STORIES ON OUR PLATE

RECIPES AND CONVERSATIONS

Edited by Jolien Benjamin, Emma-Jayne Abbots,
Jack Fleming and Deborah F. Toner

SOOP
STORIES ON OUR PLATE
Arts & Humanities Research Council
Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David
UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

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All photographs by Rocio Carvajal

Cover image and illustrations by Clara Ernst, Studio Imernst

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Recipes and Conversations

Food is an integral aspect of everyday life: it can be eaten in a fleeting moment, on the run, at a desk or in a car, providing the quick sustenance needed to fuel the human body and ensure its survival. It can be tasted, chewed, and swallowed hastily, leaving no trace of its original form as it is consumed and digested, or even left to spoil. Yet food can also linger long after its final morsels have disappeared into hungry mouths or the remnants of a meal have been cleared away. A familiar aroma or taste has the capacity to transport us back to people, places, and events. Food can invoke memories – both pleasurable and disagreeable – as it engages all of our senses. The ordinary gives way to the extraordinary as the everyday, often mundane, act of eating brings the past into the present and connects us to the places and people in our lives. The foodstuffs may be temporary, but in recollecting them through sensorial experiences, stories, and recipes we create and establish continuities with our personal and cultural histories.

Our connection with a particular food or dish not only revolves around its taste, feel, look, and aroma, but is also centred on our social relations with people and places. Behind the ingredients and meals lie the gestures and cultural values that help us tell the story of a food. Commensality – the act of eating with others – creates new social bonds and can transform strangers into friends, as well as maintain and rekindle old relationships. As we eat together, whether it be with friends, family, or strangers, we come together. This often under-appreciated act of eating further allows for conversations to blossom, memories to be recalled and created, new connections to places to be established, and identities to be made and remade. For food, cooking, and eating can tell a rich story that helps forge our social and cultural identity and anchor us to the people and places in our lives. Telling a story through a specific dish, taste, or smell, however quirky and personal, can paint a picture not only of our culinary identity, but also our broader cultural belonging. It can help define and express much of who we are. Food and stories act as a celebration, then, of ourselves as cooks and as socially connected people.

These are the foundations of Stories On Our Plate - SOOP. Founded in London in 2016 by Jack Fleming, Jolien Benjamin, and Laura Love-Petschl, SOOP is an organisation that celebrates and provides a space for people and their culinary identities. Launching with the London-based supper club series, SOOP has welcomed chefs and home cooks from all backgrounds and cultures. The series, which is convened by SOOP once a month, provides a space for cooks to share their food with curious guests and narrate the stories behind the food. Every supper club, convened in a pop-up space such as a former café or cookery school, tells a different story: from the sharing of family recipes to the challenging of misconceptions and stereotypes of national cuisines. For example, one cook, Ribale, has used the supper club series to share their family recipes from Lebanon to showcase the distinct culinary identity in the region, whilst another, Katrina, has used the series to share Eastern European recipes, specifically from Estonia and Russia. Both these cooks feature in this book. Growing from strength to strength, the SOOP supper club series has convened brunches, lunches, and dinners across London with close partner pop-up spaces such as the London Cooking Project in West London. A further component of SOOP's work, launched in 2017, is a culinary training programme for home cooks with migrant and refugee backgrounds who worked towards the hosting of their first supper club to paying customers at the London Cooking Project. Shakirat, whose Nigerian recipes are featured in this book, joined and concluded the programme with her first supper club in south west London.

Stories On Our Plate: Recipes and Conversations is a result of a collaborative research project between SOOP, food anthropologist Emma-Jayne Abbots, and cultural historian Deborah F. Toner, entitled Food Stories: Fostering Cross-Cultural Dialogue through Food. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the project aimed to encourage cross-cultural conversation through cooking and eating food, and by sharing stories of culinary heritage and cultural identity. The premise of the Food Stories project, and therefore this recipe book, is that food, and its narratives, can act as vehicles for translating the histories and cultures of different parts of the world to one another, and that food can encourage individuals to reflect and value their own culinary heritage as part of their identity. This is particularly important, we suggest, in the context of diasporas and migrant groups and in the current political climate, which has seen a rise in anti-migrant and refugee rhetoric, increasingly entrenched and polarised divisions, and political extremism.

This book draws together a number of chefs and cooks from across London, many of whom have been involved in SOOP's supper club series and culinary training programme, and it provides a platform through which they can share their favourite recipes and the stories that lie behind them. Each cook has selected three dishes that are close to their heart and soul and form part of their personal, familial, and social memories, as well those recipes that reflect their unique style of cookery and the culinary traditions and ingredients of the myriad regions that influence them. To capture the stories behind the selected recipes, Jolien Benjamin, together with Elodie Vincendeau, an intern at SOOP, and photographer Rocio Carjaval, whose stories and recipes, are also featured in the book, were welcomed into the cooks' homes where they allowed the ingredients, smells, tastes, embodied practices, and kitchen utensils to guide and inform rich and evocative conversations. The cross-cultural dialogues that were sparked from the different methods and ingredients revealed our commonalities and helped build a deeper understanding of one another through food and our culinary heritage.

In narrating their personal culinary heritage, each chef, in very different ways, shows how food creates connections between people and between people and places, and helps forge and maintain cultural identity. Yet this is not static nor rigid; rather, the stories and recipes highlight the fluidity and openness of cuisines, the adaptation and hybridity of dishes, and the ways in which people make and remake their home, identity, and sense of belonging. It is hoped, therefore, that readers will not only be inspired to cook the recipes, but will also be encouraged to think about and share their own food stories, as well as listening to those of others. To this end, we have supported this book with a series of workshops and online resources that work to stimulate continuing dialogue about the ways in which food and culinary heritage can help challenge misconceptions of seemingly 'other' people and blur social divisions. Our broader ambition, then, is that this book forms part of a wider conversation about the capacity for food to encourage cross-cultural understanding and that it inspires community initiatives and cooks in other towns and cities to instigate similar projects. We very much hope you enjoy and take inspiration from the pages that follow.

Mandana Moghaddam

“On Thursday night or Friday we would go to my father’s mother and, my goodness, she was the symbol of passion and cooking. You would lick your fingers after having her food, everyone loved, loved, loved her food.”

In a kitchen filled with the aromatic smells of turmeric, fried onions, and rosewater, it is clear that the love, care, and joy for food and cooking, similar to her paternal grandmother, has passed on to Mandana. She vividly recalls there would always be food at her grandmother’s house, no matter whether she was expecting guests or not: the door would always be open and the moment people arrived they would be directed to the kitchen. This is a key signifier for the culture, with hospitality and taking care of others being considered one of the highest virtues. The idea of always having enough food available, just in case someone should knock on the door, is beautifully reflected in the example of Mandana’s great grandmother, who had her own room in the family home. She got up at 5am and, regardless whether other family members would join her or not, she would start cooking eggs and you name it, in her little skillet on the fire next to her bed. Throughout Mandana’s life this principle was echoed and reinforced by her father stating “when people finish the food they must never see the bottom of the dish: imagine people would want to help themselves to seconds and there would be no food, that would be embarrassing.”

Persian cuisine, revolving around a sense of occasion and celebration, is epitomised in Mandana’s monthly cooking classes, ‘At Home with Mandana’, where she focusses on transferring her knowledge of Persian cuisine to people who may be less familiar with the food and culture. She is a natural in making people feel welcomed and at home, although she did not learