas for 24 hours though, so you need to plan ahead.

SERVES 4 (makes 25 - 30 falafel)

1 cup dried chickpeas

2 cups of broad beans, podded (frozen is fine)

1 small onion, peeled and quartered

8 cloves garlic, peeled

1 cup flat-leaf parsley, stems removed

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup coriander leaves, large stems removed

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup dill, large stems removed

1 tbsp ground black pepper

1 tbsp cumin seeds

1 tbsp coriander seeds

1 tsp baking powder

A large pinch of salt

Olive oil for frying

Soak the dried chickpeas for 24 hours in plenty of cold water. Drain after the 24 hours and pat dry.

Put the broad beans in a small pan and boil for 5 minutes. Drain and set aside. You could also use thawed frozen beans.

Prepare the garlic, onion and herbs and put in the bowl of a food processor. Grind the cumin and coriander seeds in a pestle and mortar and then add to the food processor along with the baking powder, salt and black pepper. Finally, add the chickpeas and broad beans and process everything to a fairly smooth paste.

Take spoonfuls of the mixture and form it into walnut-sized patties using your hands. Press them gently to flatten them out a little. Refrigerate for at least one hour to let the falafel firm up.

Pour enough oil to cover the bottom of a medium frying pan and heat to a medium-high heat. Once it is hot, put in the patties. Be careful as they might spit. Make sure you leave some space around them. You will need to cook in several batches and you may need to add more oil. Fry the first side for about 3 minutes until they are well browned. Turn them carefully with a spatula and cook the second side for about 2 minutes. Remove from the frying pan and put on a plate lined with kitchen roll to soak up any excess oil.

Serve hot with ezme, cacik (see recipes on pages 154 and 156), warmed pitta bread, hummous and salad leaves.



“ Love yourself. Love yourself is a bit of an overused expression and quite hard to understand what it really means. I think the easiest way to think about it is as a combination of some of the other happy hacks. The key ingredients are: be kind to yourself (including self-acceptance), believe in yourself, be comfortable in your own skin, respect (demand it for yourself!), know yourself and don't be a doormat. If you can do all of these, you will be well on the way to loving yourself. ”





Beetroot

Beetroot is very easy to grow - easy to germinate and with no major pests. Sow directly into prepared soil in rows in March, keep watering during germination and the seedlings will poke through in a week or two. Thin out the seedlings so that they are about 2cm apart to give enough space to grow. You can sow additional rows in succession until the end of June, ie several sowings 3-4 weeks apart to keep you supplied with baby beetroots over a longer period. Keep the area weed-free and your seedlings will grow happily into delicious beetroot. The challenge is eating them before they get too big! When they are small you can eat 5 or 6 at one sitting, but they grow big very quickly. Harvest them as you need them and they will stay fresh and sweet in the ground for weeks. You can harvest by choosing the biggest ones along the row so that the others have a chance to grow to size. They still taste sweet and delicious even when they have grown to nearly tennis ball size! They seem to stay in the ground quite happily for a few months but they will lose their sweetness after a while, probably by September/October. The other great thing about beetroot is the wonderfully purple effect they have on the digestive system!

Be true to your heart

BEETROOT AND FETA SALAD

SERVES 8-10 as a side dish or 4 as a main

6 golf ball-sized beetroot, cooked and peeled

1 cup broad beans (or frozen edamame beans) cooked

2 courgettes, sliced and barbequed (optional)

200g feta cheese (or goats cheese), roughly chopped

½ cup of pistachio nuts or pumpkin seeds

A few sprigs of mint, shredded

2 Little Gem lettuce (or other salad leaves) washed

Dijon dressing to serve

Wash the mud off the beetroot and boil in their skins, covered with water. This will take about one hour, depending on size. Test by poking a knife into them. Once they are soft, drain and slip off their skins with your hands whilst running under cold water. Do this while they are still quite hot as if you let them cool down then the skins don't slip off so easily. Chop into bite-sized cubes.

Cook the podded broad beans or edamame beans by boiling in a pan of water for 5 minutes. Frozen edamame beans are a great substitute when broad beans are not available.

Layer up the lettuce in a large salad bowl or on individual plates with the beetroot, broad beans or edamame, courgette (if using) and sprinkle over the cheese, mint and pistachio nuts. Drizzle over the Dijon dressing.

Variation - raw beetroot with tahini dressing

If you don't feel like cooking the beetroot then peel it and grate it raw. Halve the quantity of beetroot as grating increases the volume. Make the rest of the salad as above but use a tahini dressing made with: 2 tbsp of tahini, 4 tbsp plain yoghurt, 3 tbsp olive oil, 1 tsp of honey, juice of half a lemon and a pinch of salt all whisked up together. Sometimes I like to use peas instead of broad beans.



“ Be true to your heart. Being true to your heart is all about living a life that reflects your values and morals. Choose a job, friends and hobbies which are consistent with these. It may take a while to work out who you are, what is important to you and what you believe in. You will feel more comfortable in your own skin if you can honestly say you believe in the path you have taken and the choices you have made. ”

Believe in yourself

GARDEN SALAD

There are so many variations on this salad; it is for you to be creative and add in what you have available. Below is my most often cooked version. Carrots and blue cheese go amazingly well together!

SERVES 8-10 as a side dish or 4 as a main

FOR THE SALAD

1½ cups smallish carrots

4-5 medium sized beetroot

3 medium courgettes, sliced lengthways

2 Little Gem lettuces

½ cup toasted pine nuts (see p14)

200g Stilton or other blue cheese (optional)

Dijon dressing to serve

FOR THE TOASTED POLENTA

100g polenta (not the ready made kind)

1 tsp Marigold bouillon stock powder

1 tsp herbes de Provence

200g feta cheese, crumbled (optional)

400ml boiling water

First make the polenta as it needs time to cool before barbequing. Mix the polenta with the stock powder and herbs in a pan and add the boiling water. Cook over a medium heat and continue mixing until the polenta thickens. It will tend to stick to the bottom of the pan so keep stirring. (You can add feta at this stage if you want to). Once thickened, pour onto a sheet of reusable non-stick sheets and leave to cool. Once cool, cut into large squares and barbeque on both sides until crispy.

Peel the carrots and cut into bite-sized chunks. Boil and set aside.

Boil the beetroot in their skins for 45-60 minutes. When still hot, slip off their skins. This is so much easier and more satisfying than peeling them raw!

Barbeque the courgette slices with a spritz of olive oil on each side.

Wash the lettuce and tear into bite-sized pieces.

Assemble the salad in a large bowl, platter or on individual plates starting with a layer of lettuce then adding the vegetables. Sprinkle the stilton and pine nuts over the top and drizzle over the dressing. You can choose whether you prefer stilton on the salad or feta in the polenta or go crazy and have both!

Serve the salad with the crispy polenta.

Variation - winter garden salad

For a winter version of this, I take out the carrots, beetroot and courgettes and substitute winter vegetables (pumpkin, celeriac, carrots, parsnips, onions) which I

“ **Believe in yourself.** If you don’t believe in yourself, how is anyone else going to believe in you? ”

roast. Wash and peel the vegetables and chop into 2cm chunks. Tip the vegetables into a large roasting tin but set aside the pumpkin and onion as they take a shorter time to cook. Drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle with sea salt and roast for about 20 minutes. Then add the pumpkin and onion, giving everything a good mix and scraping off the bottom if things have stuck. Roast for a further 20-30 minutes until the vegetables are soft and turning brown at the edges.

When assembling the salad, I add a roughly chopped avocado. You can stick with the stilton or substitute goats cheese or even feta, depending what mood you are in and what is in the fridge! I don’t bother with the polenta either as the roasted winter veg is filling enough.







Carrots

Carrots are tricky little fighters. I find them to be the fussiest germinators of all. They like it damp, warm and dark – consistently - for the whole period of germination. Once they are up, the only worry is carrot fly but covering them in insect mesh sorts out that problem (this normally comes with holes of approx. 1.35mm). My most recent experimental solution to the germination problem is to sow the seeds in lengths of gutter in the greenhouse and cover with a wooden board so that the light is excluded. Don't cover the seeds with soil or compost as you need to check them every day to make sure they are moist and check for germination. As soon as you can see that the seeds have germinated, transfer them into the vegetable patch by sliding them out of the gutter, cover lightly with soil and water them. If you leave them for too long in the gutter, the roots grow really long, get tangled and the carrots never really recover. For later sowings when the soil has warmed up a bit, you can sow them directly into the soil but still cover with a wooden board and check everyday. Once they have germinated, remove the board and cover with a sprinkling of soil. If you are doing this and the weather turns hot, be extra careful to keep them moist under the board as they can easily dry out and get cooked!

You can sow several rows in succession from March to July to provide you with carrots over a longer season. Harvest by digging up to meet your kitchen needs as and when. The carrots will stay fresh in the soil well into December.

Young carrots in July are a very different size to old carrots coming out of the ground from November onwards. The former are delicious - steamed or boiled - and work really well in salads. Once they get bigger, they are good for roasting (see winter roasted vegetables on page 50), in casseroles such as chilli con carne or Bolognese (below.)

Colour brings joy

RAINBOW NOODLES WITH TOFU

Tofu is a brilliant protein source but it doesn't taste of much on its own so it is essential to add some flavour by marinating or adding a glaze or sauce.

The dressing for these vegetable noodles is my favourite go-to accompaniment when I feel a dish needs a bit of extra flavour. It is lovely with seared sea bass or chunks of chicken or pork fillet coated in flour and shallow fried in oil. Dashi is a Japanese stock made from seaweed and tuna, but vegetable stock is a good substitute if you don't have any.

SERVES 4

2 tbsp sesame oil

1 red pepper, seeds removed and finely sliced

4 large carrots, peeled and sliced into batons

1 large head of broccoli, chopped into small florets

1 packet of baby corn, halved

2 courgettes, finely sliced into batons

1 punnet shiitake mushrooms, sliced

½ cup coriander leaves

1 red chilli, seeds removed if you don't like it too spicy

20ml sake

20ml fish sauce

4 person-sized bundles of buckwheat noodles (around 75g per person)

2 tbsp dry roasted sesame seeds

400g firm tofu (or silken tofu)

First marinate the tofu. Chop it into cubes, and pour over the soy, sake and mirin. Leave in the fridge for a few hours and during that time, stir a few times to ensure all sides get coated. (If you are using silken tofu, skip the marinating, but coat in flour just before frying).

Next make the dressing/dipping sauce. For the stock, I use dashi powder or vegetable stock powder as it is easy to make a small quantity. You need to use boiling water to dissolve the stock powder then add the other ingredients, mix well and set aside.

Chop all of the vegetables. Heat 1 tbsp sesame oil in a wok and add the vegetables. Keep turning them over. Sprinkle with the fish sauce and sake as this helps to stop them sticking and burning, and adds to the flavour. They will take about 10 minutes to cook (depending how thinly sliced they are). I like a bit of crunch but not too much.

Meanwhile, drain the tofu from its marinade and fry it 1 tbsp sesame oil. Keep turning to brown all sides.

Cook the noodles according to the packet instructions.

Assemble the dish with noodles at the bottom, piled up with vegetables and tofu with a sprinkle of sesame seeds, coriander and chilli on top. Serve with the dressing either to pour over or as a dipping sauce for the tofu. Eat straight away.

FOR THE MARINADE

2 tbsp soy
2 tbsp sake
2 tbsp mirin

FOR THE DRESSING/DIPPING SAUCE

2 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp mirin
50ml vegetable stock or dashi
½ tsp demerara sugar or honey

Variation - miso tofu

An alternative for the tofu flavouring is to use miso. Take 3 tbsp of miso paste and mix with 1 tsp demerara sugar (or honey) and 2 tbsp mirin. Stir to dissolve the sugar. Cut the tofu into 3 large horizontal slices to maximise the surface area and spread the mixture on one side of the tofu. Add a sprinkling of sesame seeds and grill for about 5 minutes until browned but watch it closely as it can burn quickly. When you turn the tofu over, spread the second side with the glaze, add sesame seeds and grill for about 3 minutes.



“ **Colour brings joy.** There have been studies on what makes people happy and one of the findings was that vibrant colours create more happiness. So, bring some colour into your world! ”

Question authority

CHILLI CON CARNE

SERVES 8 -10

1 reduced fat chorizo sausage, chopped into small pieces (optional)

2 large onions, quartered

2 sticks of celery, cut into 10cm lengths

2 red peppers, deseeded and cut into chunks

1 punnet of mushrooms

4 large carrots

6 cloves of garlic, peeled

500g best beef mince

2 stock cubes, beef

2 tbsp dried oregano

2 tbsp mild chilli powder

3 tbsp paprika

3 tbsp smoked paprika

3 x 400g tins chopped plum tomatoes

1 x 400g tin kidney beans

1 x 400g tin aduki beans

1 x 400g tin black eyed beans

A large glass (250ml) red wine

1 tbsp olive oil

Freezes well

First fry the chorizo sausage in the olive oil in a large casserole dish. The normal version releases a lot of extra fat which I then need to spoon off, whereas the reduced fat version is perfect.

Next prepare the veggies. I find it much quicker and easier to use a food processor to chop up the veggies. Fry the chopped veggies along with the fried chorizo until they are soft (about 10 minutes).

Push the veggies over to one side of the pan and add the mince to the other side. Break up the pieces of minced meat as it fries and browns.

Once the mince is browned, mix in with the veggies. Add the red wine, herbs and spices, stock cubes, tinned tomatoes and tinned beans (drained and rinsed). Add about a tin full of water at this stage too. Give everything a thorough mix and then leave it to simmer slowly on the hob for 2 hours, longer won't hurt, for the flavours to develop. Add salt to taste.

Here is a foolproof method for cooking the rice. Use 75ml per person (that's right – ml, measure it in a measuring jug) and rinse really thoroughly under running water through a sieve. Fill a large saucepan 1/3 full of water and bring to the boil. Pour in the rice. Bring back to a simmer and continue cooking for 10 minutes. Keep an eye on it as it always seems to try and boil over and you may need to pour in some extra water from the kettle if you are cooking a lot of rice. The quantity of water is not critical as you pour off excess water once it is cooked. Drain the rice through a sieve and leave covered for a few minutes before serving.

Variation - vegetarian chilli

For a vegetarian option, I cook the vegetable sauce in the courgette lasagne recipe above on page 34.

“ **Question authority.** It may not always be appropriate or indeed necessary to question authority but sometimes it might be. Always think, consider, question - don't accept blindly. You have to tread with care with this one. It is probably not a good strategy to live your life battling wherever you go but don't be afraid to speak up when something doesn't sound right. If you are in a situation when what you are being told by the authority doesn't stack up, then ask! Ask for an explanation, express your concerns, make any suggestions you may have. Don't just assume they are right because they are in a position of authority. ”



Decisions decisions

BOLOGNESE SAUCE

I always used to make this dish with beef mince until one day I tried quorn out of curiosity and you know what, the kids didn't notice the difference! Now I use quorn as often as mince.

SERVES 8-10

2 large onions, quartered
6 cloves of garlic, peeled
2 sticks of celery, cut into 10cm lengths
2 red peppers, deseeded and cut into chunks
1 punnet of mushrooms
4 large carrots
1 courgette
500g best beef mince or quorn
2 stock cubes, beef or vegetable
2 tbsp herbes de Provence
2 tbsp paprika
2 tbsp smoked paprika
3 x 400g tins chopped plum tomatoes
A large glass (250ml) red wine, sherry or marsala
1 tbsp olive oil

Freezes well

I find this a lot quicker to make if I use a food processor to chop up the veggies. I normally give the garlic a quick blitz first to make sure it gets chopped then add the onion and pulse until roughly chopped. Make sure not to overdo it with the blitzing as you can quickly end up with mush. Start frying this in the olive oil over a medium heat while you then blitz the rest of the veggies until roughly chopped, but not mush, in batches. I always use my largest wide and deep casserole dish as it always seems to make a larger amount than I expected!

Add all the veggies to the pan and fry for about 10 minutes, until they are soft. Push the veggies over to one side of the pan and add the mince or quorn to the other side. Break up the pieces of minced meat as it fries and browns.

Once the mince is browned, mix in with the veggies. Add the red wine or equivalent, stock cubes, herbs and spices, and tinned tomatoes. Add another tin full of water at this stage. Leave it to simmer on a medium low heat on the hob, with the lid on, for about 1.5 hours. You may need to top up with a bit more water if the sauce gets too thick or dry. Add salt to taste.

Cook pasta to serve. Wholewheat pasta is a healthier alternative to normal pasta and tastes just as good. Bring a large pan of water to the boil and tip in the pasta. Once it has starting boiling again, turn down the heat otherwise it is almost certain to boil over. Give the pasta a good stir to stop it sticking to the bottom of the pan and simmer for 12-13 minutes. Drain through a colander. If you are not serving immediately, add a drizzle of olive oil to stop the pasta sticking together. Pasta is fine to reheat subsequently, unlike rice which carries a high risk of food poisoning.

Serve with your choice of pasta. Or go the whole hog and make it into a lasagne (see page 60).



“ **Decisions decisions.** Making decisions can be an agonising process. The lists of pros and cons and the fear of making the wrong decision can be paralysing. How about this....consider all decisions against the measure ‘Will it make me happier?’ ”

Accept and move on

LASAGNE

This dish is brilliant to prepare ahead. Make and assemble the dish, then refrigerate or freeze until you want to bake it. Defrost slowly at room temperature before baking.

SERVES 4-6

Approx. 15 sheets of lasagne (no pre-cook type)

Half a quantity of Bolognese sauce above

1 cup of finely grated parmesan

1 pack of wild rocket

Balsamic vinegar to serve

FOR THE BÉCHAMEL SAUCE (also known as white sauce)

50g (approx. 2cm slice) butter

Approx. 1 cup plain flour

1.5 - 2 pints semi-skimmed milk

1 tsp Colman's mustard powder

1 pinch of Maldon sea salt

You will need a lasagne dish 20cm x 30cm and at least 5cm deep

Freezes well

First make the Bolognese sauce according to the instructions above.

Secondly make the béchamel sauce. Melt the butter in a medium-sized saucepan over a medium heat. Once melted, sprinkle over the flour and mix well. Add as much flour as you can combine into the butter until it starts to go a bit powdery. Next add about half a pint of milk. Mix well and keep stirring, still on the heat, until the mixture is smooth. I find it easiest to use a balloon whisk to stir. It will thicken as it cooks. Continue stirring and as it thickens, gradually add more milk. Keep stirring, waiting for it to thicken and then adding more milk. Make sure to keep stirring throughout this process as it very easily burns on the bottom or becomes lumpy; neither of which is a desirable outcome! Once you have added all the milk, it should start bubbling. Add more milk if you need to so that it is runny enough to pour but still nicely thick. Finally, stir in the mustard powder thoroughly. This process will take about 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 200°C (fan oven).

Next it is time to assemble the lasagne. You are aiming for 3 layers of pasta, starting with a layer of Bolognese and ending with a layer of béchamel sauce. So the order is: Bolognese, pasta, béchamel, three times over. Be generous with the Bolognese sauce in the layers and don't be tempted to add another layer of pasta as it will be too dense.

Finally sprinkle over the parmesan cheese and bake in the oven for 1 hour at 200°C. Serve with rocket dressed with a drizzle of balsamic vinegar.



“ **Accept and move on.** Sometimes things just don’t work out the way you want them to. You may feel frustrated or try and change the outcome...but sometimes you might need to just accept and move on. ”

Don't aim for perfection

HOLIDAY BEAN CASSEROLE

This is a flexible sort of a bean casserole made with ingredients widely available in holiday locations and easy to cook up to keep you going for a couple of days.

SERVES 8-10

2 onions, finely chopped
1 chorizo ring, chopped (optional)
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 punnet chestnut mushrooms, chopped
3 sticks of celery, chopped
2 large carrots, chopped
1 large courgette or red pepper, chopped
2 x 400ml tins butter or borlotti beans, drained and rinsed
2 vegetable stock cubes
3 x 400g tins chopped plum tomatoes
2 tbsp herbs de Provence
2 tsp paprika
A large glass (250ml) red wine
1 cup of green olives
1 tbsp olive oil
Maldon sea salt to taste

Freezes well

Fry the chorizo in the olive oil in a large casserole dish. If you are using full fat chorizo, you will need to drain off some oil at this stage.

Add the chopped onions and garlic to the pan and sauté until soft.

Prepare the carrots, celery, courgette or red pepper and mushrooms and add them to the pan. Sauté for another 10 minutes or so to soften the veg.

Add the tinned tomatoes, beans (drained and rinsed), stock cubes, red wine, herbs and paprika. Simmer for about 1 hour.

Add salt to taste. Add the olives at the last minute as I find they lose their flavour if they are cooked.



“ Don’t aim for perfection. Life will never be perfect and you can’t be either. Try your best but don’t get hung up on aiming for perfection. Life is too short and you will just end up getting stressed out. **”**

Be thankful

SAUSAGE AND LENTIL CASSEROLE

This is a delicious way to eat puy lentils.

SERVES 8-10

16 good quality butcher sausages

2 onions, finely chopped

6 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

4 large carrots, sliced

2 red peppers, finely chopped

3 sticks of celery, finely chopped

1 punnet of chestnut mushrooms,
finely chopped

2 vegetable stock cubes

3 x 400g tins chopped plum
tomatoes

500g puy lentils, rinsed

A large glass (250ml) red wine

1 bay leaf

1 tbsp smoked paprika

1 tbsp mild chilli powder

2 tbsp herbes de Provence

1 tbsp olive oil

Maldon sea salt to taste

Freezes well

Fry the sausages in the olive oil in a deep casserole dish to brown them. You don't need to worry about cooking them through as that will happen later in the process but they are nicer browned. Remove from the pan and set aside. You will probably have to do this in a couple of batches.

In the same casserole dish, fry the onions and garlic until soft before throwing in all the other vegetables. Sometimes I chop these in the food processor to save time. How finely chopped vs chunky is up to you.

Add the red wine, herbs and spices, tinned tomatoes, lentils, stock cubes and stir well. Simmer for 1½ to 2 hours. Add the sausages, whole, about half way through the cooking time. You can use leftover sausages if you have any!



“ **Be thankful.** There will always be people out there worse off than you. Be thankful for and appreciate what you have got; don't fixate on what you haven't got. ”





Salad leaves

Growing salad leaves is definitely worthwhile. You can pick them and eat them fresh from the garden and avoid all the food miles, plastic and wastage that is associated with supermarket bagged salad. The easiest and most efficient option I have found for growing salad leaves is a 'cut and come again' variety. This means you grow the lettuce plant and once the leaves are big enough, you can pick a few leaves but leave more on the plant to grow bigger and provide you with future harvests. With a few plants, you can have fresh salad leaves ready to harvest over a period of weeks. In contrast, traditional lettuces are harvested by picking the whole plant in one go so you have to be ready to eat it when it is ready to be eaten and - it is gone in one go. I haven't had much success with lettuces which grow a head, like Little Gem. The idea is wonderful but they all seem to be ready at the same moment and most of them bolt (which means they suddenly start growing vertically because they are trying to produce a flower) before I get around to picking them.

Grow the plants in a place close to the kitchen, perhaps in a pot or even a window box so it is easy to go and grab a handful when you need them and you can keep them well watered easily. Sow the seeds in the greenhouse from March and then transfer to their final position from June onwards. You can sow in succession a few weeks apart to ensure you are well supplied all summer. Harvest as soon as the plant is big enough to spare a few leaves. Pick off a few at a time, leaving enough to provide ongoing energy to the plant and keep watering.

Love and respect nature

SALADE PAYSANNE

This French classic is definitely a meal in itself and there are many variations on it. Its fundamental building blocks seem to be lettuce, bacon and Dijon dressing. After that, you can put in whatever else takes your fancy. The version below is the one I make most often. If you are extra hungry, add chèvre or mozzarella and/or a boiled egg on top.

SERVES 8 as a side dish or 4 as a main

100g (approx.) bacon, pancetta, parma ham or chorizo

250g mushrooms, sliced

2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 red chilli (optional)

2 Little Gem lettuces or 2 large handfuls of salad leaves

400g cherry tomatoes, halved

2 avocados, chopped into chunks

1 cup broad beans, podded

½ cup toasted pine nuts (see p14)

Maldon sea salt to taste

1 tbsp olive oil

Dijon dressing to serve

Fry the bacon (or equivalent) in the olive oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Once brown and crisp, drain off any excess fat, carefully, especially if you are using chorizo (as there will be a lot).

Add the mushrooms, garlic and chilli to the pan with the bacon (or equivalent). Fry them for about 10 minutes until all the vegetables are softened. Take the pan off the heat.

Wash the salad leaves and prepare the avocados and tomatoes.

Boil the broad beans for about 10 minutes. If you want you can remove the skin from the individual beans after boiling, but I don't bother as I like them skin on.

Assemble the salad by layering up the ingredients in a bowl, platter or on individual plates. Serve with Dijon dressing.



“ Love and respect nature... it is a wonderful gift and is incredibly beneficial to our health and well-being. ”

Know yourself

HALLOUMI AND RED PEPPER SALAD

You could use buffalo mozzarella instead of the halloumi. It's a bit more straightforward as it doesn't need cooking. I don't know why, but buffalo mozzarella is far superior to normal cow mozzarella.

SERVES 8 as a side dish or 4 as a main

225g halloumi or buffalo mozzarella

2 red peppers, cut into slices

2 onions, sliced

2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 red chilli (optional)

50ml cider vinegar

2 Little Gem lettuces or 2 large handfuls of salad leaves

1 punnet of cherry tomatoes, halved

2 avocados, chopped into chunks

1 cup broad beans, podded

½ cup toasted pine nuts (see p14)

1 tbsp olive oil

Dijon dressing to serve

Slice the onions, peppers, garlic and chilli, if using, and fry in the olive oil over a medium heat. Once everything is soft (after about 10 minutes) turn up the heat and pour 50ml of cider vinegar into the pan. Mix well and let the vinegar bubble and evaporate. Remove from the pan and set aside.

Boil the broad beans for about 10 minutes. Drain and set aside. If you want you can remove the skin from the individual beans after boiling, but I don't bother as I like them skin on.

Wash the salad leaves and prepare the avocados and tomatoes.

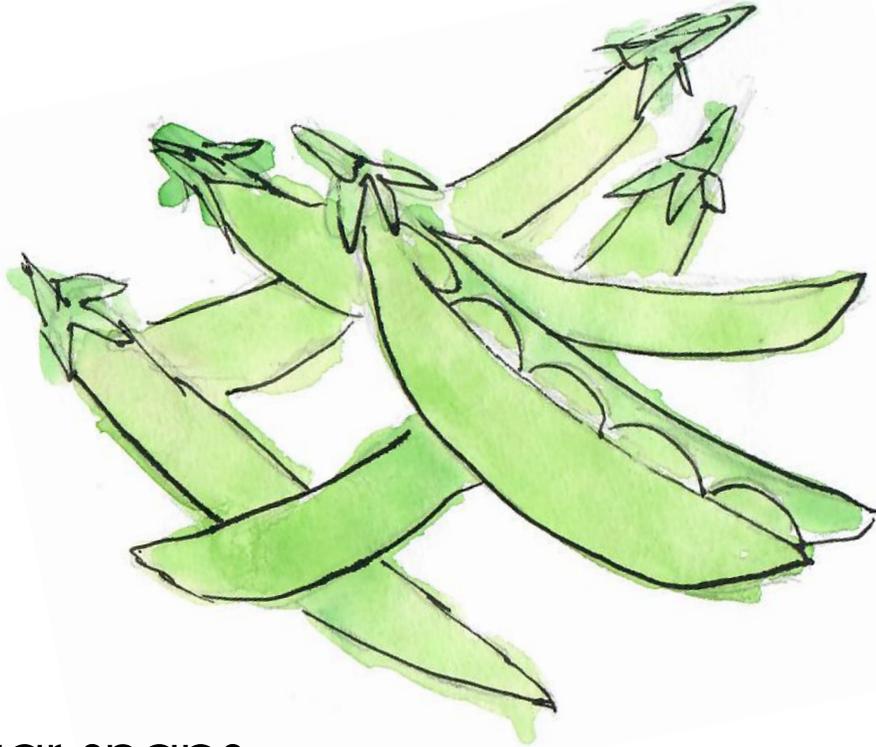
Slice the halloumi and fry in olive oil for a few minutes on each side over a medium high heat. Watch it closely as it doesn't take long and can burn quickly. Fry the halloumi just before you are ready to serve as it goes a bit rubbery if it sits around.

Assemble the salad by layering up the ingredients in a bowl, platter or on individual plates. Serve with Dijon dressing.

“ **Know yourself.** It may sound obvious, but if you don’t know what you like, then how can you make choices that will make you happy? Often we focus so much on doing what we think others want or expect us to do, we don’t stop to question whether or not we genuinely enjoy those things. It might take some time and experimentation to work out what is right for you but it is worth the effort. ”







Sugar snaps

Sugar snaps are a good alternative to peas as the harvest is a bit more generous. They have fatter peas and a juicier pod than mange tout. With normal podding peas, you don't get many once they are podded.

Germination is much more successful in the greenhouse than in the open ground. I sow the seeds 5cm apart in a compost-filled gutter in March to increase the germination rate and make the planting out job a lot easier! Once the plants are 2-4cm tall, plant them out (in April/May). The plants are hardy so you don't need to worry about frosts. Prepare a depression in the soil and slide the germinated sugar snaps straight in. Firm the baby plants in and water well. Provide netting for the sugar snaps to grow up as they need support. I use pea and bean netting secured between bamboos. Continue watering as the plants flower and the pods start to develop. Once the pods are fat, pick off and enjoy! The harvest will be over in a couple of weeks, so make the most of it!

These are best eaten raw, straight off the bush, but they work well thrown into a salad raw. Break off the ends and pull off any stringy bits from the sides. I prefer not to cook them as the sweetness evaporates. If you have only ever eaten supermarket sugar snaps, you won't believe the sweet crunchiness of their homegrown cousins.

Be persistent

THAI BEEF WITH BROAD AND FRENCH BEANS

SERVES 4

100g steak (marinated for up to 2 days in 2 tsp each of soy sauce, fish sauce, lime juice and sesame oil)

1 tbsp olive oil

FOR THE DRESSING

1 tbsp soy sauce

1 tbsp fish sauce

Juice of 1 lime

A thumb-sized piece of fresh root ginger (approx. 30g), peeled and grated

2 red chillis, finely chopped

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

½ tsp demerara sugar

50ml vegetable stock

50ml coconut milk

FOR THE SALAD

1 Little Gem lettuce, washed

2 avocados, chopped into chunks

½ a pack of beansprouts

1 cup broad beans, podded and steamed

1 cup French beans, cut into 2cm lengths and steamed

1 cup sugar snaps, halved

2 courgettes, sliced and fried (optional)

½ cup coriander leaves

Put the steak into a plastic bag with the marinade ingredients and leave in the fridge for 30 min - 2 days. The flavour really develops if you can leave it for longer. Putting it in a plastic bag makes it easier to ensure the whole steak is coated. If you prefer to use a dish, go for it.

Mix all the ingredients for the dressing.

Prepare all the vegetables for the salad. Leave the sugar snaps raw as they are sweeter that way, Snap off the ends and pull off any stringy bits from the sides. Pile up the vegetables on individual plates.

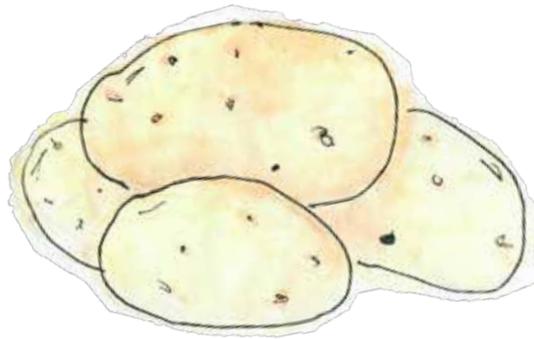
Fry the steak in the olive oil in a very hot frying pan until cooked to your liking. I like it quite rare for this purpose. Once cooked, take out of the pan and slice it thinly across the grain.

Put the slices of steak on the salad and pour over the dressing. Sprinkle over the coriander leaves and serve straight away.



“ **Be persistent.** Have you ever noticed how young children get what they want? They KEEP asking! As adults we worry about being annoying or rude, but sometimes, to get something you really want, you need to chase after it and be persistent! ”





Potatoes

Potatoes are a wonderful thing to grow. Sow the seed potatoes around Easter time and before you know it, you will have potatoes to eat. Make sure you buy your seed potatoes from a UK supplier so that they are disease-free. My favourite variety is Charlotte which has a lovely waxy texture even when they are large. You plant the seed potatoes 40cm apart with 60cm between rows. Normally you have to 'earth up' potatoes which means that you have to stack up extra soil around the plant as it grows because if any potatoes start developing at the surface of the ground they will go green and are inedible. I find that if you plant them extra deep, you can get away without earthing them up which means one less job. Water well as the plants are growing and the flowers are developing. They are ready to harvest just after the plants have flowered (normally in July) but they can sit in the ground as you eat your way through them until at least December. The potatoes will grow bigger as the season progresses.

Watch out for potato blight which can cause them to rot. If you see dark patches on the stems, cut them all off and dispose of them by burning or send them to local authority waste (don't put them on the compost heap as you can spread the disease!) Usually the potatoes in the ground are still fine to eat if you catch it early. You will know if the potatoes have succumbed to the disease as unfortunately they turn to mush. The other problem to look out for is scabby patches on the potatoes but you can cut these off and the potatoes are fine to eat. Regular watering should reduce the risk of potato scab.

Don't be a victim

CHIPPY POTATOES

SERVES 4

8 medium-sized waxy potatoes
Olive oil to coat
2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
A large pinch of Maldon sea salt

FOR THE MIX SOLEIL

4 tsp paprika
2 tsp mild chilli powder
2 tsp garlic salt
2 tsp herbes de Provence
1 tsp smoked paprika
1 tsp Szechuan pepper
½ tsp ground nutmeg
½ tsp ground coriander
½ tsp cumin

Preheat the oven to 200°C (fan oven).

First make up the mix soleil. Combine all the ingredients in a jar and shake well. I make up a batch to use as needed. This quantity should leave you some left over. It is also great for marinating chicken pieces with a bit of olive oil and lemon juice.

Wash the potatoes and chop them up into bite-sized chunks. If you need to prepare your potatoes before you are ready to cook them, make sure you leave them completely submerged in cold water as otherwise they can turn brown. When you are ready to cook them, put them in the metal roasting tray.

Drizzle over the olive oil and sprinkle over the salt and spice mix generously. I would use at least half the quantity you have made for this amount of potatoes. Shake the pan around to coat the potato chunks.

Roast in the preheated oven for about an hour, turning them halfway through the cooking time.

When the potatoes are cooked and the right colour of golden brown to suit your taste, take out the roasting pan and drizzle over the balsamic vinegar. Put back in the oven for 5 minutes so that the balsamic vinegar evaporates, leaving the potatoes crispy yet tangy.

Variation - Crunchy mash

Sometimes I like to boil the potatoes first, mash them up roughly but without adding any milk or butter and then put them in the roasting dish with a generous drizzle of olive oil and sprinkling of mix soleil and salt. Roast at 200°C for about 30 min. This is also a great way of using up excess mashed potato either out of the fridge or even defrosted from the freezer.



“ **Don't be a victim.** Bad things may happen to us as we make our way through life. When you have suffered, it is easy to focus on blame. You feel like a victim and as long as you feel that way, you will be trapped in a harmful and negative cycle. To be able to move on, you need to take control, release the blame, let out the anger and accept what has happened. Move forward, be free and be your best self. ”



French and runner beans

Beans are second only to courgettes in terms of how easy they are to grow in the garden. French and runner beans are prolific croppers once they get going. Especially runners. Runner beans and French beans keep on producing beans as long as you keep on picking. Follow exactly the same treatment for both types. Sow the seeds in the greenhouse towards the end of April, 5 seeds to a 2 litre pot and don't plant them out until all risk of frost has passed (1st June at the earliest). If you sow too early, the plants will grow too big and won't plant out as successfully. As they are climbers, they need something to grow up. Make sure it is a sturdy support as they will get tall and heavy! A wigwam made from 8, 8ft bamboos tied together at the top is a good option. Train one bean plant up each of the bamboo canes. You may need to tie in the small plants to encourage them up the canes to start with but once they get growing, they will wind around the canes on their own. Keep watering throughout the growing season especially when the plants are flowering. When they start producing beans, keep picking! Runners especially can get stringy if you leave them on the bush too long (even if the seed packet says they are stringless) and peeling off the sides won't solve the problem. Annoyingly, even one stringy bean can ruin a dish, so pick regularly! Climbing French beans seem to do better and are easier to pick, than bush style.

You can blanch and freeze French and runner beans in the same way as broad beans. Top and tail, wash and cut into 5cm lengths. Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil and add the beans. Bring back to the boil and continue simmering for 2 minutes then drain out the water, rinse the beans immediately with cold water, lay out the beans on a tray and freeze straight away. Once they are frozen, you can transfer to a freezer bag and then it is very easy to grab a handful straight from the freezer whenever you want them. They need to cook for about 5 minutes from frozen.

Money is not success

BEAN CHAKCHOUKA

This is a delicious recipe for French or runner beans. Chakchouka freezes very successfully. If you want to freeze it, stop before you add the eggs and it works brilliantly.

SERVES 4

300g runner or French beans,
chopped into lengths about 2-3cm

1 tin chopped plum tomatoes

1 onion, finely chopped

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 red chilli, chopped (optional)

A pinch of saffron strands

1 tsp cumin

1 tsp smoked paprika

4 eggs

100g chèvre or goats cheese, cut
into chunks

1 tbsp olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

Lettuce or rocket with Dijon
dressing to serve

You will need a large non-stick
frying pan which can go under the
grill (ie one with a metal handle or
removable handle)

Freezes well

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan. Add the cumin seeds and fry for a couple of minutes until they sizzle.

Add the onion, garlic and chilli and fry until soft.

Add the tinned tomatoes, the beans and enough boiling water to cover. Add the saffron, smoked paprika and a good pinch of salt. Stir well and simmer for about 1 hour on a medium to low heat. The beans can take a surprisingly long time to soften.

Once the beans are soft, make four little egg-sized wells in the mixture. It should be thick enough to hold the shape of the wells. Break an egg into each one.

Sprinkle the chunks of goats cheese around the pan.

Turn the grill to medium and keep cooking on the hob for 1 minute. Finally, put the pan under the grill for about 3-5 minutes until the eggs are cooked through but with runny yolks and the cheese is slightly melted.

Serve with salad leaves and Dijon dressing.

“ **Money is not success.** What is success? Does it equate to money, a high powered job, a flashy car, designer clothes and fancy holidays? Personally I don't think so. Success to me is more about happiness and a sense of sustained contentment with your life. There may be a minimum level of resource that enables you to be happy – you need somewhere to live, money for food, clothes and a level of comfort which suits you - but more money doesn't mean more happiness. ”



Giles' law

RUNNER BEAN, PUMPKIN AND COCONUT CURRY

SERVES 8

1 small pumpkin or butternut squash, cubed

750g runner or French beans, chopped into 2-3cm lengths

3 onions, finely chopped

2 x 400g tins of coconut milk

2 x 400g tins chopped plum tomatoes

1 x 400g tin haricot or borlotti beans, drained or 250g fresh or frozen broad beans, if available

2 tbsp mustard seed

20 curry leaves

¼ cup tamarind soaked in 1 cup boiling water and strained to remove the stones and solids

1 tbsp olive oil

Salt to taste

FOR THE CURRY PASTE

2 tbsp coriander seed

1 tbsp fennel seeds

1 tbsp turmeric

3 cloves, ground in a pestle and mortar

1 thumb-sized piece of fresh root ginger (approx. 30g), peeled and roughly sliced

4 cloves garlic

2 green chillis (seeds removed if you don't like it too hot)

Freezes well

First make the curry paste. Put the coriander and fennel seeds into a large dry frying pan and heat until an aroma rises. Pour into a jug and add the rest of the curry paste ingredients (ginger, garlic, chilli, turmeric and cloves). Add a dash of water and blend with a stick blender until fairly smooth. Make sure you do NOT add the mustard seeds into this mix and grind as the flavour of the mustard seeds is overpowering when ground. I once did this by mistake and the curry was practicably inedible. It took me a while to work out what had gone wrong.

Add the olive oil to the pan and pour in the mustard seeds. Fry until they start popping then add the chopped onion and curry paste. Fry until soft.

Add the runner beans, pumpkin, tinned tomatoes, broad, borlotti or haricot beans, coconut milk, curry leaves and some water to almost cover the vegetables.

Meanwhile, put the tamarind in a mug and pour boiling water over. Leave to sit for a few minutes and then sieve to remove any stones or solids. Pour the resulting tamarind juice into the pan.

Simmer for 1-2 hours or until until all the vegetables are soft. The beans can take a surprisingly long time to soften.

Serve with rice and/or naan bread or chapatis.



“ **Giles’ law.** You get out what you put in - my husband Giles always says this. This applies in many situations: for example, if you go to a party, telling yourself you are going to have a rubbish time, sit in the corner on your own then guess what....you probably will have a rubbish time. You may not feel like it but psyche yourself up, go feeling positive, make an effort and you will have much more fun.”

Be comfortable in your own skin

TUNA PIE

This is a great dish to make with tinned tuna and piles of veg. You can either top it with mashed potato and bake it in the oven (as below) or top with puff pastry and bake in the oven; or, for a quicker and simpler option, just make the tuna sauce and serve with jacket potatoes, rice or pasta.

SERVES 4

4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 onion, finely chopped
160g tin of tuna, drained
4 tbsp plain flour
1 tsp mustard powder
1 vegetable stock cube
1 pint milk
1 cup frozen sweetcorn
1 cup frozen peas
2 large carrots cut into small cubes
1 cup French beans cut to 3cm lengths
Half a head of broccoli cut into small florets
1 tbsp olive oil

FOR THE MASHED POTATO

1kg peeled potatoes, chopped in halves or quarters if they are large
60g butter
100ml milk

You will need a large casserole dish and 25cm x 25cm ovenproof baking dish

Freezes well

Pour the olive oil in a large deep casserole dish. Add the onions, garlic and carrots and fry until softened over a medium heat.

Add flour and mustard powder and stir thoroughly.

Pour over the milk and stir to combine. Keep stirring and simmer until thickened. Add more milk or water if necessary to achieve a nice sauce consistency.

Add the tuna and remaining vegetables and crumble in the stock cube. Continue to simmer over a medium heat until the vegetables are soft (about 30 minutes). Stir frequently as the sauce can stick to the bottom of the pan.

Meanwhile, cook the potatoes. Put the peeled potatoes in a large deep saucepan and cover with water. Bring to the boil and simmer for about 30 minutes until the potatoes are soft when you spear them with a knife. Drain off the water, leaving the potatoes in the pan. Add the butter and the milk and mash with a hand potato masher until the potatoes are smooth. Add salt to taste.

To assemble your pie, pour the tuna mix into an ovenproof baking dish. Spoon the mashed potatoes carefully on top, making sure the potato doesn't sink. Smooth out the potato with a palette knife so that it goes all the way to the edges. Use a fork to add texture to the surface which will help it brown nicely.

Bake in the oven for 30 min at 200°C until the potato is golden brown. If you are assembling the pie earlier and baking from cold, it will take at least 1 hour.

Variation - chicken and bacon pie

If you prefer, you can use chicken and bacon instead of tinned tuna. Take 2 free range chicken breasts and cut into bite-sized chunks and 4 rashers of best quality smoked bacon, chopped fairly finely. Start by frying the bacon and once brown, add the chicken and continue to fry until lightly browned (It doesn't have to be cooked through at this stage). Then proceed with the recipe above by adding the onions and garlic.



“ **Be comfortable in your own skin.** Don't get sucked into the media-fuelled obsession to look 'magazine perfect' (which we all know means photoshopped). Remember that most pictures people post on social media are tweaked, filtered and not how people look in real life. Be happy with your body and how you look. Focus on self-confidence and a smile. ”

You choose

CHICKEN OR CHICKPEA LENTIL CURRY

SERVES 4-6

- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 6 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
- 2 thumb-sized pieces of fresh root ginger (approx. 60g), finely chopped
- ½ cup fresh coriander leaves
- 2 large carrots, finely chopped
- 2 courgettes, finely chopped
- 2 cups of French beans, cut into 2cm lengths
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 2 x 400g tins chopped plum tomatoes
- 1 cup (150g) red lentils (dry weight), rinsed
- 100g creamed coconut (or 200g coconut milk)
- 2 x 400g tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed or 4 chicken breasts (or equivalent quantity of thigh fillets) cut into chunks and browned
- 1 vegetable or chicken stock cube
- 4 tbsp curry powder
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1 tsp mild chilli powder
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 1 tbsp olive oil

Freezes well

First brown the chicken in a large casserole dish in the olive oil, if you are using it. Once it is browned, remove from the pan and set aside. It doesn't need to be cooked through at this stage as it will cook in the sauce later.

Use a food processor to chop the onions, garlic, ginger and coriander leaves finely. In a second batch, chop the carrots and courgettes in the food processor again but not too finely. Fry the chopped veggies in the casserole dish until soft (about 10 minutes).

Add the tinned tomatoes, lentils, creamed coconut, stock cube and spices (except the garam masala). Stir well and add enough water to make a nice saucy consistency. Then add the chicken pieces or chickpeas, whichever you are using. Simmer on a medium to low heat for 1.5-2 hours. Stir regularly and top up with boiling water a couple of times as the lentils absorb water as they cook. Add the frozen peas and French beans for the last 30 minutes of cooking.

Stir in the garam masala at the end of the cooking process.

Serve with rice, naan bread or chapatis. Mango chutney is a great accompaniment.

“ You choose. When it comes to life choices, you are your own boss, especially when it comes to you own body. Don’t get pushed into doing things you don’t feel comfortable with. Any partner worth having will respect you and if they don’t....then they can move along. ”



Break traditions and make your own

THAI GREEN CURRY

SERVES 4-6

FOR THE PASTE

2 tsp coriander seeds

1 tsp cumin seeds

10 green chillies, seeds removed unless you like it very spicy!

2 stems lemongrass

3 tbsp galangal, sliced

1 tbsp lime zest

4 coriander roots and lower part of stem, washed well

6 cloves garlic

½ cup shallots, peeled and chopped

1 tbsp shrimp paste

FOR THE CURRY

1 cup fresh coriander leaves, chopped

4 tbsp curry paste

800ml coconut milk

4 chicken breasts, sliced into bite-sized chunks or 400g firm tofu

4 medium carrots, peeled and cut into batons

12 baby corns, halved

1 cup mushrooms, quartered

1 cup broccoli, cut into small florets

1 cup mangetout or sugar snaps, halved

Firstly, make the curry paste. Add all the prepared ingredients to a food processor and chop to a fine paste. This will make enough for about 2 quantities of this curry. I often double up the paste quantity and freeze it. It works brilliantly to freeze it in ice cube trays and then use as much as you need.

Heat the oil in a large casserole dish until hot. Add the chopped coriander leaves followed by the curry paste and fry for 2-3 minutes. Lower the heat and add the coconut milk.

Prepare the vegetables. The quantities are approximate so feel free to make substitutions according to what you have in the fridge. Add the vegetables and chicken (if using) and top up with boiling water until the vegetables are almost covered. Simmer for 15 - 20 minutes until the chicken is cooked through and the vegetables are tender.

Add the fish sauce, kaffir lime leaves and Thai basil.

If you are using tofu, cut it into cubes, squeeze out any excess liquid and fry in a separate frying pan until browned on all sides. Add to the curry just before serving.

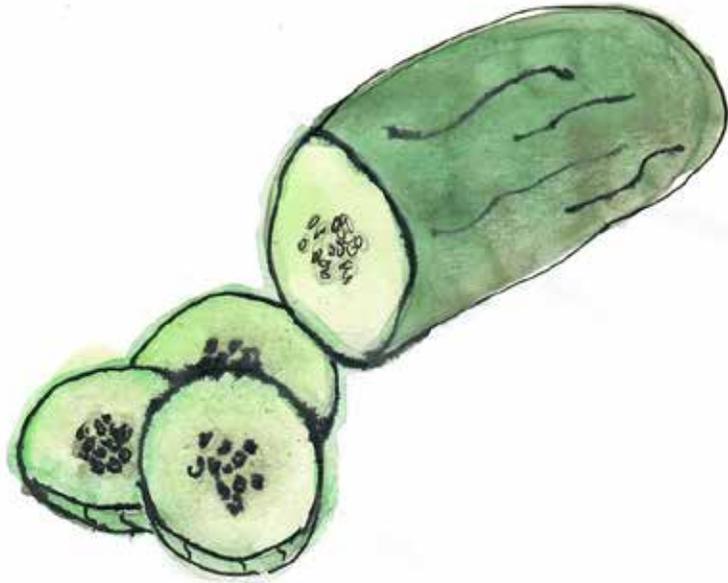
1 courgette, cut into batons
1 cup French beans, halved
2-3 tbsp fish sauce (or to taste)
8 kaffir lime leaves, finely chopped
1 cup Thai basil leaves
1 tbsp olive oil

Freezes well (you can also freeze just the curry paste)



“ Break traditions and make your own. Tradition can be comforting but it can also be a straightjacket. Choose the traditions you like and ditch the ones you don’t. Don’t be a slave to tradition....make your own new ones! ”





Cucumbers

Cucumbers are similar to tomatoes in that they need to grow in the greenhouse to thrive. There are outdoor varieties but a position in the greenhouse gives the best results in all but the hottest of summers. Sow the seeds from mid April in pots in the greenhouse and transfer to their final positions once they are big enough. You can grow them in grow bags but I find grow bags dry out very quickly so it is easier to stay on top of the watering if they go directly into the soil. If you are planting them outside, do it after 1 June to make sure they don't get damaged by a late frost. Make sure you water the plants every day or two throughout the growing and fruiting period. The plants tend to spread so you need to give them space. Pick the cucumbers once they are about 20-30cm long. If you let them get too long and fat, the skin can become a bit tough. Keep picking until the plants run out of steam in September/October.

Homegrown cucumbers are a world away from the supermarket varieties in taste and texture terms. They have a fresh crisp bite that you never get from the supermarket ones and the taste is sweet and fresh with no lingering bitterness which is often present in their shop-bought cousins. Not many of the recipes in this book include cucumbers as I really don't think you can beat eating a chunk of cucumber just as it is!

Music heals

THAI CABBAGE SALAD WITH SEARED SALMON

The dressing on this salad is my go-to alternative to a Dijon vinaigrette. This is a lovely fresh tasting salad that goes brilliantly with seared salmon or you could equally serve it with Thai style chicken or prawns (see p96). It also goes weirdly well with roasted parsnips (page 140)! If you are short on time you could get away without making the dipping sauce and just have the dressing, but I like its salty, spiciness with the salmon. It hits all the taste triggers: the magic combination of sweet, sour, salty, bitter and savoury (sometimes called umami).

SERVES 4

4 fillets of salmon

1 tbsp olive oil

FOR THE SALAD DRESSING

2 tsp soy sauce

3 tbsp rice wine vinegar

3 tbsp sesame oil

¼ tsp demerara sugar

DIPPING SAUCE FOR THE SALMON

Juice of one lime

3 tbsp soy sauce

3 tbsp mirin

½ tsp demerara sugar

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

1 red chilli, finely chopped with seeds removed

FOR THE SALAD

½ a head of Chinese leaf, sliced

1 cucumber, halved lengthways and sliced finely

1 avocado, cut into chunks

First make the salad dressing. Combine all ingredients for the dressing in a screw top jar and shake well. This will keep in the cupboard in a jar for ages.

Next make the dipping sauce. Combine all ingredients and mix well. Set aside.

For the salad, prepare all of the vegetables. The broad and French beans need to be cooked. I tend to blanch and freeze them straight after picking and then for the salad I can grab a couple of handfuls straight from the freezer and boil for 3-4 minutes. Arrange in a salad dish as your creativity takes you. Pour over the dressing just before serving.

Cook the salmon just before you are ready to eat, as it is best fresh from the pan. Remove the skin if you want to (this is personal choice). Heat up a heavy based frying pan to maximum heat and add the olive oil. When it is hot, add the fish but take care here as it will probably spit boiling oil. Fry skin side down first (if you left it on) for approximately 3-4 minutes. Turn and cook the other side for 2-3 minutes. I like it best when there is still an area of darker pink in the centre as it is meltingly tender like that.

Serve a pile of salad with the dressing, a fillet of salmon and the dipping sauce on the side.

½ a pack of beansprouts
1 cup broad beans, cooked
2 cups french beans, steamed
½ cup coriander leaves
2 tsp sesame seeds, dry toasted
until golden in a frying pan

Variation

If you have sprouting broccoli (or normal broccoli works fine too), roast it for 12-15 minutes until tender but crispy on the edges and add to the salad; or if you are in courgette season, slice up and fry a few courgettes to add to the salad.



“**Music heals.** Dance like no one is watching; sing like no one is listening. Enjoy music. You might want sad music to allow you to feel and process your pain, or you might choose happy music to raise the spirits. There is music for every state of mind. Let it wash over you and feel its healing power.”

Choose friends who make you feel good

THAI STYLE CHICKEN OR PRAWNS

This marinade is a delicious balance of the 5 tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter and savoury (sometimes described as umami). The nam jim is a relish with the same flavours as the marinade which boosts the flavour of the dish. Thai cabbage salad from page 94 is a brilliant accompaniment. The flavour of the chicken is best if you marinate it overnight.

SERVES 4

4 chicken breasts or 6-8 chicken thighs (or you could use prawns or pork fillet)

1 tbsp olive oil

FOR THE MARINADE

6 tbsp soy sauce

Juice of two limes

4 tbsp mirin

2 thumb-sized piece of fresh root ginger (approx. 60g), peeled and sliced across the grain

8 cloves of garlic, peeled

2 red chillis

1 cup coriander leaves

4 stems of lemon grass, roughly chopped

4 tsp sesame oil

FOR THE NAM JIM RELISH

Half of the marinade

1 red or white onion

1 tsp dry roasted sesame seeds

First make the marinade. Blitz all the ingredients for the marinade together with a stick blender. The ginger can create a fibrous texture if you blitz it in large chunks, so slice across the grain first to avoid this.

Slice the chicken into bite-sized chunks. Coat the chicken with half of the marinade quantity. You will use the other half for the nam jim. Leave the chicken in the fridge overnight if you have time. If you are using prawns, they only need to marinate for an hour or so.

For the nam jim, add a finely chopped red or white onion and a teaspoon of dry toasted sesame seeds to the remaining half of the marinade. Stir well.

When you are ready to eat, remove the chicken from the marinade and fry in the oil or barbeque over a hot heat. It won't take long; about 3 minutes per side. Serve with the nam jim.

Variation - Chinese pork marinade

For a similar marinade that works brilliantly with a whole pork fillet, blitz together 6 cloves garlic, 1 red chilli, 1 tbsp sesame oil, juice of one lime, 1 tbsp honey, 1 tsp five spice and ½ cup coriander leaves. Marinate for a few hours and then barbeque the whole fillet. Delicious!



“ Choose friends who make you feel good (about yourself). You can't choose everything in life but one thing you can choose is your friends. Do it wisely! Choose friends who respect you, understand you, listen to you, appreciate you, treat you with kindness and make you feel good about yourself. ”



Herbs

Basil

Basil grown outside can be a struggle but in the greenhouse it is a dream. Sow in March in a modular seed tray. Once the seedlings have emerged, thin if necessary so that you have one plant per module. Once the little plants are big enough to handle, prick out and plant into bigger pots to grow on (2 litre pots are about right). Keep watering throughout. Once they have bushed out a bit, you can pick a few leaves here and there so that you don't weaken the plant too much. Keep picking out the top leaves to stop the plants flowering and you can harvest well into October. If you let the plants flower, they will move into seed production and stop growing new leaves.

Mint

The challenge with mint is keeping it under control! Buy a small plant from a garden centre and plant it into a bigger pot. The plant will thrive in a sunny position. Water in well and during dry spells, and you will have leaves to pick throughout summer and autumn. Mint is a perennial which means it will live for multiple years. In winter, cut all stems to the base and they will grow again next year. After a year or two, you will find that the roots are getting overcrowded in the pot. You can either put the mint in a bigger pot or you can divide the plant by chopping the root ball in half in early spring and putting one half back in the same pot with some fresh soil. If you plant mint in open soil, it will spread prolifically so watch out!

Thyme

Thyme is another herb which you can easily keep on a patio or window box. It comes from a Mediterranean climate, so it enjoys a sunny spot and well-drained soil. Like mint, it is a perennial so you will have thyme for years to come. Buy a small plant and pot into a more generous pot with some gravel mixed into the compost to aid drainage. Water in well and then again when it gets dry throughout the growing season. Once the plant has grown big enough, you can start picking. In winter, trim the stems, ready for next year's growth.

Flat leaf parsley

Flat leaf parsley is a much tastier alternative to curly parsley and easy to grow. Sow in the greenhouse in March and prick out into small individual pots. Grow on in the greenhouse until early June by which time they should be sturdy little plants and you can plant them outside. Keep watering and they will increase in size quite quickly and will be quite resilient. Nothing much seems to attack them and you can pick off leaves as you need them from late June through to October and beyond.

Take the credit

HERBY SALSA VERDE

This is a delicious sauce which zings with the taste of summer and goes brilliantly with any grilled chicken or fish.

SERVES 8

1 cup fresh flat leaf parsley leaves

1 cup fresh basil leaves

1 cup fresh mint leaves

1 tbsp fresh thyme leaves

¼ cup capers, rinsed

¼ cup gherkins, rinsed

1 tbsp anchovies in oil, drained

½ cup spring onions, finely sliced

50ml lemon juice

200ml extra virgin olive oil

Chop the herbs, capers, gherkins and anchovies in a food processor until fairly finely chopped.

Stir in the finely sliced spring onions (You could just throw these into the food processor with the herbs, but I think slicing them improves the texture).

Stir in the lemon juice and olive oil and leave covered in the fridge until you are ready to serve.

“ Take the credit. When you have worked hard on something, be proud. Acknowledge the fact that you worked hard and take credit for your achievements. It is good for others to realise how great you are! **”**



Just say no!

MOROCCAN PUY LENTIL SALAD

This salad goes brilliantly with barbequed aubergine slices, slow roasted lamb and hummus. I don't bother making homemade hummus as the supermarket versions are very good but you could if you wanted to.

**SERVES 8-10 as a side dish or
4-6 as a main**

100g puy lentils, cooked

600g (about one small) pumpkin
or squash, peeled, cubed and
roasted

1 red pepper, chopped into small
chunks

2 cups cherry tomatoes, quartered

½ cup mint, chopped

½ cup flat leaf parsley, chopped

100g feta cheese, crumbled
(optional)

1 tbsp pumpkin seeds

2 tbsp pomegranate seeds

2 tsp sumac

2 tbsp pomegranate molasses

Juice of half a lemon

2 tbsp olive oil

Peel the pumpkin, remove the seeds and chop into 2cm cubes. Roast with a drizzle of oil in a large roasting dish for about 1 hour, turning a couple of times during the cooking process.

Next, cook the puy lentils. These are actually really easy to cook. Put in a medium-sized saucepan with about four times their volume of water. They don't require soaking beforehand, cook in about 40 min and don't tend to boil over or stick to the bottom of the pan like some pulses. Cook on a medium heat until they are tender but still with a little bit of bite. Drain and set aside.

Combine the lentils, sumac, herbs and pumpkin seeds in a large bowl. Then mix in the pomegranate molasses, lemon juice and olive oil. Give it all a good stir. Taste to check as you may need a little more lemon juice or oil.

Then add the pumpkin, peppers and tomatoes and stir gently.

Finally, sprinkle over the pomegranate seeds and feta (if using). I am not normally a fan of fruit in savoury dishes but this really works!

Variation - Mediterranean puy lentil salad

Puy lentils are a lovely base for a salad and can be taken in different directions. If you are in the mood for something more Mediterranean, instead of the ingredients above, add roasted red peppers, courgettes and onions, small quartered tomatoes, fried halloumi (or goats cheese or buffalo mozzarella), olives and serve on a bed of salad leaves with lemon juice and olive oil drizzled over.

“ **Just say no!** Sometimes you need to say no....to the general stuff that people ask you to do ALL THE TIME! If you say yes to everything you can be pulled in so many directions. Your whole self is pulled apart and you have no downtime to re-energise and refresh. Everyone has their own limit of how many activities, social engagements, etc. they have capacity for. Find your limit, then, to retain your sanity and strength, start prioritising and sometimes, in the nicest possible way, say no. ”



Laughter is the best medicine

BASIL PESTO

This is a great way of preserving any basil you may have grown and freezes brilliantly in small jars. It also tastes very different from commercial pesto.

MAKES 3-4 200g JARS

4 cups basil leaves

1 cup toasted pine nuts (see p14)

1 cup finely grated parmesan

4 cloves of garlic, peeled and roughly chopped (or more if you like it spicy)

150ml extra virgin olive oil

Put the pine nuts and garlic in the food processor and blitz to fine crumbs. Then add the basil with a good slug of olive oil and blitz again until the leaves are chopped finely. Tip the food processor contents into a bowl and stir in the grated parmesan. Finally, add enough olive oil to loosen the mixture slightly but not too much.

If you put this in small jars and top with a layer of olive oil it will keep for weeks in the fridge or even longer in the freezer.

Freezes well



“ Laughter is the best medicine. Laughing really does make you feel good. Go out with friends who make you laugh. Go and see a hilarious movie. Laugh until your tummy hurts. ”



Garlic

Garlic is the complete opposite of onions in growing terms! I have found that onions don't really grow particularly well and don't keep very well. They are also cheap in the supermarket and I honestly can't taste the difference. Garlic, on the other hand is easy to grow, keeps well and tastes great. Sow individual cloves in October in rows 30cm apart with 20cm between cloves, burying each clove about 5cm deep. They will grow a small grassy stem and sit trouble-free all winter until they start growing more energetically from spring onwards. They may pick up a bit of allium rust (small orange spots on the foliage) towards the end of their growing season but this doesn't seem to impact the bulbs. They are ready to harvest in June/July when the foliage is turning brown. Harvest the plants all in one go by digging the bulbs carefully out of the soil and dry them by laying out in the sun for a few days. You can either leave the long stem on, or cut off but leave at least 10cm above the bulb to help the storing process. Store in a dark place and enjoy over the next few months.

Make sure you buy garlic bred for growing in the UK as, if you plant normal supermarket garlic from a hotter climate, it probably won't like the UK weather. There are softneck and hardneck types and I find the softneck store better. I have managed to grow nearly a year's worth of garlic for the last few years. I have also found that I can successfully plant cloves from some of my own harvest! If you choose the fatter cloves, they will grow into fatter head.

Be proud of your age

GINGER PUY LENTILS WITH COD

SERVES 4

4 fillets of cod or haddock

1 tbsp olive oil

FOR THE LENTILS

200g puy lentils

1 thumb-sized piece of fresh root ginger (approx. 30g), finely chopped

3 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 red chilli, finely chopped and seeds removed if you don't like it too hot

1 red onion, finely chopped

2 tsp cumin seeds, coarsely ground in a pestle and mortar

50ml water

50ml balsamic vinegar

50ml soy sauce

2 tbsp tomato ketchup

1 tbsp sweet chilli sauce

2 tbsp olive oil

½ cup coriander leaves, chopped

Rinse the lentils thoroughly and cook according to pack instructions. They normally take about 40 minutes. Drain and set aside.

In a separate medium-sized saucepan put the ginger, garlic, chilli, onion, cumin, water and vinegar and simmer for 5 minutes to let the flavours mingle and develop.

Pour the onion mixture over the drained lentils and then add the soy sauce, ketchup, sweet chilli sauce, oil and coriander leaves. This can sit in the fridge overnight; in fact, I think it tastes even better on the second day.

When you are ready to eat, heat a frying pan until it is very hot. Pour in the oil and fry the fish at a high temperature. It will take about 4 minutes per side, depending on the thickness of the fillets. You can leave the skin on and it will go deliciously crisp. Sometimes I slice the fish into bite-sized chunks, roll them in flour and shallow fry them in oil to make them even crisper and tastier.

Serve the fish on a large pile of the spiced lentils.



“ **Be proud of your age.** Why won't the world let anyone grow old gracefully any more!?! The proportion of older people is increasing and yet the obsession with youth is out of control. Growing older is just part of life, and sure, dye your hair if you want to but anyone over the age of 40 is not a second class citizen! You may have gained a few wrinkles along the way but think how much you have (or will have!) learned and think of the experiences you have (or will have!) You know yourself better, feel more comfortable in your own skin and have the huge benefit of life experience. That is a fair bargain for a few wrinkles. ”

Wear a smile

SOUTH INDIAN PRAWN CURRY

This is a very simple curry but with a lovely flavour. The dish freezes best if you freeze just the sauce and then add the prawns once you are ready to heat and eat it.

SERVES 4

2 packets of raw king prawns
½ tsp black mustard seeds
½ cup fresh or frozen curry leaves
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 tsp mild red chilli powder
1x 400g tin chopped plum tomatoes
2 tbsp tamarind, soaked in boiling water and sieved to remove solids
½ x 400g tin coconut milk
1 tbsp olive oil

Freezes well

Heat the oil in a large deep frying pan. Pour in the mustard seeds and cook for a minute or two until they crackle. Watch them closely as they will literally jump out of the pan. Add the curry leaves, onion and garlic and fry until soft.

Meanwhile, prepare the tamarind water. Normally tamarind comes in solid blocks complete with stones. Before using it, you need to cut off a slice and soak in boiling water for a few minutes then put through a sieve to remove the solids and keep the resulting tamarind water to use in the dish.

Add the tomatoes, tamarind water and chilli powder to the onion mix. You may need to add a little water. I normally refill the tomato tin and pour that in. Let it simmer for a few minutes.

Finally, add the coconut milk and prawns. Simmer for 3-4 minutes until the prawns turn pink.

Serve and enjoy!

“ **Wear a smile.** What shall I wear? This question is the source of way too much angst. It doesn't matter! Wear whatever, wear it with confidence and wear a smile. ”



Life is not a competition

PEAR CHUTNEY

I planted four pear trees five years ago and have been carefully pruning and training them as espaliers. They are starting to look good but I still have not eaten a single pear! Last year there were a few but before they ripened they were attacked by a combination of wasps and birds. So, for the moment, I am using supermarket pears. I'll keep trying with the trees though.

This chutney is delicious with cheese. Don't eat it for at least 6 months as it needs to mellow. It lasts for years and continues to improve!

MAKES ABOUT 5 x 750g jars

3 kg pears, peeled and roughly chopped (weighed raw)
500g cooking apples, peeled and roughly chopped (weighed raw)
1 kg onions, roughly chopped
225g root ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
5 cloves garlic
6 chillies, deseeded
Zest and juice of one lemon
2.2 litres malt vinegar
25g salt
550g brown sugar

FOR THE PICKLING SPICES

8 cloves
3 tsp coriander seed
3 tsp black mustard seed
1 tsp black peppercorns
1 cinnamon stick
1 tsp allspice
1 tsp juniper berries

You will need a very large and deep saucepan, a 30cm square of muslin cloth and 5 x 750g jars.

Peel and core the apples and pears. Add ½ cup of water and cook in the microwave or on the hob for about 20 minutes to soften the fruit. This helps the chutney to break down into a smooth texture once you get to the main cooking stage. Set aside.

Put the onion, ginger, garlic, chillies, lemon juice and zest in the food processor and chop finely.

Prepare the pickling spices and tie up in a muslin cloth.

Put the vinegar into a very large and deep pan with the spices in the cloth and boil for 3-4 minutes, then turn off the heat.

Add the chopped onion mix, salt and the stewed pears and apples to the pan and bring to a simmer. Cook on a low simmer for about 3 hours with the lid on stirring occasionally.

Once the mixture has cooked down quite a long way, add the sugar and mix well. Continue boiling, leaving the lid off so that the liquid can evaporate. After the sugar is added, there is a risk that the mixture will burn on the bottom, so stir frequently at this stage and be careful as the mixture can spit. The texture should be fairly smooth with no large lumps. It is ready once it is thick and dark. This can take up to 2 hours.

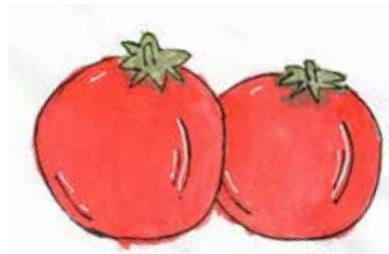
Remove the muslin spice bundle and carefully ladle the chutney into the clean jars. This is a lot easier with a jam funnel. Put the lids on straight away. Store in a cool, dark place and wait 6 months before eating to allow the flavours to mellow and develop.



“ Life is not a competition. It is very easy to get caught up trying to be the best, get to the top, climb up the greasy pole. In a way, I think we pick this attitude up from school where exam results matter; people are compared against each other and only one person can be top of the class. Life is different, though. There are no prizes awarded, no marking scheme. You can decide what you want to achieve and how to plot your course. Don’t get hung up trying to ‘beat’ other people. We can all be winners at life. ”



Tomatoes



Tomatoes are the food of the gods in my humble opinion – healthy and delicious. They grow well in a greenhouse or a warm, sheltered spot outside. I grow cordon tomatoes (as opposed to bush) which means that they are tall, skinny plants, growing a single stem from which the leaves and flowers are produced. They need to be tied into a bamboo or other support as they can't support their own weight. Cordon tomatoes take up less space compared to bush tomatoes which have a more sprawling habit.

Ideally the seeds should be sown in February, but I am always a bit late and it seems to work out. Sow them into a seed tray and put in a warm place: either a heated greenhouse or a sunny windowsill. Once the seedlings are about 10cm tall, prick out into individual 10cm square pots. Make sure they get plenty of light at this stage. You need to wait for the first flowers to start forming (even if you can only see tiny buds) before you plant them into their final location, otherwise they will grow tall and leafy, but won't produce flowers for a while. You can grow them in growbags, large pots or in open soil, either in the greenhouse or a warm sunny spot outside. Once they are in their final position, grow them up bamboo canes and tie them in as they grow. Only plant them outside after 1 June once risk of night frosts has passed.

You will need to water pretty much every day throughout the growing season as they are very thirsty! Adding tomato food every so often, in line with the instructions on the bottle, will definitely improve the flavour. Remember to pinch out the side shoots (the baby sprout between the main stem and where the leaf grows off the main stem) as they grow so that the growth is concentrated into one main stem instead of becoming an unwieldy bush. Keep watering regularly as the fruit develops. If you are sporadic with your watering, you will notice that the tomatoes split when they are watered after a dry patch or can get blossom end rot which makes the tomatoes inedible. Also look out for tomato blight. The tell-tale sign is black patches on the stem. If you see this, drastic action is needed. Completely remove the affected plants and burn or send to your local composting waste facility. Don't put the infected plant material on the compost heap as you can spread the disease.

Start harvesting as soon as the fruit ripens. As the leaves at the bottom start to turn yellow (towards the end of August), gradually remove the bottom leaves. This encourages the tomatoes to ripen and increases air circulation to reduce the chance of disease. By October, any remaining green tomatoes are unlikely to ripen on the plants. At this point, it is best to pick them all and bring them inside where they will ripen if you leave them in a warm area, covered, with a ripe banana. You could always make green tomato chutney if they refuse to ripen. Nurture your tomatoes and you will be rewarded!

Do what makes you happy

TOMATO AND PESTO TART

SERVES 4

1 pack ready rolled reduced fat puff pastry

12 large tomatoes, sliced into ½cm thick slices

200g jar pesto (or homemade see page 104)

Rocket and best quality balsamic vinegar to serve

You will need a shallow roasting tray 40cm x 30cm

Preheat the oven to 200°C (fan oven).

For the tart, spread out the pastry on a large shallow roasting tray (40cm x 30cm) and prick all over with a fork - a bit of a lip on the roasting tray is good as it stops the tomatoes falling off. Bake the pastry in the oven for 10 min at 200°C to start the cooking process and ensure that the finished tart is crisp on the bottom. The pastry should be just starting to brown when you remove it from the oven. If it has puffed up then flatten it with a fish slice.

Spread over a generous layer of pesto. Lay out the tomato slices so that they are overlapping, as close to the edge as you can go.

Turn down the oven to 180°C and return the tart to the oven for 1 hour until the tomatoes look cooked and the pastry around the edge is golden. Serve with rocket and balsamic vinegar.

“Do what makes you happy. If you know what makes you happy, then do it! If you don’t know, then keep looking and one day you will find it. Don’t go down a path that other people think you should follow or spend your life doing what is expected of you. Listen to your heart and do whatever it is that makes you happy.”



Balsamico
di Modena
1977

SQUEFA

UR awesome

CHICKEN FAJITAS WITH REFRIED BEANS

SERVES 4-6

6 chicken breasts or equivalent weight thigh fillets
3 onions, sliced
3 red peppers, cut into strips
1 packet of chestnut mushrooms, sliced
2 tbsp olive oil
2 avocados, roughly chopped with a squeeze of lemon juice
Half an iceberg lettuce, shredded
16-18 flour tortillas

FOR THE MARINADE

4 tbsp mix soleil (see p78)
Juice of one lemon
20ml olive oil
Pinch of Maldon sea salt

FOR THE SALSA

6 medium tomatoes, finely chopped
1 cup coriander leaves, finely chopped
Juice of ½ lime
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
1 red chilli, finely chopped and seeds removed if you don't like it too hot

First marinate the chicken. I like to do this the night before for maximum flavour. Cut the chicken into finger-width strips. In a bowl, combine the lemon juice, olive oil, mix soleil and salt. Stir well and add the chicken. Mix it all around so that it is completely coated. Leave in the fridge until needed.

For the refried beans (you can do this in advance too), fry the onion and garlic in a medium sized saucepan in a drizzle of oil until soft. Drain and rinse all the beans and add to the pan with water about half way up the beans. Simmer for about 20-30 min until the beans are soft enough to mash roughly with a large spoon. You may need to add a little more water to get the right consistency. They don't need to be completely smooth. Add the spices and salt and stir well. Set aside. If you make these ahead of time, you will need to reheat them.

For the salsa, mix all the ingredients together and put in the fridge until needed.

For the onion and pepper mix, fry the onion, red pepper and mushrooms in 1 tbsp olive oil on a medium heat. Keep cooking for 10-15 minutes until they have softened but not too much as you don't want them too sloppy. Set aside.

Just before you want to eat, take the chicken strips out of the marinade and fry in 1 tbsp of oil in a hot frying pan. Don't just pour in the whole lot as you will end up boiling the chicken in the liquid and it won't go brown and crispy around the edges. As the strips are quite small, they don't take long to cook – around 2 minutes per side. Don't be tempted to cook them for longer as they will lose their tenderness. They will continue to cook after you have removed them from the heat.

Finely shred the iceberg lettuce (iceberg gives by far the best crunch), chop the avocado into chunks and pile onto separate dishes.

FOR THE REFRIED BEANS

- 1 tin kidney beans
- 1 tin black beans
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp chilli powder
- Maldon sea salt to taste

Warm the tortillas according to the packet instructions.

I like to put all the components: the tortillas, refried beans, chicken, onion mixture, shredded lettuce, chopped avocado and salsa on the table and let everyone assemble their own fajitas.



“ U R awesome. Yes, you are. ”



Spinach

Spinach

Spinach is a really easy crop if you get the right kind. I always grow perpetual spinach (also known as leaf beet) which keeps producing leaves over a long season. It fills a gap in early spring when there is not much else available from the garden. I have tried other types, more like the supermarket kind, but they seem to go to flower when the plants are still tiny which means they don't produce many leaves. Perpetual spinach has large leaves and needs cooking. It is no good as a salad leaf. It has quite thick stems that run up through the leaf which are best cut out to ensure your resulting dish is tender and delicious.

Sow perpetual spinach in June, directly into the soil. Give them a good water to start them off, water again in dry spells and the seedlings will grow into good-sized plants quite quickly. You can pick a few leaves off each plant to eat once they are big enough. Don't take all the leaves as you need to make sure the plants have enough energy to keep producing more leaves. You normally get a generous crop of leaves to harvest in the autumn while the weather is warm and the plants are growing strongly. Throughout the winter, you may get a few and in the spring the plants will accelerate again and give you more leaves to harvest. Eventually they will start flowering. At this point your harvest is over and you can dig up the plants and donate them to the compost heap.

Remember to listen

SPINACH DAL

SERVES 8

FOR THE DAL

350g dal (split yellow chickpeas)

½ tsp turmeric

1 thumb-sized piece of fresh root ginger (approx. 30g), peeled

A large pinch of Maldon sea salt

FOR SPINACH MIX

350g spinach, washed and shredded

1 tbsp olive oil

1 tsp cumin seeds (whole)

4 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped

1 large onion, finely chopped

½ tsp turmeric

½ tsp red chilli powder

1 tsp garam masala

4 medium tomatoes, chopped into large dice

Freezes well

Rinse the chana dal in the sieve thoroughly as this will reduce the scum during the cooking process. Then leave the dal to soak for at least 30 minutes. It doesn't matter if it is longer.

Put the chana dal in a large, deep saucepan with the turmeric and chunk of ginger. Cover with twice its volume of water. Bring to the boil slowly and simmer until tender. Watch it carefully as it can boil over aggressively. This takes around 100-120 minutes and you will need to top up the water as you go along. Towards the end, it tends to stick to the bottom of the pan. So turn the heat down and make sure you stir frequently. If it does stick, take the pan off the heat for a few minutes and this seems to release the burned on bits. At this stage, don't add too much water as dal shouldn't be too thin. Once it is very nearly cooked, you can leave the pan with the lid on and it will gently continue cooking through.

Meanwhile, make the spinach mixture. With homegrown spinach, I cut the central rib out of each leaf as it can be a bit chewy. Fry the cumin seeds in the oil in a wide, deep saucepan, until they crackle. Then, add the onion and garlic and let them sweat gently until soft. Add the turmeric, chilli powder, garam masala and tomatoes (It is much easier to chop tomatoes with a serrated knife) and cook for another few minutes until the tomatoes soften. Add the shredded spinach and put on the saucepan lid. Mix after a few minutes to ensure all the spinach wilts.

Once the spinach has all wilted, mix the spinach mixture into the dal and add salt as necessary. Either remove the chunks of ginger or warn your eaters!



“**Remember to listen.** To communicate effectively you need to listen as well as talk. So many misunderstandings can be avoided if we communicate more; so many problems solved.”

Respect

SPINACH, COURGETTE, FETA AND QUINOA SALAD

SERVES 8 as a side dish or 4 as a main

100g quinoa, cooked

200g spinach, washed and shredded

5 medium courgettes, chopped into quarters lengthways and then sliced

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

200g feta cheese, crumbled

100g olives

¼ cup flat leaf parsley, finely chopped

½ red chilli, finely chopped

A squeeze of lemon juice

2 tbsp olive oil

Rinse the quinoa thoroughly and put in a pan with about 3 times its volume of water. Boil for 20 minutes. Once ready, set aside but keep warm.

Put 1 tbsp olive oil in a large frying pan and sauté the courgettes with the garlic and a pinch of salt. Once the courgettes are golden brown, remove from the pan.

Wash and shred the spinach. With homegrown spinach, I cut the central rib out of each leaf as it can be a bit chewy. Put a drizzle of olive oil in the frying pan and add the shredded spinach. Put the lid on and let it steam for about 5 minutes by which time it should have wilted down. Take it off the heat.

Assemble the salad on individual plates by layering up quinoa, spinach, courgette, feta, parsley, chilli and olives. Squeeze over the lemon juice and drizzle over the remaining olive oil. Serve warm.

“ **Respect.** Respect is so important. Respecting yourself but also expecting respect from those around you. It is especially important in a relationship to treat each other with respect. Always. ”



Be adventurous

TERIYAKI CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

SERVES 4

4 chicken breasts, each one cut horizontally to make 2 long flat fillets

2 cups baby spinach leaves

½ bag beansprouts

½ cup coriander leaves

1 red chilli, sliced

300g buckwheat noodles

FOR THE TERIYAKI MARINADE

4 tbsp sake

4 tbsp soy

4 tbsp mirin

½ tsp demerara sugar

FOR THE BROTH

2 litres vegetable stock

2 tsp sweet chilli sauce

1 thumb-sized piece of fresh root ginger (approx. 30g), grated with a microplane grater

2 tbsp soy sauce

1 tbsp fish sauce

Juice of one lime

First marinate the chicken breast. I like to do this the day before for maximum flavour. Mix the teriyaki marinade ingredients together and put the chicken breasts into the marinade. Slicing the chicken breasts horizontally is a way to get more flavour into the chicken as you are increasing the surface area. It also makes them quicker to grill so that you don't risk drying them out. Make sure you turn the chicken a couple of times during the marinating time to ensure they are coated on all sides.

For the broth, mix all ingredients except the lime juice in a large saucepan and bring to the boil.

Meanwhile, cook the noodles according to the packet instructions. Also remove the chicken from its marinade and cook under a hot grill. It should only need about 3-4 minutes per side.

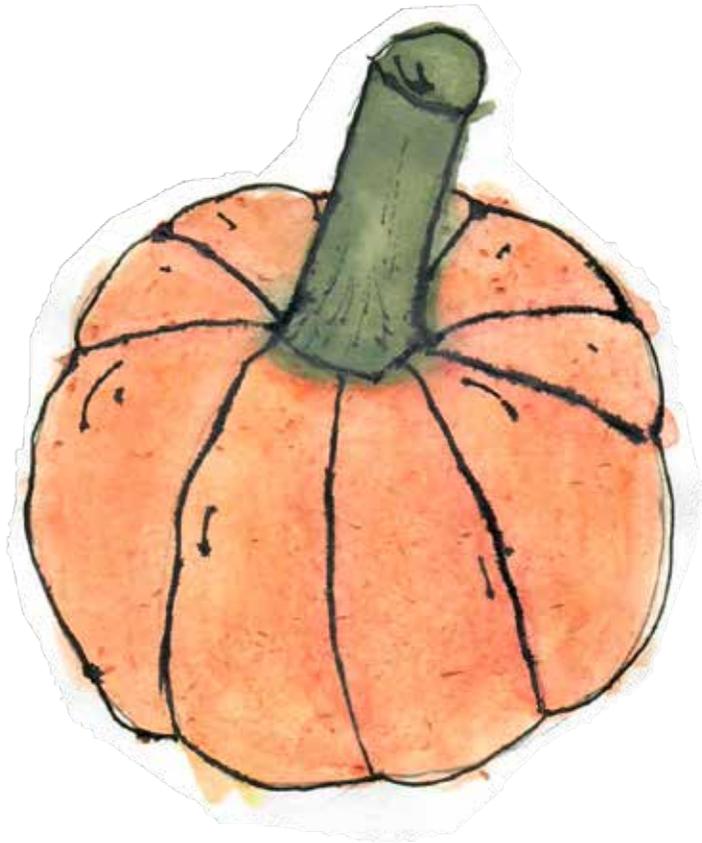
Once the chicken is cooked, slice it finely across the grain.

To assemble, put the noodles in the bottom of each bowl, pour over the broth, put a large handful of baby spinach and beansprouts in each bowl, finish by laying the sliced chicken breast on the top with a sprinkle of coriander, some red chilli and a squeeze of lime juice. Dive in straight away.



“ **Be adventurous.** Treat life like one big adventure...keep exploring new places and seeking out new experiences. ”





Pumpkin

Pumpkins are easy and fun to grow as you can carve a great Hallowe'en lantern but they taste great too, if you choose the right variety. They will also last for months in a cool dry place.

They do like to wander around the vegetable patch so give them space. They like the same treatment as courgettes – sow them in the greenhouse in March, plant out after 1st June, give them plenty of nutritious soil and water them generously. The pumpkins start as small green balls and grow over the summer until they ripen in autumn and turn orange. Harvest in October once they are orange and the leaves have turned brown. To ensure they store well, try not to damage the stem when you cut them from the bush. It is safer to cut them a bit further up the vine. Store them in a cool, dry place and they will last well into December.

I have found them to be tastier and easier to deal with than squash. The Crown Prince or butternut type squashes I have tried either don't taste particularly good or require an axe to cut through the skin - not too handy for the kitchen! My favourite variety is 'Becky' which is quite a small pumpkin so it is easy to peel and chop and has a better taste than some of the bigger ones. It has just the right look for a Hallowe'en lantern. Here are some of my favourite recipes with pumpkin.

Be satisfied

MOROCCAN CHICKPEA STEW

SERVES 8-10

FOR THE SPICE MIX

- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 3 tbsp coriander seeds
- 3 tbsp cumin
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 4 cloves
- 8 cloves garlic
- 2 thumb-sized pieces of fresh root ginger (approx. 60g), peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 cup coriander leaves and stalks

FOR THE STEW

- 4 medium onions (2 finely chopped, 2 quartered)
- 1 x 400g tin chopped plum tomatoes
- 500g waxy potatoes, chopped into 2cm chunks
- 1 small pumpkin, peeled, deseeded and chopped into 2cm chunks (approx 600g)
- 5 large carrots, peeled and chopped into 2cm chunks
- 1 tin of chickpeas
- 2 vegetable stock cubes
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup green olives
- Salt to taste

Freezes well

Start with the spice mix. Toast the dry spices in a frying pan gently until you can smell their aroma. Watch carefully as they can burn fast! Then grind the spices either in a pestle and mortar or I find it much easier and more effective in a coffee grinder. Alternatively, if you want a shortcut, you can buy the spices ready ground.

Put all the ingredients for the spice mix, including the ground dry spices, into a container and blitz with a stick blender to a fine paste. Add ½ cup water to get it all moving.

Fry the finely chopped onions in a large casserole dish with the oil on a low heat until soft. Add the spice mix and sweat gently for a few minutes.

Add the chopped vegetables (except the pumpkin), tinned tomatoes, chickpeas and stock cubes and then top up with boiling water. Simmer over a medium heat for about 15 minutes then add the pumpkin. Simmer for a further 1 hour until everything is soft.

Top with green olives and serve with couscous or crusty bread. Add the olives at the last minute as I find that they lose their flavour if they are cooked.



“ **Be satisfied.** It’s good to be ambitious in life but it is also good to be satisfied with what you already have. Don’t focus so hard on striving for the next thing that you forget to appreciate what you have already achieved. Sometimes you might even just stop and enjoy. ”

Be active

PUMPKIN, PEA AND FETA SALAD

This salad is a real crowd pleaser – everyone always loves it.

SERVES 8-10 as a side dish or 4 as a main

½ large bag of baby spinach leaves (approx. 120g)

3 cups of frozen peas

2 avocados, peeled and chopped

1 pumpkin, peeled, deseeded, chopped, and roasted

200g feta cheese, crumbled

½ cup toasted pine nuts (see p14)

2 tbsp olive oil

Dijon dressing

Preheat oven to 200°C (fan oven).

First prepare the pumpkin. You need to peel it, scrape out the seeds and finally chop into bite-sized chunks. Then roast in the oven at 200°C drizzled with the olive oil for about 45 minutes until the chunks are turning brown at the edges. It will need turning half way through the cooking time. Don't worry if the pieces break up a bit. Once roasted, set aside.

Cook the frozen peas in boiling water and drain.

In a large salad bowl or platter, lay out the spinach leaves and layer up the pumpkin, peas, avocados, feta cheese and pine nuts. Pour over the dressing. I like this with the pumpkin and peas still warm but it is equally good cold.

“Be active. Find an activity you enjoy and then it will be easier to stick to it. Don't embark on a gym membership if you hate the gym. Exercise will make you fitter, stronger and feel better about yourself. It also has the magical ability to produce endorphins in your body which really do make you feel happier. **”**



Hello, I'm...

PUMPKIN, LEMONGRASS AND COCONUT SOUP

I don't make many soups as in the past I have made large quantities, frozen them in portions and then got bored with eating them. This is different! It tastes so good - wholesome, but with a bit of zing - you won't get bored with it.

SERVES 8

1 small/medium pumpkin, peeled, deseeded and chopped into approx. 2cm chunks (about 800g prepared weight)

1 medium onion, chopped

1 thumb-sized piece fresh root ginger (approx. 30g), peeled and chopped

4 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 chilli, chopped (remove seeds if you don't like it too spicy)

4 sticks of lemongrass, chopped

1 cube of vegetable stock

½ x 400g can of coconut milk

2 tsp cumin seeds

2 tsp coriander seeds

1 tbsp fish sauce

1 tbsp olive oil

Freezes well

Grind the cumin and coriander seeds in a pestle and mortar.

Fry the onion, garlic, ginger and chilli in the olive oil in large pan until soft.

Add the pumpkin, ground spices and vegetable stock cube and pour over boiling water to cover the vegetables. Add the coconut milk and simmer for about 30 minutes until the pumpkin is very soft.

Blend the soup. I find it easiest to do this with a stick blender directly in the saucepan. Add fish sauce and taste to check if it needs a bit more salt.



“ **Hello, I’m...** If you are in any social situation, party, school thing, work thing and you are feeling awkward because you don’t know anybody else there, just go and introduce yourself to someone else: ‘Hello, I’m’ Choose someone who looks as though they might be feeling the same way as you. Do it early on, before you end up standing around for a while feeling even more awkward. The other person will be delighted that you have broken the ice and you will feel so much better! If you are not sure what to talk about, ask questions. Most people find it easy to talk about themselves! After that, things will flow.”

It's ok not to have a plan

MEXICAN BEAN STEW

SERVES 8

2 onions, finely chopped
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 punnet chestnut mushrooms, chopped
2 red peppers, chopped
1 small/medium butternut squash or pumpkin, chopped in 1cm cubes (approx. 800g prepared)
2 x 400g tins black eyed beans, black beans or aduki beans (any combination)
2 vegetable stock cubes
3 x 400g tins chopped plum tomatoes
3 tbsp dried oregano
½ tsp demerara sugar
2 green chillis, finely chopped
3 tsp cumin seeds, ground in a pestle and mortar
3 tsp smoked paprika
Juice of 1 lime
½ cup coriander leaves, chopped
1 tbsp olive oil
Maldon sea salt to taste

Freezes well

Fry the onions, chillis and garlic in a large casserole dish, in the olive oil, until soft then add the red peppers and mushrooms and fry for a bit longer.

Add the squash or pumpkin, tinned tomatoes, stock cubes, beans (drained and rinsed), oregano, cumin, paprika and sugar. Stir all the ingredients together and add about ½ pint of boiling water, enough to cover the vegetables. Simmer for 30 minutes until all the squash is soft.

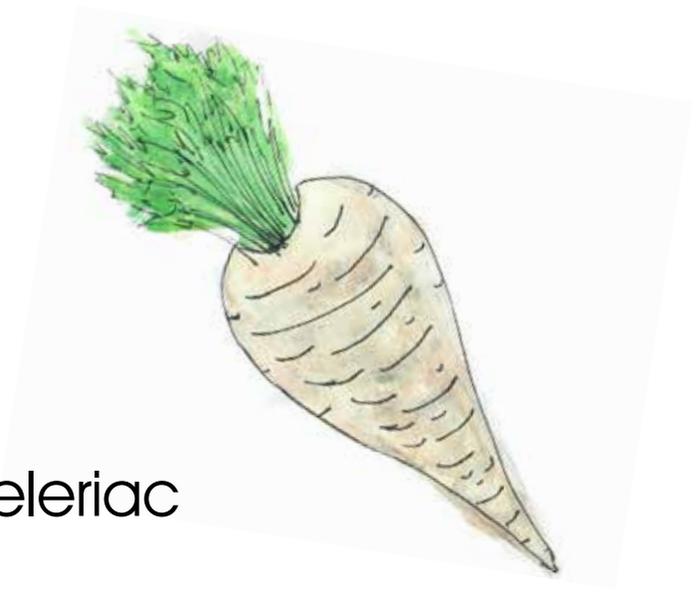
Add the lime juice at the end of cooking.

Serve with a sprinkle of coriander leaves and your choice of crusty bread, tortilla, quinoa or rice. A chopped avocado is also a great addition.

“It’s ok not to have a plan. We are often told that we need to set objectives, track progress, reach milestones. But I am not so sure about that. It depends what kind of person you are and what you are trying to achieve. Sure, if you know where you want to get to, by all means, make a plan. But you may not - in which case, there is no shame in wending your way through life and plotting your course as you go along.”







Parsnips and celeriac

Parsnips are relatively trouble free. You sow the seeds straight into the prepared ground in March/April. Sow them quite thinly as they usually germinate fairly reliably as long as you buy a new packet of seed every year. Germination can take several weeks so be patient. Most seed will stay viable for a few years but not parsnips. Thin out the seedlings if necessary to leave about 7cm in between which will give the parsnips enough space to grow. Keep the parsnips weed-free and water during dry spells throughout the summer. By the autumn, your parsnips will be looking pretty good but you shouldn't harvest until the first frost as this is supposed to make the roots sweeter (I am not sure about this, but I follow the guidance anyway). When you are digging up your precious parsnips, make sure you use a spade as a fork can damage the roots. Dig them up as you need them as they will stay in the ground happily all winter. They may develop brown patches on the skin called parsnip canker but you can cut this off and they are still fine to eat.

Celeriac is not a very good-looking vegetable but it has a nice flavour (quite a lot like celery) and is available in the winter when there might not be much else coming out of the veg patch. I sow the seeds in the greenhouse in March in modular seed trays with several seeds per module. Once they are up, thin them out so that you have only one plant per module. Plant the little plants outside in May, leaving about 30 cm between plants and water in well. They will quietly get on with growing without too much input, except a bit of weeding. Throughout August and September, when the roots starts swelling, it is important to tear off the bottom layer of leaves every so often as it helps the roots to expand. Water during dry spells. You can harvest once the roots are big enough and continue harvesting throughout the winter. I leave the roots in the soil until I need them but cover with environmesh or fleece to stop them freezing. As a large part of the root is above ground, it is vulnerable to frost. You can dig it up and store in a shed but the one time I did that, the mice had a feast and I had no celeriac!

Keep smiling

ROAST PARSNIPS OR CELERIAC

I have tried cooking parsnips in lots of different ways: mashing, soup, in curries, but I can't find a better and more appealing way to cook them than good old-fashioned roast parsnips. They are quick to cook and don't need parboiling (boiling them for a few minutes before roasting them) like traditional roast potatoes. I also find they go really well with all sorts of dishes you might not expect, not just your standard Sunday roast. They are delicious with any kind of Asian-style salad, holiday bean casserole or ratatouille.

SERVES 4

500g parsnips and or celeriac,
washed, peeled and chopped into
large chunks

Olive oil to coat

Maldon sea salt to taste

Preheat the oven to 200°C (fan oven).

Wash, peel and chop the vegetables. If it is getting towards late winter/early spring, you may need to remove the core from the parsnips as it can get a bit tough. Earlier on I don't find any problem with it.

Put the veg in a roasting dish and drizzle over the olive oil, giving it all a good shake to coat the pieces thoroughly. Sprinkle over a generous pinch of salt. If you prepare the veg before you are ready to cook them, make sure you either leave them covered with cold water or coat them thoroughly in oil as otherwise they can turn brown.

Roast in the oven for about 45 minutes, turning them a couple of times during the cooking process. Eat straight away.

Variation - winter roasted vegetables

You can make a mix of various winter vegetables: pumpkin, carrot, parsnip, celeriac and onion. Wash and peel the vegetables and chop into 2cm chunks. Tip the vegetables into a large roasting tin but set aside the pumpkin and onion as they take a shorter time to cook. Drizzle in olive oil with a sprinkling of sea salt for about 20 minutes and then add the pumpkin and onion, giving everything a good mix and scraping off the bottom of the pan if things have stuck. Roast for a further 20-30 minutes until the vegetables are soft and turning brown at the edges.



“Keep smiling. Even when you don’t feel like it, try and force out a smile. You will find that people smile back and that makes you feel a bit better.”

It's fine to complain... sometimes

ASIAN SLAW

SERVES 8-10 as a side dish or 4 as a main

½ white cabbage, finely shredded
4 medium carrots, grated
1 red pepper, finely chopped
1 celeriac, grated (if available)
1 cup broad beans or edamame beans (cooked)
1 cup sugar snap peas, trimmed and cut into chunks
2 avocados, cut into chunks
½ cup roasted peanuts, chopped or dry roasted sesame seeds
½ cup fresh coriander leaves, chopped

FOR THE DRESSING

½ tsp runny honey
4 tbsp rice vinegar
1 tbsp soy sauce
4 tbsp sesame oil
3 tbsp reduced fat mayonnaise
1 red chilli, finely chopped with seeds removed (optional)
1 thumb-sized piece of fresh root ginger (approx. 30g), grated with a microplane grater
2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

First make the dressing. Put all the ingredients into a jar and shake well.

Cook the podded broad beans for about 5 minutes in a pan with about 2cm of water in the bottom. Drain and leave to cool. A good substitute when broad beans are not available is frozen edamame beans which can be cooked in the same way.

Prepare all the vegetables and combine in a large bowl. Pour over the dressing and mix well.

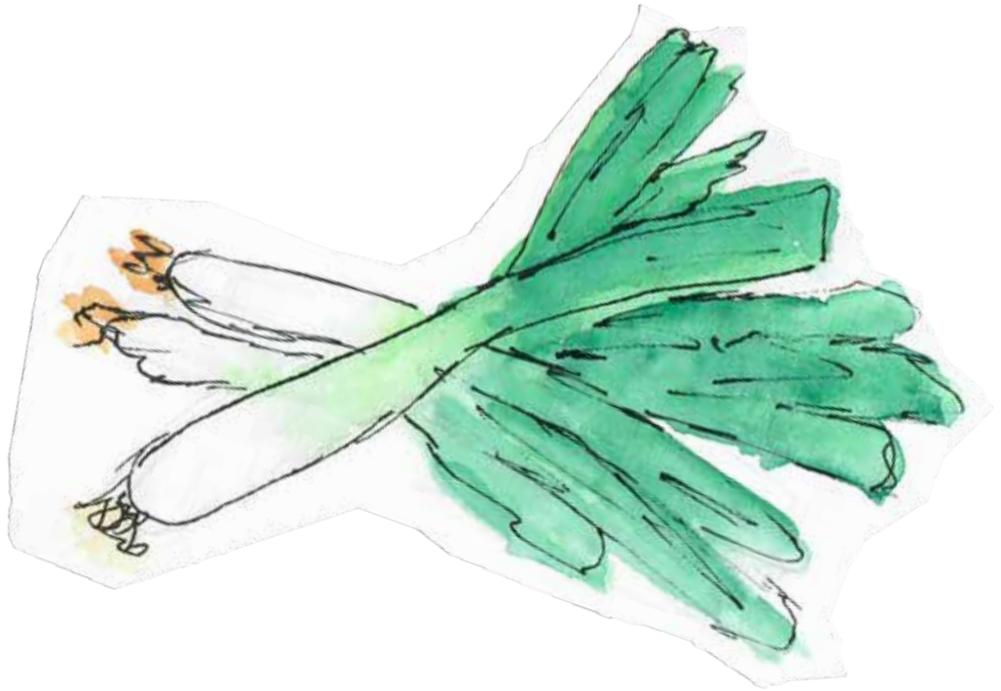
Sprinkle with peanuts or sesame seeds and coriander to serve.



“It’s fine to complain...sometimes. From time to time, we all need a good moan. Things don’t go perfectly all of the time and in those situations we are entitled to complain, vent or rant to our good friends. Going through the process of complaining can help you to see a solution to the problem, might prompt you to make a change that will make things better or might help you to get it out of your system and move on. If you find, however, that you are complaining on a regular basis then you need to take a good look at the cause and make a change for the better. ”



Leeks



Sow leek seeds in March in the greenhouse in seed trays. I find only a relatively small percentage germinate so I hardly ever have to thin them out. You may have more luck! Once they are about 2mm in diameter (normally around May time) their growth seems to stall in the seed tray so I move them to a temporary outside position in the veg patch for a few more weeks, until about June or July. Keep them watered during this time. When they are the thickness of a pencil and at least 30cm tall, they are ready to put in their final positions where they will stay until they are ready to be harvested in winter. Dig up the leeks and trim their roots to about 1cm with sharp secateurs. This may seem a bit mean but it encourages new root growth. Make a deep hole with a dibber and drop the trimmed leek into the hole. Don't backfill with soil; instead fill with water which will then drain away. Space the holes 20cm apart in rows 30cm apart. The deep holes create the white part of the leek as only the part above ground turns green. Water during dry spells throughout summer and autumn.

You need to watch out for allium miner which can be terminal if left. The bug crawls down inside the middle where the new leaves are developing and lays eggs which hatch into hungry caterpillars which then eat their way out causing a lot of damage. The only reliable defence I have found is regular inspection - looking down the middle to see whether you can see evidence of any visitors. If you find any, squash them.

The other potential problem is less serious. It is rust which normally develops once they are a bit bigger and usually only seems to affect the outer leaves that I will cut off anyway. Harvest during the winter when the leeks have thickened to a good diameter. These tough vegetables will stand all winter, happily putting up with rain, wind and snow without damage. You can dig them up as you need them. Make sure you dig them up with a spade and dig extra deep as you don't want to damage them whilst digging them up.

Be your own cheerleader

CHEESY LEEKS

SERVES 4

FOR THE LEEKS

1kg leeks, washed and sliced

1 tbsp olive oil

1 cup parmesan, grated

FOR THE BÉCHAMEL SAUCE

50g (approx. 2cm slice) butter

Approx. 1 cup plain flour

1.5 - 2 pints semi-skimmed milk

1 tsp Colman's mustard powder

1 pinch of Maldon sea salt

You will need an oven-proof lasagne dish 20cm x 30cm and at least 5cm deep

Freezes well

Preheat the oven to 200°C (fan oven).

First, wash the leeks carefully. They often have grit all the way down inside so I cut along their length nearly all the way to the root end to make them easier to wash. Next, slice them quite finely. Put the oil into a large, deep frying pan and pile in the leeks over a medium heat. Stir every so often while they gently fry (10 - 15 minutes). Once they are soft, take off the heat and pour into the lasagne dish.

Meanwhile, make the béchamel sauce. Melt the butter in a medium-sized saucepan over a medium heat. Once melted, sprinkle over the flour and mix well. Add as much flour as you can combine into the butter until it starts to go a bit powdery. Next, add about half a pint of milk. Mix well and keep stirring, still on the heat, until the mixture is smooth. I find it easiest to use a balloon whisk to stir. It will thicken as it cooks. Continue stirring and once thickened, add another half pint of milk. Keep stirring, waiting for it to thicken and then adding more milk. It is important to keep stirring throughout this process as it very easily burns on the bottom of the pan or becomes lumpy; neither is a desirable outcome! Once you have added all the milk, it should start bubbling. Add more milk if you need to so that it is runny enough to pour but still nicely thick. Finally, stir in the mustard powder thoroughly. This process will take about 30 minutes.

Pour the béchamel sauce over the leeks and sprinkle over the grated parmesan. At this point, you can either bake it straight away or put it in the fridge or freezer. If you are baking it straight away, bake in the oven at 200°C for about 30 minutes until the top is golden brown. If you are baking from cold, it will take closer to 1 hour. If you have frozen it, defrost fully before cooking.

Variation - cauliflower and broccoli cheese

If you don't want to use leeks for this, then a delicious alternative is a mixture of cauliflower and broccoli. Cut into florets and steam the cauliflower and broccoli for about 10 minutes until tender, then continue as above with the béchamel sauce.



“ Be your own cheerleader. People (often women) who don't draw attention to their work are less likely to get promoted than someone who shouts about their achievements. The workplace is not a place for British modesty. Inside or outside the work environment, it is healthy to acknowledge and be proud of your achievements and it will increase your sense of self-worth to acknowledge them. Sometimes it is good to blow your own trumpet! ”

STARTERS

I know it might seem slightly odd to put the starter section after the mains but I find that, when planning a meal, I focus first on the main course which is usually driven by what is available from the veg patch. A starter is a bit of an afterthought and has to be something fairly quick and easy; a sharing dish for people to nibble on to keep the hunger at bay until the main course is ready!

Be determined BAKED CAMEMBERT ▼

Get creative CHILLI PHILLY DIP WITH PITTA BREAD CRACKERS ▼

Be kind to yourself CACIK DIP ▼

Where are the WIIFMs? EZME ▼

Keep talking TOMATO AND CHILLI SALSA ▼

Be determined

BAKED CAMEMBERT

This is one of the easiest dishes ever; it makes for a lovely starter to share or a pre-lunch or dinner nibble.

In French supermarkets, you can buy camembert in small terracotta pots which are designed to go in the oven. Freshly baked bread is a marvellous accompaniment to dip into the hot and runny camembert. I don't have time to make fresh bread so a great cheat's option is to buy supermarket bakery bread and rebake at home to crisp it up and make it soft inside. Freezing ahead of time and defrosting before baking does it no harm at all; in fact, I would say it improves it.

SERVES 8

1 whole Camembert

1 tsp herbes de Provence

Bread to serve, for example
supermarket ciabatta or sunflower
and honey loaf

You will need a Camembert sized
heat-proof terracotta dish

Preheat the oven to 200°C (fan oven).

Put the Camembert into the baking dish and sprinkle the herbs over the top. Bake for 30 minutes at 200°C until puffed up and meltingly oozy in the middle.

I like to serve it with a supermarket ciabatta or sunflower and honey loaf, warmed through in the oven for 15 minutes. Warming the bread makes all the difference. Slice the bread and get dipping!

“Be determined. Never give up. You won't get where you want to get to by giving up.”



Get creative

CHILLI PHILLY DIP WITH PITTA BREAD CRACKERS

Another super easy, pre-meal snack.

SERVES 8

200g cream cheese

50ml sweet chilli sauce

½ cup coriander leaves

FOR THE PITTA BREAD

5-6 wholemeal mini pitta breads

1 tsp smoked paprika

Preheat oven to 200°C (fan oven).

Cut the pitta breads into triangular pieces and open them out so that they are in a single layer.

Lay the triangles out on a baking sheet and sprinkle with the smoked paprika.

Bake for 8-10 minutes until crisp and slightly brown.

Meanwhile, turn out the whole tub of cream cheese onto the serving platter. Pour over the sweet chilli sauce and sprinkle over the coriander leaves.

Serve the cream cheese with the pitta bread crackers.

“ **Get creative.** A bit of unstructured creativity is good for our brains. I used to think that I wasn't at all creative as I wasn't musical or arty but I didn't understand the nature of creativity. Creativity doesn't have to be about writing a symphony or painting a masterpiece, you can create anything! It can be surprisingly satisfying. It might be a spot of gardening or cooking, doing some colouring, making a fancy dress outfit, writing a poem, fixing something broken instead of buying a new one. Or it could be a bigger project, building a shed, fixing up a car, learning a musical instrument. Using parts of our brain that we don't normally use for day to day existence is a good thing. ”



Be kind to yourself

CACIK DIP

This is a delicious creamy dip from Turkey which is great with warmed pitta bread. It also combines well with ezme (see recipe below). You could even make it into a meal by combining with falafel, ezme (see recipes on page 44 and 156), hummus, salad leaves and good flat bread or pitta bread.

SERVES 8

2 cucumbers, peeled and grated

500g Greek-style yoghurt

2 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped

1 tbsp dill, finely chopped

Salt to taste

Olive oil to drizzle

Firstly peel and then grate the cucumbers into a bowl. Squeeze the grated cucumbers between two plates and pour off the excess juice. Add the chopped garlic, dill and the Greek yoghurt. Mix well and add salt to taste.

Garnish with a sprig of dill and a drizzle of olive oil. Refrigerate until you are ready to serve.

“ **Be kind to yourself.** Why do we always beat ourselves up? No one is perfect! Don't expect yourself to be either. Learn to accept your imperfections. You wouldn't treat a good friend the way you treat yourself sometimes. Give yourself a break, be tolerant and accepting....be kind to yourself. While we are on the topic of being kind...be kind to others too! You will never wake up regretting what you said or worrying that you upset someone if you always try to be kind and try not to hurt other people's feelings. Being kind to others will make you feel better about yourself too. ”



Where are the WIIFMs?



This is a great dip for sharing. You can even make it into a meal by combining with falafel, cacik (see recipes on page 44 and 154), hummus, salad leaves and good flat bread or pitta bread.

SERVES 6-8

450g fresh ripe tomatoes, finely chopped
1 green pepper, finely chopped
1 small red onion, finely chopped
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
1/4 cup flat leaf parsley, finely chopped
1 tbsp lemon juice
3 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp pomegranate molasses
1 tsp sumac
A pinch of dried mint
A pinch of salt
Pitta bread to serve

Chop the tomatoes, onion, garlic, green pepper and parsley finely and mix in a bowl.

Add the lemon juice, pomegranate molasses, olive oil, sumac, mint and salt and mix thoroughly.

Chill for 30 minutes before serving with pitta bread or similar to dip.

“ **Where are the WIIFMs.** I love the concept of WIIFMs because it is a reflection of human nature. WIIFM stands for ‘what’s in it for me’, and we all care about that. When weighing up options, it is important to think about yourself, what you are going to get out of the different options and what is important to you. ”



Keep talking

TOMATO AND CHILLI SALSA

SERVES 6-8

450g fresh ripe tomatoes, finely chopped

1 cucumber, chopped into small cubes

1 tsp cumin seeds

3 cloves of fresh garlic, finely chopped

½ cup each mint and coriander leaves, finely chopped

Juice from half a lime

Tortilla chips to serve

Dry roast the cumin seeds and then grind them in a pestle and mortar.

If the tomatoes are very juicy after you have chopped them, pour off some of the juice so that the salsa is not too sloppy. Combine all the ingredients in a bowl and mix thoroughly.

Leave in the fridge for an hour or two to let the flavours mingle but not for too long.

“ **Keep talking.** Problems in relationships almost always stem from a lack of communication. Continued communication breakdown will certainly make things worse. Keep talking. Say what you feel, remember to listen and be prepared to compromise, a bit, for something that is worth holding on to. ”



PUDDINGS

Think thrice before you post and don't be a RHUBARB FOOL

Ask! RHUBARB, ALMOND AND GINGER PUDDING

Looks are overrated GOOSEBERRY AND ELDERFLOWER PARFAIT

Don't worry be happy BLACKCURRANT SORBET

Enjoy the journey BAKED CHEESECAKE WITH BERRY COULIS

'Like this!' STRAWBERRY CHEESECAKE WITH CHOCOLATE BASE

Failure is great LEMON DRIZZLE CAKE WITH RASPBERRIES

One thing at a time VICTORIA SPONGE CAKE

Materialism disappoints STICKY DATE CAKE

See the good CHOCOLATE AND ALMOND CAKE

What's inside counts most SPICED CHOCOLATE LOAF

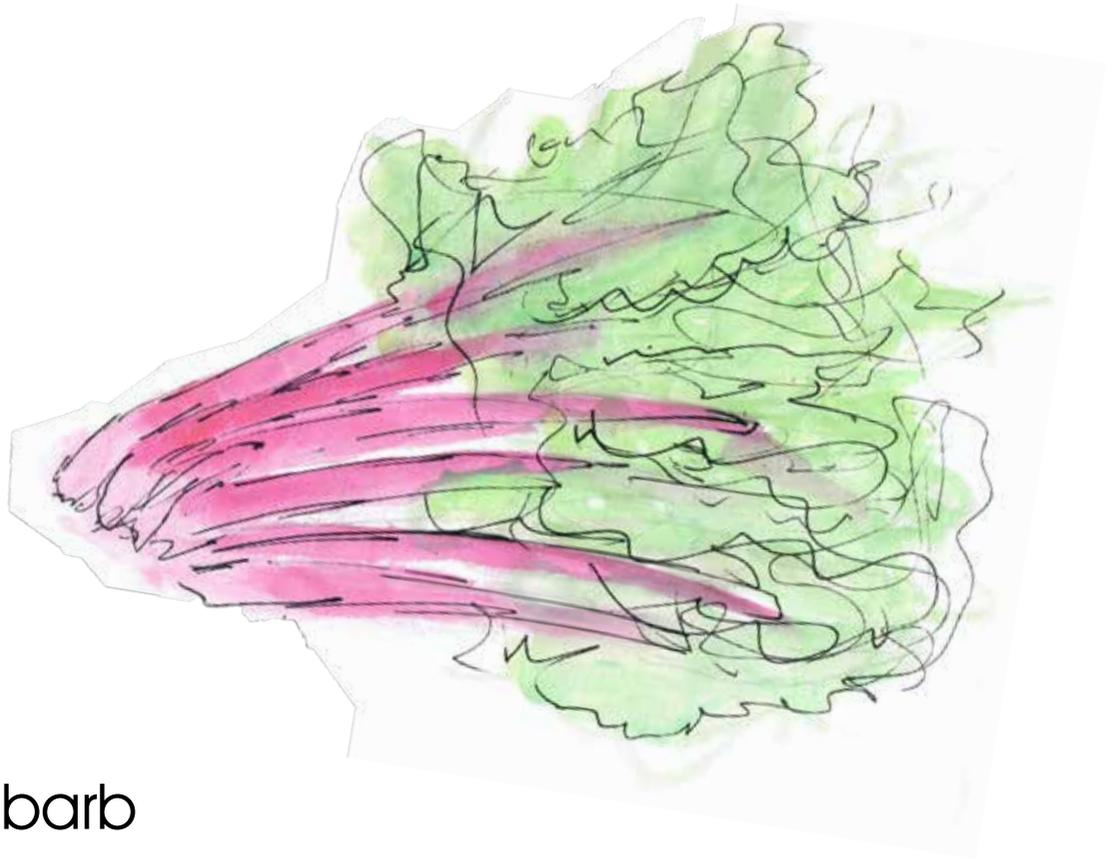
No belfies BANANA AND CHOCOLATE CHIP LOAF

Have an opinion CHOCOLATE RING CAKE

Just do it! ORANGE AND ALMOND SQUISHY CAKE

Ask a friend OATY RAISIN COOKIES
Sorry not sorry MELTING GINGER BISCUITS
Seek help CHOCOLATE BUTTON BISCUITS
Party like a child GINGERBREAD PEOPLE
Share CHOCOLATE MARSHMALLOW COOKIES
Be resilient life can be a ROCKY ROAD
Be kind to our planet GATEAU BRETON
If at first you don't succeed... RICE KRISPIE TREATS
Confidence is KEY LIME PIE
Sleep is sacred CARAMELISED APPLE TARTE TATIN
Accept a compliment SYRUPY PEAR TART
Why take drugs? TIRAMISU
Do your own thing MERINGUE STACK
Don't let a little problem grow CHOCOLATE MERINGUES





Rhubarb

Rhubarb is another easy fruit to grow (although technically a vegetable as we eat the stalk). It is a perennial so it just sits in the soil, year after year, producing beautiful pink stems with large crinkly leaves. Be aware that the leaves are poisonous. You can harvest it as soon as the stems are long enough which is normally in March. Keep picking some, but not all, of the stems until about June. When you harvest, you need to pull a stem out at the base instead of cutting. This reduces the chance of disease and rot. From June, the bush needs to rest and regenerate for the rest of the season. It is possible to 'force' rhubarb, which involves putting a cover over the plant before it starts growing in January. It is supposed to make the crop earlier and the stems pinker and sweeter. I am not convinced. It just seems to weaken the vigour of the plant and reduce the volume of the harvest.

Think thrice before you post and don't be a...

RHUBARB FOOL

This is one of the simplest things to do with rhubarb but also one of the most delicious. It looks prettier if you serve it in ramekins or small glasses.

SERVES 8

1kg rhubarb

350g caster sugar

Zest of 1 orange, finely grated
(optional)

900ml double cream

Wash the rhubarb and chop into 2cm lengths. If you want an orangey tang, then add the zest from an orange at this stage. Cook in a saucepan on the hob with a dash of water over a medium heat for about 10 minutes until soft. Add the sugar and give it a good stir to break up any remaining chunks. The volume of stewed rhubarb should be approximately the same as the unwhipped cream.

Whip the cream to soft peaks.

Fold the rhubarb into the cream and chill.

“ **Think thrice before you post.** In the rollercoaster world of social media, it is easy to get carried away in the heat of the moment. However, once something is ‘out there’ you can’t take it back. If you are about to post something, stop and think. If it is a message to or a comment about someone, would you say it to their face? If it is a photo or video, would you be happy for your granny or a future employer to see it? Pause, think a second time, and then for good measure, think again. ”



ASK!

RHUBARB, ALMOND AND GINGER PUDDING

SERVES 4-6

FOR THE RHUBARB

400g rhubarb, cut into 2cm chunks

80g light brown sugar

FOR THE TOPPING

120g butter, softened

120g caster sugar

2 eggs

Zest of 1 orange, finely grated

120g ground almonds

2 tbsp self-raising flour

Extra thick double cream, to serve

You will need a 24cm x 24cm x 6cm oven proof dish

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Mix the rhubarb and light brown sugar in an ovenproof dish.

In a separate bowl, cream the butter and caster sugar until smooth and fluffy. Beat in the eggs and the orange zest. Fold the almonds and flour into the mixture. Finally, spread the mixture over the top of the rhubarb.

Cook in the oven for 45 minutes until golden brown.

Serve warm with extra thick double cream.



“ **Ask!** If there is something you want and you don’t ask for it, you often won’t get it. But if you ask, you have a much better chance. This doesn’t mean you should go through life making demands. If you ask politely, with a smile on your face, you will be surprised what good things come your way. This translates to the work environment too – be assertive, make opportunities and grab them when they come your way.”





Gooseberries

Gooseberries grow on a perennial bush. If you are lucky, they will be fairly trouble-free once they get going. They produce a single flush of fruit rather than ongoing flowering and production over a longer period. The bushes flower in early spring and produce gooseberries which are ready to harvest a few weeks later in June/July. If you want to cook them, harvest them when they are still hard to the touch. If you leave them longer to ripen on the bush, you can eat them fresh as dessert gooseberries. Suck the juice out of the skin (don't eat the skin) and they are delicious. You can also freeze the raw gooseberries on trays and transfer to plastic bags once they are frozen. Then you can take a handful as and when you need for cooking.

If you are unlucky, you may end up with some caterpillars (gooseberry sawfly) in the spring which, if you have a bad infestation, can completely defoliate the bush, and destroy any hope of gooseberries. The most effective way to deal with this is to cover the bush with a fine mesh in early spring. The gooseberry sawfly is a fly rather than a butterfly, so it can get straight through butterfly netting. When the bush is in full flower, take off the netting for a couple of days to make sure the flowers are pollinated. Then put the mesh back on. Some sawflies may have laid eggs while the netting was off, so you will need to inspect the bush regularly to find any caterpillars which may hatch. Pick off and squash any caterpillars you find (sorry, but they will just crawl back to your gooseberry bush if you opt for the humane option.) This may all sound like a lot of hassle, but if you have a serious sawfly population, this is the best way of saving the gooseberries!

The bush will need a bit of tidy-up pruning in the winter to make sure it doesn't get too congested. Remove a small number of main stems to keep them reasonably spaced out and reduce the length of the stems by a quarter. Finally, cut the sideshoots coming off the main stems to 2-3 buds.

Looks are overrated

GOOSEBERRY AND ELDERFLOWER PARFAIT

Gooseberries are one of those special British fruits that you really don't see much overseas and even in the supermarkets, they are fairly rare. If you have access to some, this is a great way to make the most of their flavour. They go brilliantly with the flavour of elderflower which nature has cleverly made available at the same time of year!

For the elderflower, you will need to scour the hedgerows in early summer and find some! The flavour is best when the flowers are creamy white and before they start turning brown at the edges.

A parfait is a frozen pudding, similar to ice-cream, but much easier to make as it doesn't need to be churned during the freezing process. It will keep in the freezer for several weeks, or longer. Make sure you wrap it well if you are leaving it in the freezer for more than a day or two so that the flavour stays fresh.

SERVES 8-10

500g gooseberries

10 elderflowers wrapped and securely tied in a muslin cloth OR

2 tbsp elderflower cordial

300ml double cream

FOR THE MERINGUE

225g sugar

150ml water

2 egg whites

You will need a loaf tin (23x13x7cm), lined with cling film with enough at the edges to fold over the top

Top and tail the gooseberries, wash and put into a medium-sized pan with the elderflowers or cordial. If you are using the flowers, make sure you pick them when they are still a fresh creamy colour as that is when they have the strongest aroma and use them when they are still fresh. You won't believe how much flavour comes from boiling the gooseberries up with them. Wash the elderflowers and then tie them up securely in a muslin so that the flavour can come through, but not the bits of flower. Add 100ml water to the pan, simmer the gooseberries until soft then remove the muslin bundle. Whizz the gooseberries with a stick blender, sieve and set aside to cool.

To make the meringue, slowly bring the sugar and water to the boil in a saucepan. When the sugar is dissolved, boil for 5 minutes. In a large bowl, whisk the egg whites until stiff with an electric hand mixer. Pour in the sugar syrup as you continue whisking and keep whisking until the meringue is glossy and thick (about 10 minutes).

In a separate bowl, whip the cream to soft peaks.

To combine, fold the fruit puree into the meringue and then add the cream and fold in. Make sure it is all smooth and mixed in properly then pour into a loaf tin lined with cling film. I find lining the loaf tin makes it a lot easier to get out of the tin! Freeze. When you are

ready to serve, remove from the freezer about 5 minutes before you want to eat it to make it easier to cut into slices to serve.

Variation - mango and passionfruit parfait

When gooseberries are not in season, mango and passionfruit is an equally delicious parfait. Follow the recipe above in relation to the meringue and cream but instead of gooseberry puree, use mango and passionfruit. I buy tinned mango puree which makes things much easier. Use about 300g and to that add the sieved insides of 3 passion fruit.



“ Looks are overated. If you hang your identity on your physical appearance, what happens when you grow a bit older or gain a bit of weight? ”





Blackcurrants and redcurrants

Blackcurrants and redcurrants grow on perennial bushes and are pretty low effort. They both require exactly the same treatment as each other and have a similar regime to gooseberry bushes. They produce a single flush of fruit rather than ongoing flowering and production over a longer period. They will flower in early spring and need a net over them to protect them from the birds as the currants develop. Look out for caterpillars on the leaves and remove any you find. Harvest the currants once they are fat and juicy in June/July. You can freeze the raw currants on trays and transfer to plastic bags once they are frozen. Then you can take a handful as and when you need for cooking.

Pruning needs to be done over the winter. The bush has a permanent framework of branches so it is a question of thinning out any overcrowding and making space for new growth. Remove 2-3 branches if necessary to make some space in the bush. Then reduce the length of the remaining branches by a quarter. Finally cut the side shoots on the main stems to 1-3 buds.

Don't worry be happy

BLACKCURRANT SORBET

MAKES 1.2 LITRES

1.35kg blackcurrants and redcurrants, washed, topped and tailed

1 litre water

630g caster sugar

You will need a 1.2 litre freezerproof container

Put the sugar and water in a large saucepan and heat over a medium heat until the sugar dissolves.

Add the currants and simmer for 15 minutes until they break up.

Pour the mixture into a sieve and push as much through as you can, leaving a dryish remainder of squashed skins in the sieve. You may need to do this in a couple of batches.

I don't have an ice cream maker so I do this the old-fashioned way. If you do have one, feel free to use it although check the quantities to make sure it will fit! For the old fashioned method, pour the liquid into a large plastic container and put in the freezer. After about 2 hours, take it out of the freezer and stir vigorously with a wooden spoon to break up the ice crystals as they form. You need to do this several times over the next few hours as the sorbet gradually freezes. This process keeps the sorbet soft and smooth.

“ **Don't worry be happy.** ‘Don't worry be happy’ is the title of a very cheesy song from the 80s, and it may be easier said than done, but there is something in it. It is easy to be drawn into social media and obsess over it. If there are key worry triggers for you, limit or remove them. For those worriers out there, it is ok to worry a bit but get it over and done with in an hour or so and then get on and live your life. If you can't stop worrying, then DO something! Any activity will soothe your mind and help you to move your focus away from worrying. ”



Enjoy the journey

BAKED CHEESECAKE WITH BERRY COULIS

SERVES 10-12

FOR THE BASE

325g Maryland cookies

3 tbsp cocoa powder

50g butter, melted

FOR THE FILLING

840g cream cheese (50:50 full-fat and reduced-fat works)

240g caster sugar

2 large eggs

1 tsp vanilla extract

FOR THE BERRY COULIS

500g mix of blackcurrants, redcurrants, raspberries and blackberries

75g caster sugar

You will need a 27cm round springform cake tin

Preheat oven to 170°C (fan oven).

For the base, whizz up the cookies and cocoa powder in a food processor until they resemble fine crumbs. Add the melted butter and blitz again. Pour into the tin and press into the base with your fingers. Refrigerate.

For the berry coulis, top and tail the blackcurrants and redcurrants, then wash all of the fruit. The ratio is up to you. Put all your currants and berries in a medium saucepan with the sugar over a medium heat. Simmer for 5-10 minutes until the fruit has broken down a bit but not completely. Leave to cool.

For the filling, beat the cream cheese and sugar together on a medium speed until smooth. Add the eggs and vanilla extract and beat until combined. Pour into the tin.

Bake in a preheated oven for 40 minutes. It should still have a bit of wobble in the middle. Leave it to cool in the oven with oven off and the door ajar as it will crack if it cools too quickly.

Once cool, remove the cheesecake from the oven. Carefully slide a palette knife around the edge of the tin before unclipping and removing the ring. Leave the cheesecake on the base. Serve the cheesecake with a generous spoonful of coulis.

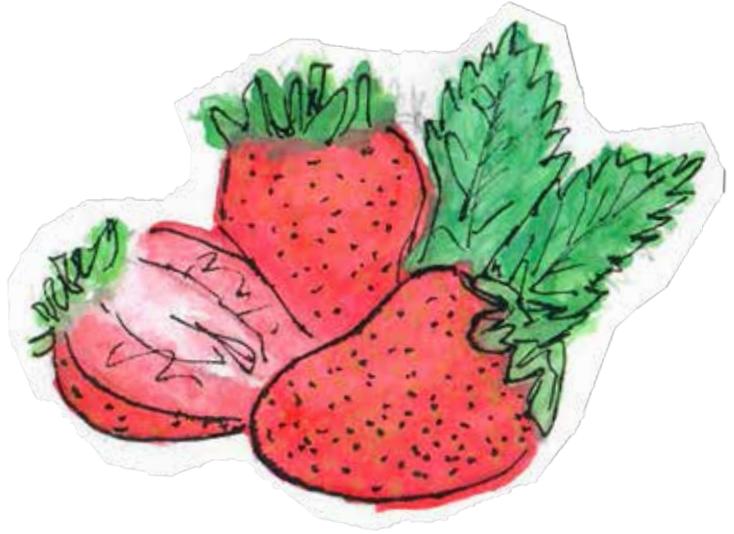
Variation - mango and passionfruit coulis

If you don't have berries or currants available, then you can take your cheesecake in a more tropical direction by making a mango and passion fruit coulis. Take 6 passion fruits, whizz the pulp in the food processor then sieve out the seeds. It is strange, but the food processing doesn't chop up the seeds, it just makes it easier to separate all the juice from them. Combine the passion fruit juice with 300ml of tinned mango pulp and 3 tbsp of icing sugar. Mix well.



“ **Enjoy the journey.** We are often told to focus on goals, objectives and what we want to achieve, but if that dominates your thinking you can miss out on the present. Don't focus so much on where you are trying to get to that you forget to enjoy the time along the way. Don't wait to be happy until you get 'there,' be happy during the journey. ”





Strawberries

Strawberries, warmed by the sun, taste amazing picked straight from the plant. They are easy enough to grow. As with lots of fruit crops, the greatest threat is birds so net your plants or grow in a fruit cage if you can. The birds will even try and peck through the netting at the ripe strawberries so watch out! It is definitely worth getting some straw to put around your plants before they start fruiting as otherwise your precious strawberries will get all muddy. I find that I also need to scatter a little slug death around the plants. Make sure you water if it is dry during the flowering and fruiting period to help the berries to develop and swell. The fruit will ripen for 2-3 weeks in June. Make sure you pick every other day to catch the fruit at their best moment. Store in the fridge but serve at room temperature for the best flavour.

The plants last for 3-4 years but productivity declines after that so you are best to get new plants. You need to cut off all the runners so that you don't end up with a tangled thicket and to concentrate the plant's energy. You can grow a few runners into plants to use as replacements. Ideally, you should plant your new strawberries into a new patch to reduce the build-up of pests and diseases. But I find that if you dig out a few spadefuls of soil when digging out the old plants and replace with well-rotted manure and soil from somewhere else, you can get away with keeping the strawberry patch in one place. When the harvest has finished, remove the straw as you don't want damp rotting straw around your strawberry bushes all winter.

You can freeze strawberries if you have too many to eat at harvest time. Put them on a tray in the freezer and transfer them to a bag once they are frozen. If you put them straight in bag they will stick together. Frozen strawberries are good for making smoothies (see page 234) or stewed fruit (page 236) but they are not a substitute for fresh strawberries as they become very soft and flabby once they are defrosted.

'Like this!'

STRAWBERRY CHEESECAKE WITH CHOCOLATE BASE

SERVES 10-12

FOR THE BASE

325g Maryland cookies

3 tbsp cocoa powder

50g butter, melted

FOR THE FILLING

2 x 405g cans of condensed milk
(the light version is fine)

4 x 250g tubs mascarpone cheese

Juice of 4 lemons

2 punnets strawberries

You will need a 27cm round
springform cake tin

For the base, blitz the cookies to crumbs in a food processor. Add the cocoa powder and melted butter. The mixture will be quite crumbly. Tip into the tin and press into the base. Refrigerate.

For the filling, put the condensed milk, mascarpone cheese in a large bowl and beat together with an electric hand mixer. Add the lemon juice and mix well.

Pour the filling onto the base and refrigerate overnight.

Just before serving, halve the strawberries (or quarter if they are very large) and pile or arrange them on top of the cheesecake. Put the tin on a large serving plate, release the spring clip and remove the ring. I serve straight from the base as it seems pretty much impossible to remove the base without making a total mess!

“Like this! It is easy to become obsessed with social media; always thinking about photo opportunities, what you can post and how many likes you might get. You can get sucked into worrying more about how your life looks on social media than what it feels like in real life. Have you noticed that the celebs and the people most active on social media are making money out of it? Stop worrying about ‘likes’ on social media and focus on real life, real friends, real relationships.”





Raspberries

Raspberries are such a delicious fruit to grow. I often eat them straight off the bush...one for me, one for the punnet! I grow autumn fruiting raspberries as they don't tend to be eaten by the birds. The name is a bit of a misnomer really as they are normally fruiting by the end of July, just a few weeks behind the summer fruiting varieties. Raspberries are perennial plants which fruit on canes. Autumn fruiting raspberries fruit on canes grown that same year so you need to cut the canes to the base in January to encourage lots of vigorous growth upon which the raspberries will be produced. The plants need a bit of support so I put in a post at each end of the row and tie string around it to keep the canes from flopping over. Raspberries are very thirsty. It is no coincidence that most supermarket varieties come from Scotland...they love rain! Make sure you water generously throughout the spring and summer, when the plants are growing and particularly when the plants are flowering and fruiting.

The key challenge I have found in recent years is wasps. They can destroy almost an entire crop and can make it very high risk to pick the last few they haven't eaten. There is a very effective method I have used to get rid of the wasps. It may sound a bit obsessive but you need to think seriously about whether you are willing to let the wasps have your tasty raspberries. Your toolkit is as follows: take a small washing ball, half fill it with wasp and ant killer powder and find a square of cardboard. When the wasps start appearing on the raspberries, you need to strike while they are in the middle of feasting. When you spot a wasp on a raspberry, hold the washing ball directly under it and trap it with the cardboard on top in the ball with the powder. Shake the washing ball around gently so that it gets coated with powder and then release the wasp. It will be drunk and dozy from the raspberry feast so they are generally not aggressive. When you release it, it will be a bit disoriented, clumsy and white from the powder but will fly back to the nest and spread the powder around the other wasps. If you manage to get a few like this, you will notice a significant decline in the number of wasps around. You may need to have several sessions but it is well worth a go if there are lots of wasps around.

Failure is great

LEMON DRIZZLE CAKE WITH RASPBERRIES

This cake has a lovely crunchy top created by pouring the sugar syrup over the top as soon as it comes out of the oven. The syrup runs into the cake and makes it deliciously moist.

SERVES 6-8

FOR THE CAKE

100g butter, softened
175g caster sugar
175g self-raising flour
2 large eggs
4 tbsp milk
Zest of one lemon, finely grated
100g raspberries, fresh or frozen

FOR THE TOPPING

Juice of one lemon
100g caster sugar

You will need a loaf tin
(23x13x7cm), lined

Freezes well, defrost at room
temperature

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Line the tin with a loaf lining case.

Cream together the butter and sugar in a large bowl with an electric hand mixer. Add the eggs and lemon zest and beat together well. Fold in the flour. Add the milk and continue to fold in until the mixture is smooth.

Scatter the raspberries on the bottom of your chosen tin and pour over the cake mixture.

Bake in the oven. While the cake is in the oven, be careful not to open the door and let in a blast of cold air, or give the tin a jolt, as it can cause the cake to sink in the middle and it probably won't recover. Test after 40-45 minutes by gently sliding the cake out of the oven and putting a skewer into the middle of the cake. When it is ready, the skewer will come out clean.

While the cake is cooking, mix together the lemon juice and sugar for the topping. When the cake is ready, prick it with holes all over the top and pour over the topping. The topping will sink into the cake and leave a crunchy sugary crust on the top. Leave in the tin to cool. Once cool, remove from the tin.



“**Failure is great.** Cooking is a constant experimentation for me and sometimes it doesn’t come out as well as I had hoped. On one of my first solo cake-making missions, aged about 11 years, I made a cake and unfortunately put in plain flour instead of self-raising and didn’t put in any baking powder or bicarbonate of soda (raising agents) so my cake came out of the oven very flat and very dense. It was definitely not a success so, after that I remembered to put the right kind of flour in! We all hate to get something wrong, but we shouldn’t! Failure is part of the road towards success. Interestingly, brain scans have shown that the brain is working hardest when you get a something wrong. That is where the thinking and learning happen. So we should not be afraid of failure. It is an essential part of the learning journey called life.”

One thing at a time

VICTORIA SPONGE CAKE

This is the most basic cake recipe, but it is a great one.

SERVES 8-10

FOR THE CAKE

225g butter, softened

225g caster sugar

225g self-raising flour

4 large eggs

4 tbsp milk

FOR THE FILLING

½ cup strawberry jam

150ml double cream, whipped (optional)

1 tsp icing sugar for dusting

You will need two round loose-bottomed 20cm tins, lined on the bottom, buttered on the sides

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Prepare the tins. Cut out two circles of baking paper just a little larger than the base of the tins and stick down with butter one in each tin. Then butter the sides as well. It is best to use two tins so that each layer of your cake cooks separately. This makes the cake lighter and fluffier. If pushed, though, you could cook the cake in a single tin and when you get to the filling you will need to cut the cake in half horizontally.

Cream together the butter and sugar in a large bowl with an electric hand mixer. Then add the eggs and beat in well, with the hand mixer.

Fold in the flour. Then add the milk and continue to fold in until the mixture is smooth. Pour half of the cake mixture into each tin.

Bake in the oven and test after 25 minutes by gently sliding the cake out of the oven and putting a skewer into the middle of the cake. When it is ready, the skewer will come out clean. While the cake is in the oven, be careful not to open the door and let in a blast of cold air, or give the tin a jolt, as it can cause the cake to sink in the middle and it probably won't recover. Once cooked, carefully remove the cake from the tin and leave to cool on a rack.

When cool, spread strawberry jam and double cream (if using) over one cake and sandwich the other layer on top. Sprinkle the top with sifted icing sugar.

“ **One thing at a time.** If you are feeling overwhelmed and getting bogged down, then break things down into bite-sized chunks. Write a list and work through it. Take it one step at a time. ”



Materialism disappoints

STICKY DATE CAKE

MAKES ABOUT 24

200g dried dates, stoned

275ml boiling water

1 tsp bicarbonate of soda

175g soft light brown sugar

150g butter, softened

3 large eggs

175g self raising flour

You will need a 30x20cm roasting pan, lined with reusable non-stick baking parchment

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Pour the boiling water over $\frac{3}{4}$ (150g) of the dates and leave to soak for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

With an electric hand mixer, cream the butter, sugar and dates with their soaking water until well combined. Add the eggs and mix well. Finally fold in the flour and bicarb.

Chop the remaining unsoaked dates into quarters and stir into the mixture.

Pour the mixture into the prepared tin.

Bake for 40 minutes until the cake is firm to the touch.

Allow to cool in the tin and once cooled, cut into squares.

“**Materialism disappoints.** Materialism is bad for the world and is unlikely to make you happy. You might get a short term buzz from the retail therapy and the novelty of owning a new object. The joy quickly ebbs away when someone else has a newer and fancier version of the same thing. You can get stuck in a cycle of always coveting new shiny things and each one you get satisfies you for a shorter time. Try viewing possessions like faithful friends: build up a relationship, appreciate them, and accept them as they are.”



See the good

CHOCOLATE AND ALMOND CAKE

SERVES 8-10

200g 70% cocoa dark chocolate
4 large eggs
170g caster sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract
250g ground almonds
200g butter, melted
Cocoa powder to serve

You will need a 23cm round loose-bottomed tin, base lined with buttered sides

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 170°C (fan oven).

Blitz the chocolate in a food processor until is chopped into small nibs.

In a large bowl, beat the eggs, sugar and vanilla extract with an electric hand mixer until pale and thick. This will take about 10 minutes and is important as it adds air to the mixture to make the cake light.

Fold in the chopped chocolate, ground almonds and slightly cooled melted butter, gently, to avoid knocking out the air you have just whisked in. Make sure it is thoroughly combined.

Pour the mixture into the lined and buttered tin and bake for 40 minutes until firm to the touch. Leave to cool in the tin. Once cool, remove from the tin.

Dust with cocoa powder before serving.

“ **See the good.** It is so easy to be critical and always to see the worst in people. The media seems to fuel such thinking. However, it is important to remember that everyone is different and no one is perfect. We all have faults. Try and accept people’s imperfections and instead focus on and appreciate their positive qualities. ”



What's inside counts most

SPICED CHOCOLATE LOAF

This cake keeps for days and retains its moist fudgy texture. It also packs a flavour punch with the combination of ginger, cinnamon and chocolate, but is less heavy than your average seriously chocolatey cake as it has only 50g of chocolate.

SERVES 4-6

115g butter, softened
190g dark brown sugar
1 large egg
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
50g 70% cocoa solids dark chocolate, melted
100g plain flour
1 tsp ground ginger
1 tsp ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
125ml boiling water

You will need a loaf tin
(23x13x7cm), lined

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Prepare the tin. I strongly suggest using a loaf tin shaped liner as they are very easy to use.

Melt the chocolate by microwaving on high for 1 minute, stirring, then heat again, if necessary, for 30 seconds and stir until the chocolate is smooth. Set aside.

Cream together the butter and sugar with an electric hand mixer until soft. Don't worry if there are some stubborn lumps of sugar, they will melt on cooking.

Add the eggs and vanilla and beat well. Mix in the melted chocolate on a slow speed.

Add the flour, bicarb and spices gradually along with the boiling water mixing slowly but thoroughly as you go. By the time it is all added, the mixture will be quite runny.

Pour into the lined tin. It should be about ¾ full so that it doesn't overflow when it rises.

Bake for 35 minutes and then test with a skewer. It is supposed to be quite a squidgy cake so don't expect a completely clean skewer. Leave to cool in the tin.

“ **What’s inside counts most.** Our society is obsessed with looks these days. The beauty industry is a goliath and we may feel pressured to conform to a certain look. Fake everything has become almost the norm. Isn’t what’s on the inside more important? Do you want people to like you because of how you look, or who you are? ”



No belfies

BANANA AND CHOCOLATE CHIP LOAF

I normally double up the recipe to make two loaf tins and freeze one for cake emergencies!

SERVES 6-8

125g butter

150g caster sugar

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 egg

2 very ripe bananas, mashed

170g self raising flour

60ml milk

50g 70% cocoa solids dark
chocolate, chopped

1 tsp icing sugar for dusting

You will need a loaf tin
(23x13x7cm), lined

Freezes well, defrost at room
temperature

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Melt the butter, sugar and vanilla in a large saucepan
over a medium heat.

Remove from the heat and add the mashed bananas and
mix well, followed by the eggs and mix again.

Fold in the flour and milk and finally stir in the chopped
chocolate.

Pour into the lined tin and bake in the oven for 30-40
minutes. Test by sticking a skewer in the middle. It
should come out not quite clean as you want a bit of
squidge. Leave to cool in the tin. Dust with icing sugar
through a sieve to finish it off.

“ **No belfies.** What’s a belfie? It’s a bottom selfie. Anything you post online or send by electronic means will be somewhere on the internet forever and out of your control. Whatever it might be, make sure you are happy for your granny and any or everyone else to see it. If not, don’t put it out there! ”



Have an opinion

CHOCOLATE RING CAKE

This is my all time favourite chocolate cake. It looks more impressive in a ring mould somehow. It has a dense, moist fudginess to it and it is intensely chocolately. I have tried many chocolate cakes over the years which are either too light, too dry or not chocolately enough. This cake also has the very useful quality that it keeps brilliantly for quite a few days and, as with all cakes, you can freeze it. Just make sure you let it defrost at room temperature.

SERVES 10-12

FOR THE CAKE

300g 70% cocoa solids dark chocolate, melted

300g butter, melted

300g sugar

7 large eggs

4 tbsp plain flour

FOR THE ICING (chocolate ganache)

225g 50% cocoa solids dark chocolate, broken into small chunks

225ml double cream

50g best quality white chocolate (optional)

You will need a ring mould, 28cm across, well buttered

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

For the cake, beat together the eggs and sugar in a large bowl until thick and creamy. This takes about 10 minutes with an electric hand mixer.

Put the chocolate and butter in a bowl and microwave for 1 minute at a time, giving a stir after each minute. This will take 2-3 minutes. Do not overheat. Stir until smooth. You can also melt the chocolate and butter in a bowl over a saucepan of boiling water but I find this method more onerous.

Add the melted chocolate and butter mixture to the egg mixture and mix until well combined. Fold in the flour.

Pour the mixture into the ring shaped tin (well buttered) and bake in the oven for 35-40 minutes, until springy. A skewer shouldn't come out completely clean as it should be a little gooey in the middle.

Leave to cool in the tin. Once cool, remove from the tin. This stage can be a bit tricky, so make sure you butter it thoroughly.

For the ganache, it is best to use chocolate with approximately 50% cocoa solids as using 70% results in an icing that is not sweet enough. If you can't find 50%, then use a mixture of dark and milk chocolates. Put the cream into a small saucepan and heat gently to below boiling point. Whatever you do, don't let it boil! When you can see the tiniest wisp of steam, take it off the heat, wait 1 minute to let it cool a bit and then gently stir in the chocolate, broken into very small pieces (or even

“ Have an opinion.

Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. It is a good idea to express your opinion in a non-offensive way but the world is a better place when people express their opinions and learn to accept each other’s opinions. ”

better, use chocolate chips). Keep stirring, gently, until melted and smooth. I have learnt that chocolate can be very temperamental when doing this and it can easily go lumpy (seize or separate). The golden rule is not to overheat the cream and to break the chocolate into very small pieces so that it melts more easily. Remember that chocolate melts at body temperature, so the milk doesn’t need to be very hot to melt the chocolate. If it does go lumpy, you can normally rescue it by stirring in warm milk a teaspoon at a time.

Leave to cool, when it will be thick enough to ice the cake (this may take 20 - 30 minutes). You can whisk it when cold if it needs to be a bit thicker.

Finally, melt the white chocolate by microwaving on low power for 30 seconds, give it a stir then microwave for another 30 seconds if you need to. Use the melted white chocolate to drizzle over the iced chocolate ring.



Just do it!

ORANGE AND ALMOND SQUISHY CAKE

This cake is unusual as it doesn't have any butter or flour in it. The ground almonds and orange juice keep it deliciously moist and squidgy.

SERVES 8-10

FOR THE CAKE

4 large eggs, separated
150g caster sugar, plus 1 tbsp extra
175g ground almonds
½ tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp baking powder
Juice and zest of one large orange

FOR THE TOPPING

Juice and zest of one lemon
50g caster sugar

You will need a 23cm round loose-bottomed cake tin, base-lined

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Put the egg yolks into a medium bowl with 150g of the sugar and whisk until pale and creamy, with an electric hand mixer. This takes 3-5 minutes, so stick with it.

Mix in the almonds, cinnamon and baking powder, followed by the orange juice and zest.

In a separate bowl, make a meringue mixture by whisking the egg whites with 1 tbsp of sugar until they form stiff peaks. It is important to do this in a clean bowl, with clean beaters and no yolk at all mixed into the whites.

Put a spoonful of the meringue mixture into the almond mix and stir in. Then add the rest of the meringue and fold in gently, trying to make sure you don't bash out the air you have whisked in.

Pour the mixture into the prepared cake tin and bake for 30 minutes before checking. If you open the oven door too early, the cake may sink. It is ready when the top is firm but springy to touch.

“ **Just do it!** If you are seriously considering something, have weighed up the pros and cons but are not 100% sure about it...just do it! Do you want to live with regrets and always wonder ‘what if’? If it is something that takes you out of your comfort zone, all the better! You will be a stronger person afterwards. ”



Consider the consequences

CHOCOLATE CHUNK COOKIES

This recipe does make quite a lot of cookies so if you don't want so many, you can either halve the recipe or freeze any extras. You can even freeze half of the cookie dough and then when you want cookies, defrost and bake.

MAKES ABOUT 50

250g butter, softened

130g dark brown sugar

200g caster sugar

2 large eggs

2 tsp vanilla extract

250g plain flour

135g porridge oats

½ tsp baking powder

300g chocolate, cut into generous chunks (I use a mixture of dark and milk)

You will need 2 baking sheets, lined with reusable non-stick parchment

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Cream the butter and sugar together in a large bowl with an electric hand mixer. Beat in the eggs and vanilla extract. Add the flour, oats and baking powder and mix well.

Finally, add the chocolate chunks and mix well. This can be quite hard work as the mixture will be thick by now.

Use two spoons to drop walnut-sized balls of cookie dough onto the lined baking trays. Space the cookies out generously as they will spread during baking.

Bake in the oven for approx. 7-10 minutes. Cook in two or even three batches so that you don't overcrowd your oven. The cookies will harden up on cooling, so don't worry if they seem quite soft. After a couple of minutes gently transfer with a palette knife onto a cooling rack. Don't overcook them as a cookie should be soft and chewy!

“**Consider the consequences.** All actions have consequences. Some intended, some unintended, some good, some bad. It's generally a pretty good idea to think about what might happen before you do something. That is not to say you shouldn't do whatever it is anyway, but it is good to go into it with open eyes and make an informed decision.”



Ask a friend

OATY RAISIN COOKIES

This recipe does make quite a lot of cookies so if you don't want so many, you can either halve the recipe or freeze any extra cookies. You can even freeze half of the cookie dough and then when you want cookies, defrost and bake.

MAKES ABOUT 40

250g butter, softened
240g dark brown sugar
120g caster sugar
2 tbsp runny honey or golden syrup
2 large eggs
2 tsp vanilla extract
340g plain flour
85g porridge oats
½ tsp baking powder
1 tsp ground cinnamon
1 tsp ground ginger
1 tsp mixed spice
150g raisins

You will need 2 baking sheets, lined with reusable non-stick parchment

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Cream the butter and sugar together in a large bowl with an electric hand mixer. Beat in the eggs, honey and vanilla extract. Add the flour, oats, spices, baking powder and raisins and mix well.

Use two spoons to drop walnut-sized balls of cookie dough onto the lined baking trays. Space the cookies out generously as they will spread during baking.

Bake in the oven for 10-12 minutes. I find these cook better in two separate batches, 2 baking sheets at a time, otherwise the oven is overcrowded and the hot air doesn't circulate as well. Turn the tray around half way through cooking so that the whole tray cooks evenly. They will harden up on cooling so don't worry if they seem quite soft when you take them out of the oven. Transfer with a palette knife onto a cooling rack. Don't overcook them as a cookie should be soft and chewy!



“ **Ask a friend.** If you are having a tough time, then reach out to a friend, family member, someone at work, school or a charity. There is always someone there who will be able to help you. When you ask people close to you for help, it helps them to get to know you a little better. It deepens the bond you have. Don't be afraid to show vulnerability as together we can all get stronger. If the tables are turned and someone is asking you for help, then do it. Do your best to be there for them and to be supportive. Helping others is good for your own sense of self-worth. It's a win win situation. ”

Sorry not sorry

MELTING GINGER BISCUITS

These biscuits have the smoothest, most melt-in-the-mouth texture of any I have ever tasted. The secret is the cornflour and icing sugar.

MAKES ABOUT 30

200g butter

60g icing sugar

125g plain flour

125g cornflour

½ tsp baking powder

1 tsp ground ginger

You will need 2 baking sheets, lined with reusable non-stick parchment

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 170°C (fan oven).

Cream the butter and sugar. Add the flours, baking powder and ginger and mix into a dough.

Take a chunk of dough and roll it into a large marble-sized ball in your hands. Space them out on the lined baking trays and squash gently with your hand. Leave about 10cm between the biscuits as they will spread.

Bake in the preheated oven for about 15 minutes but check after 10. They should be very pale but with a very slight browning to indicate that they are cooked. Leave to cool on the baking tray for a few minutes before transferring to a cooling rack with a palette knife.

“**Sorry not sorry.** If you screwed up, say sorry. If you didn't, then don't. Some of us go through life apologising for things that are in no way our fault. This behaviour feeds insecurities and lowers self-worth. Be strong and stand proud. Don't take on other peoples' blame.”



Seek help

CHOCOLATE BUTTON BISCUITS

MAKES ABOUT 30

250g butter, softened

125g caster sugar

300g self raising flour

40g cocoa powder

About 90 white chocolate buttons
(3 per biscuit)

You will need 2 baking sheets,
lined with reusable non-stick
parchment

Freezes well, defrost at room
temperature

Preheat the oven to 170°C (fan oven).

Cream the butter and sugar with an electric hand mixer until smooth.

Add the flour and cocoa and whisk in on the slowest speed as otherwise it can get messy. The mixture will firm up into a dough. I generally don't bother sieving the flour or cocoa as it seems to work out fine without. But you can if you are feeling keen (or have particularly lumpy flour or cocoa powder).

Roll walnut-sized lumps of dough in your hands and place on the lined baking sheets, well spaced as they will spread on cooking. Press down gently with your hand.

Put the biscuits in the oven and bake for 10-15 minutes. They should be slightly firm on top and will harden when you take them out of the oven. As soon as you take them out, place the white chocolate buttons on each one and press down gently. I normally put three on each biscuit. The chocolate buttons will partially melt and stick to the biscuit giving a delicious icing effect for very little effort! Once they have cooled a little, move onto a cooling rack with a palette knife to cool fully.

“**Seek help.** Sometimes we all need a bit of help and we might be afraid or embarrassed to ask, especially if we feel as though it shows our weaknesses. But, turn it around...if someone asked you for support because they were going through a tough time, would you be pleased they asked and happy to help? I think so. Let's beat the stigma around mental health and seek help when we need it. ”



Party like a child

GINGERBREAD PEOPLE

MAKES ABOUT 15

FOR THE BISCUITS

125g butter
100g dark muscovado sugar
4 tbs golden syrup
325g plain flour
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
2 tsp ground ginger

FOR THE ICING

1 large egg white
185g icing sugar
½ tsp cream of tartar

You will need 2 baking sheets,
lined with reusable non-stick
parchment

Freezes well, defrost at room
temperature

Preheat the oven to 170°C (fan oven).

Melt the butter, sugar and syrup in a medium saucepan,
over a low to medium heat, stirring occasionally.

Take off the heat and stir in the flour, bicarb and ginger
to make a stiff dough. Bring it together with your hands
into a ball.

Put the dough ball onto a floured surface. While the
dough is still warm roll out with a floured rolling pin to
about 5mm thick. Go slowly as it is a delicate dough and
can break easily. Use cookie cutters of your choice to cut
into shapes. Make sure that you fit as many shapes as
you can into your dough, as subsequent rollings never
work as well. Carefully move the shapes onto the lined
baking sheet using a palette knife. Gather any leftover
dough together and pat together for a second rolling.

Bake on baking sheets for 9-10 minutes until light
golden brown.

When cool, decorate with the icing.

For the icing, beat the egg white with an electric hand
mixer in a medium bowl until foamy. Gradually add the
icing sugar and cream of tartar until stiff peaks form.
This will go crusty quite quickly so you should use it
straight away. If you cover it with cling film so that no
air gets to the icing, it will keep for a bit longer. But you
are safer to use it straight away. Put it into a piping bag
and get creative with those gingerbread people!



“ **Party like a child.** Remember the giddy excitement of parties when you were little, the contagious giggles and running around like crazy? Try and keep that feeling going as you get older. You don’t need alcohol or drugs to have a good time if you can channel your inner kid. ”

Share

CHOCOLATE MARSHMALLOW COOKIES

MAKES ABOUT 36 cookies

240g caster sugar
240g light brown sugar
240g butter, softened
2 large eggs
2 tsp vanilla extract
450g plain flour
100g cocoa powder
½ tsp baking powder
150g milk chocolate, cut into small chunks
150g dark 70% chocolate, cut into small chunks
200g mini marshmallows (6 per cookie)

You will need 2 baking sheets, lined with reusable non-stick parchment

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Put the marshmallows in the freezer until you are ready to ball the cookies.

Put the sugars and butter into a large bowl and blend until light and fluffy with a handheld electric beater. Add the eggs and vanilla and beat until combined.

Add the dry ingredients (flour, cocoa powder, baking powder) and beat again until well mixed. Finally add the chocolate chunks and mix again.

Take the marshmallows from the freezer. Form each cookie by taking a walnut sized piece of cookie dough and forming it around 6 frozen marshmallows. Place on the baking sheet, at least 10cm apart, as the cookies will spread. You will probably need to cook in two batches unless you have a lot of oven space and baking sheets.

Bake in the preheated oven for 15 minutes. The cookie dough should still be quite soft as you want them to be chewy when cool. Let them cool for about 5 minutes then transfer to a cooling tray with a palette knife. You can then use the baking trays to cook the next batch.

“**Share.** Share these cookies but also share in your life more generally. Sharing makes good times better and bad times less bad. Sharing a problem may not make it go away but will help you feel better about it, help you find a solution and make you feel less alone with your worries.”



Be resilient, life can be a ...

ROCKY ROAD

There are loads of different versions of rocky road and indeed, you can add whatever you want, but this is my favourite. I like to keep it basic, sticking to marshmallows and rich tea biscuits in the chocolately base but you could add raisins, dried cherries, dried cranberries, nuts....the list goes on.

MAKES ABOUT 36

300g 70% cocoa solids chocolate

125g butter

2 tbsp golden syrup

200g Rich Tea biscuits (I use the reduced fat version)

200g mini marshmallows

1 tsp icing sugar to dust

You will need a rectangular tin 36x26cm, lined with reusable non-stick baking parchment

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Melt the chocolate, butter and syrup in a large saucepan over a low heat. Stir until smooth then remove from the heat.

Break the Rich Tea biscuits into chunks. I put them in a plastic bag and bash them a bit with a rolling pin. Don't overdo it, as you want chunks not crumbs!

Add the broken up biscuits and marshmallows to the chocolate mixture and stir until well combined. Tip into the lined tin and leave overnight to set.

Once set, cut into small squares with a sharp knife and dust with icing sugar to serve.

“ **Be resilient.** Don't expect life to run smoothly all the time. Be resilient and appreciate the bumps in the road as it makes for a more interesting journey and makes you grow as a person. ”



Be kind to our planet

GATEAU BRETON

This is a great way to use up all the extra egg yolks you end up with when you make meringue. It freezes perfectly so you can save it for another occasion...if you can resist! It is like a cakey version of shortbread.

MAKES ABOUT 30

225g plain flour

250g caster sugar

250g butter, chopped into chunks

6 large egg yolks

FOR THE TOPPING

20g 70% cocoa solids dark chocolate, melted

You will need a round tin 23cm, with the base lined

Freezes well, defrost at room temperature

Preheat the oven to 170°C (fan oven).

Separate the eggs. Set aside the whites (You can freeze them for future use).

Put the flour, sugar, butter and egg yolks into a food processor and blitz until it is thoroughly combined.

Tip out into the lined tin and smooth out. It is a sticky dough! I haven't found a better way of doing this than using my hands.

Bake in the oven for about 35-40 minutes until lightly browned.

Leave to cool in the tin.

Once cooled, melt the chocolate for the topping. About 1 min in the microwave in a glass bowl should do the trick and make sure you stir well to ensure it is smooth. Drizzle over with a teaspoon. I like to do it in criss-crossing lines but let your creativity go wild!

Once the chocolate has solidified, cut the cake into slices, squares or my favourite, diamonds and remove from the tin.



“ **Be kind to our planet.** We only have one planet. So far, we humans seem to be doing our best to destroy it. Together we can turn this around but only if every single one of us does our absolute best to respect the resources of the planet, reduce our consumption, recycle everything possible. Reduce, reuse, recycle. ”

If at first you don't succeed...

RICE KRISPIE TREATS

I had a few tries at this recipe before getting the quantities right but it was certainly worth the effort and I quite enjoyed eating the imperfect versions along the way!

MAKES ABOUT 24

60g butter

200g marshmallows

2 tsp vanilla extract

200g Rice Krispies

3 tbsp caramel sauce

250g 70% cocoa dark chocolate,
melted

You will need a rectangular tin
30x20cm, lined with reusable non-
stick baking parchment

Freezes well, defrost at room
temperature

In a large saucepan, melt the butter over a low heat and add the marshmallows. Keep stirring as they melt and add the vanilla extract once smooth.

Stir in the Rice Krispies with a wooden spoon until fully combined. Pour into the lined tin. The mixture is very sticky and you need to press it gently into the tin. I find buttered hands are the best way of doing this.

Spread a thin layer of the caramel sauce over the top of the Rice Krispies.

Finally, pour the melted chocolate in a thin layer over the top. Chill to set. Cut into squares being careful not to cut the reusable baking parchment.

“ If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Yup, pick yourself up, brush yourself off and have another go. You'll get there in the end and you will become better, stronger and tougher along the way. **”**



Confidence is...

KEY LIME PIE

SERVES 8-10

FOR THE BASE

325g Maryland cookies

3 tbsp cocoa powder

50g butter, melted

FOR THE FILLING

2x 405g tins condensed milk

6 large egg yolks

Zest of 4 limes

Juice of 6 limes

FOR THE TOPPING

50g 70% cocoa dark chocolate, melted

You will need a 27cm round springform cake tin

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

First make the base by blitzing the cookies in a food processor and adding the cocoa powder and melted butter. (I normally melt it in the microwave, but make sure you cover it as it does spit). Once it is crumbly, pour into the tin and push down into an even layer. Leave it to rest in the fridge.

For the filling, put the egg yolks in a bowl with the lime zest and whisk with an electric hand mixer for 2 minutes until the yolks have thickened. Then add the condensed milk and whisk for another 5 minutes, adding the lime juice in the last minute or so.

Pour the mixture over the base and put in the oven. Bake for 20 minutes. It is ready when it feels just set when you gently touch it. Let it cool.

Once cool, unclip the tin, run a palette knife around the edge and remove the ring. I usually leave the pie on the base as it is tricky to remove. Next, melt the chocolate for the topping. I put it in a bowl in the microwave for 1 minute and then stir. It might need a little longer, but don't overdo it. Use a teaspoon to drizzle the melted chocolate over the key lime pie.

“ **Confidence is key.** Confidence is so important in life. Some people are born with it, possibly even too much, and some people don't have enough. Developing just the right amount of confidence is key to navigating through life without worrying too much, without insecurities, but with a warm solid feeling of self-assurance in your heart that you CAN do it. So if you are not very confident, start believing in yourself. You need to realise that no one else out there is any better than you. Confidence will shine out of you and you will find it easier to get through life's challenges more calmly, more smoothly and more successfully. ”



Sleep is sacred

CARAMELISED APPLE TARTE TATIN

SERVES 8-10

FOR THE PASTRY

140g butter, cold and cut into cubes

170g plain flour

55g ground rice

55g caster sugar

1 egg yolk, beaten

FOR THE FILLING

110g butter

220g caster sugar

1.2kg cox apples (about 10)

Zest of one lemon

Extra thick double cream, to serve

You will need a 27cm diameter, 5cm deep frying pan which can go on the hob and in the oven.

For the pastry, put the flour, ground rice, sugar and butter into a food processor and blitz to a fine crumb texture. Then add the beaten egg yolk and process again. The mixture should form into clumps. If it is still too dry and crumbly, then add a tablespoon of cold water and process again. Tip the mixture out onto a clean surface and gather into a ball. Wrap the ball of pastry in cling film and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. It will last for several days in the fridge, or you can even freeze it at this stage.

Preheat the oven to 190°C (fan oven).

For the filling, peel the apples, cut them in half and remove the cores. It doesn't matter if they go brown. Melt the butter and sugar in the pan over a medium heat. A pan with a metal or a removable handle works well. Then arrange the halved apples on top of the butter and sugar mix, bearing in mind that the tart will be turned out and served upsidedown. You need to pack them in tightly as they will shrink a little as they cook. Sprinkle the lemon zest over the apples. Put the pan back onto a medium heat and leave it to bubble gently. It is essential to caramelize the butter and sugar on the hob before the tart goes into the oven. Keep going until you can see the caramel bubbling around the apples darkening to a golden brown. This may take 30 - 40 minutes.

Meanwhile, roll out the pastry to a circle slightly larger than the pan on a generously floured surface. Make sure it doesn't stick to the surface. Once the caramel apples are ready, take them off the heat and carefully place the pastry over the top. Tuck the edges down inside the pan with a knife to help if necessary. Bake in the preheated oven for 20 - 25 minutes. Once the pastry looks lightly browned and crisp, remove the tart from the oven. Leave to cool for 5 minutes and then, putting a large plate over the pan, holding it tightly, invert. Carefully remove the pan to reveal beautifully caramelised apples. Serve warm or cold with extra thick double cream.



“ **Sleep is sacred.** Sleep is so important for all round good health. Your body repairs itself while you sleep, your brain relaxes properly and your whole self recharges. Think of sleep as an essential element of a healthy life not as an optional time-waster. Have you ever noticed how eating chocolate at night keeps you awake? In addition to caffeine, it also contains an even stronger stimulant called theobromine. Here’s a non chocolate based, delicious pudding. ”

Accept a compliment

SYRUPY PEAR TART

SERVES 8-10

FOR THE PASTRY

375g plain flour

125g caster sugar

125g polenta or ground rice

200g butter, cold and cut into cubes

1 large egg

FOR THE PEARS

250g caster sugar

250g demerara sugar

1 litre water

60ml white wine

1 vanilla pod

Juice and zest of one lemon

1 cinnamon stick

12 firm Williams or Comice pears, peeled

Extra thick double cream, to serve

You will need a 27cm diameter tart dish with a loose-bottomed base

To make the pastry, put the polenta, sugar and butter into a food processor and blitz to a fine crumb texture. Add the egg and continue processing until the mixture forms into clumps. If it still seems too dry, add 1 tbsp cold water and blitz again. This pastry is quite a crumbly mix because of the polenta and as the tart is best with a fairly thick crust, I find it works best to tip the crumbly pastry mix straight into the tart tin. Press into the base, the corners and up the sides and then refrigerate for 2 hours.

To poach the pears, put the caster and demerara sugars into a large pan with the water, wine, lemon zest and juice and cinnamon stick. Take the vanilla pod, slice it along its length and scrape out the seeds. Put both the pod and the seeds in with the poaching liquid. Bring to the boil and simmer until the sugar is dissolved. Add the pears so that they are covered in the liquid as much as possible. Cover, simmer gently for 20 minutes, then remove from the heat and cool for 2 hours.

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Remove the pears from the poaching liquid but keep the liquid as this will become your syrup. Core and quarter them carefully as they will be soft and slippery. Arrange the pieces of pear in the pastry case. (The pastry case does not need to be baked blind). Bake in the preheated oven for 45 minutes until the pastry is lightly golden.

While the tart is baking, put the pan with the poaching liquid back on the heat and boil steadily until it has reduced in volume by two thirds. (It will take about 20-25 minutes of steady boiling). It will still be runny but will thicken when it cools. Don't overdo it at this stage as the syrup will be too thick.

Remove the tart from the tin (but leave it on the base) and serve while the tart is still warm. Serve with the syrup and extra thick double cream.

“ **Accept a compliment.** It can feel so ingrained to put yourself down in response to a compliment. Do yourself a favour, accept it with a smile and believe it! ”



Why take drugs?

ITALIAN TIRAMISU

This pudding does involve a few different steps and different bowls, so you do need to read and follow the recipe carefully. But none of it is difficult. It really is worth the effort and it will keep in the fridge for several days. Incidentally, tiramisu is an Italian word which translates to 'pick me up.'

SERVES 8-10

FOR THE COFFEE SYRUP

10g instant coffee
100ml water
100g caster sugar
50ml Tia Maria

FOR THE SUGAR SYRUP

50ml water
115g caster sugar

FOR THE CREAM

4 large eggs, separated
1.2kg mascarpone cheese
1 tsp vanilla extract
100g caster sugar
300g sponge fingers

FOR THE TOPPING

20g 70% chocolate, grated

You will need a round serving bowl
27cm diameter, 10cm deep

For the coffee syrup, simmer the ingredients (coffee, water, sugar and Tia Maria) for 5 minutes on a medium heat. Set aside.

For the sugar syrup, boil the sugar and water in a small saucepan until the bubbles start to look syrupy and it thickens very slightly (about 4 minutes). Don't let it get too thick or go brown as it will solidify when it hits the egg yolks which is a problem!

Meanwhile make the cream in a large bowl. Whisk the egg yolks with an electric hand mixer until fluffy and pale yellow (about 4 minutes). Continue whisking while you pour the sugar syrup into the bowl and mix until lukewarm (another 4 minutes).

Add the mascarpone and vanilla and whisk until smooth.

In a clean bowl and with clean beaters, whisk the egg whites and sugar (100g) to make a fairly stiff meringue. You must make sure that the bowl and the beaters are completely clean or the egg whites won't thicken. Then fold this meringue mixture into the mascarpone mixture. Folding is best done with a large metal spoon - you are trying to avoid knocking the air out of the mix.

In your serving bowl, put a layer of sponge fingers on the base. Pour over a third of the coffee syrup then spread over a third of the mascarpone. Repeat with two more layers, finishing with a layer of mascarpone. Dust with grated dark chocolate.

Refrigerate for at least two hours, preferably overnight.



“ Why take drugs? Why do people take drugs? It is a simplification but it seems to me that the key reasons are: because they think they will have more fun; peer pressure; or to wipe out any pain they might be feeling. It could be a combination. Whatever the reason, drugs are not the answer. If you want to have more fun or your friends are pressuring you to try stuff, then maybe you are at the wrong party with the wrong people. If there is pain, focus on fixing the underlying causes, don't numb it with drugs. ”

Do your own thing

MERINGUE STACK

I love a meringue stack pudding as you can make the meringue discs over a week in advance and store in an airtight container. The filling can be prepared the day before and sit in the fridge; then all you need to do on the day is assemble your stack. There are also several possible options to follow depending on whether you are feeling like raspberries, chocolate or lemon. If you don't know what to do with all the spare egg yolks, make a Gateau Breton (see page 214) or use them in the lemon curd recipe in the variation below.

SERVES 8-10

FOR THE MERINGUE

8 large egg whites
300g caster sugar

FOR THE FILLING

450g mascarpone cheese
200ml double cream
3 punnets of raspberries

You will need 3 baking trays which will fit a 30cm diameter circle, lined with reusable non-stick baking parchment

Preheat the oven to 140°C (fan oven).

First make the meringue discs. You can do this days in advance and keep them in an airtight container. In a large bowl, whisk the egg whites with an electric hand mixer until they are stiff but not dry. Add the sugar a little at a time, whisking as you go, until stiff.

Prepare 3 baking trays by lining them with reusable non-stick baking parchment. This is really important as the meringue discs will be fragile so you need to be able to remove them easily. Spread a third of the mixture on each baking tray in a circle of about 30cm diameter.

Bake for 1 hour in the preheated oven and then turn the oven off and leave them in there to cool gradually. They will be firm and crisp. Once they are cool, you can gently peel away the non-stick parchment.

For the filling, whisk together the mascarpone and double cream until smooth and thick. I like to put in 2 punnets of raspberries and roughly fold them in so that they break up and the juices start to flow. Keep the third punnet to use when you compile the stack. Don't mash up the raspberries too much first as they can get too juicy and make the mixture runny.

A couple of hours before you are ready to eat, assemble the stack. Lay the bottom disc on a serving dish and spread out half of the creamy mixture on it. Push a few whole raspberries into the cream. Place the second disc on top and spread the remainder of the mixture, again

“**Do your own thing.** Always do your own thing. We spend far too much time trying to fit in and worrying about what other people think. (In fact, the hormones flying around a teenage girl are programming her to do this...it's different for boys as they have different hormones). But have confidence, be your own person and rock it! ”

pushing a few more raspberries in. Place the final disc on top. Arrange your remaining raspberries on the top and lightly dust with icing sugar.

Variations - chocolate raspberry meringue stack or lemon meringue stack

You can change this one up a little by making a chocolately meringue which goes very nicely with the raspberries. Once your meringue is made as above, fold in 3 tbsp of cocoa powder and 100g chopped dark chocolate.

A completely different avenue to follow is to take it in a lemon direction instead of raspberry. Make the mascarpone and double cream mixture as above. You can either buy lemon curd and spread it over the creamy mixture on both layers, or you can make your own lemon curd, like so: take the juice and zest from 3 lemons, put in a glass bowl with 4 large egg yolks, beaten, 90g sugar and 60g of butter cut into cubes. Heat the bowl over a pan of boiling water and stir frequently until the mixture is smooth and thick. It will take 15 - 20 minutes. This will keep covered in the fridge for several days. When you are ready, spread the lemon curd and mascarpone between the meringue discs.



Don't let a little problem grow

CHOCOLATE MERINGUES

MAKES ABOUT 20

4 egg whites
200g caster sugar
2 tbsp cocoa powder (sifted)
100g 70% cocoa solids dark chocolate, roughly chopped

FOR THE TOPPING

200ml double cream, whipped
1 punnet raspberries

You will need 2-3 rectangular baking trays 36x26cm, lined with reusable non-stick baking parchment

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven).

Whisk the egg whites in a large bowl until stiff peaks form.

Add the sugar gradually as you continue whisking.

Fold in the cocoa powder until thoroughly combined. Finally fold in the chopped chocolate.

Put spoonfuls on a lined baking tray. I like to do mini spoonfuls (teaspoons) to make small, bite-sized meringues. Bake at 180°C for 15 minutes and then remove from the oven. If you like them crisp then leave them in the oven to cool down slowly. I like them with a bit of chewiness so I take them out straight away and let them cool in the tin. After a few minutes, transfer to a cooling rack with a palette knife. You may need to cook them in batches.

Whip the cream with an electric hand mixer in a deep bowl (to avoid making a mess). Take care as the cream takes a while to start thickening, but once it does it thickens up quickly. Always stop when it is still a bit too runny and stir manually for the last little bit. I find that cream always thickens up a little more as it sits and you don't want it to dry out too much. Whipped cream should be creamy, not dry and crumbly!

Put a spoonful of cream on top of each meringue. Top with a raspberry on each pile of cream and push down gently to keep it all together.



“Don’t let a little problem grow. If you have a little problem, fix it before it becomes a big problem. **”**

BREAKFAST

Let it go BERRY FROZEN FRUIT SMOOTHIE

Trust in people MUESLI WITH STEWED FRUIT



Blackberries

Blackberries are easy and robust but can be vicious! The plants are big and can be very thorny. If you are choosing a variety, you can go for a thornless one but I chose the one with the biggest, juiciest, sweetest fruit and it is definitely not thornless! A blackberry is a vigorous climber so it needs a sturdy support, fence or wall (with wires attached) that you can tie the stems onto. Fruit develops on stems which grow during the previous year. This means that while you are picking fruiting stems, there will be new stems growing which will not fruit. You need to protect these as they are your next year's crop. You might be able to tie them up so that they are out of the way. Harvest time is between August and October. Once the plants have finished fruiting, cut the old stems down to the base. At this point you can tie the new stems into the support, fanned out ready to produce fruit in the following year. Also trim the sideshoots growing off the main stems back to 1-3 buds. Blackberries freeze excellently. Put them on a tray in the freezer and once they are frozen solid you can transfer to a bag. Then you can grab a handful whenever you need.

Let it go!

BERRY FROZEN FRUIT SMOOTHIE

This is a brilliant way of using up overripe bananas. When they start going spotty, peel them, break into quarters and put them in a bag in the freezer and you can use them when you need them. Using frozen fruit gives the smoothie a much firmer texture, more like ice cream. It is definitely easier to eat with a spoon than to drink it!

SERVES 4

3 frozen bananas

2 cups frozen strawberries,
raspberries or mixed berries

Put the frozen fruit into a medium glass bowl and microwave on high for 1 minute to soften very slightly.

Add a dash of water and blend with a stick blender until smooth.

Spoon into small glasses and serve.

“ **Let it go!** If you are holding onto a grudge, let it go. Forgive and forget. It’s hard but will help you to move on in a positive way. ”



Trust in people

MUESLI WITH STEWED FRUIT

Linseed is my personal wonder food. It is SOOOO good for the digestion. I always take a tub of it on holiday to keep my system moving. This muesli mix will keep for ages in a sealed container. You can freestyle it and make it your own but this is my usual mix. The stewed fruit lasts in the fridge for a week or so and any excess freezes well.

MAKES 2 LITRES

3.5 cups porridge oats

2.5 cups oat and raisin granola (I use Jordans)

½ cup golden linseed

1 cup whole almonds

½ cup pumpkin seeds

½ cup chia seeds

½ cup sunflower seeds

½ cup raisins

FOR THE STEWED APPLE AND BERRIES

4 large cooking apples

2 cups of blackberries, raspberries, blackcurrants, strawberries or any combination

For the muesli, put all the ingredients in the container and give it a good shake to mix.

For the stewed apple and berries, peel and core the apples and slice into fairly thin slices. Put into a saucepan with ½ cup of water and cook on a low to medium heat for about 15 minutes. Check frequently to make sure it is not burning on the bottom and stir. Add a dash more water if necessary to stop it sticking and you may need to turn down the heat. Add the berries half way through the cooking time. As the apples soften, stir vigorously to help them break down. The apple will turn a beautiful pinky-purple colour as the berries break down too. Once it is fairly smooth take off the heat and set aside to cool. I find that the mixture is sweet enough without adding sugar.

Serve the muesli with plain yoghurt, a dash of almond milk and stewed fruit.

Variation - stewed rhubarb

You can also make stewed rhubarb with the same method above. It will probably need some sugar as it is often very tart. Berry coulis would also be a good option to mix into the muesli (see page 176), but I would reduce the sugar for this purpose. When nectarines, peaches and plums are plentiful, they are great stewed too.

“ Trust in people. Trust your friends to help and support you when you need it. Be trustworthy yourself. Share your troubles and you will find your relationship deepens. If you only ever talk about the small stuff you’ll never learn anything about what makes others tick. In this crazy world of social media friends and connections, remember that it is quality, not quantity, that matters. When the going gets tough, it is those people around you who you trust and who trust you that matter. ”



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About the author

Charlotte Derry is a 47-year-old ex-accountant with a husband and three daughters, a thriving vegetable patch and a love of cooking, thinking and reading. This is her first book and gathers together the cumulative experience of 25 years of cooking for family and friends, growing her own fruit and veg and pondering how we can be happier.

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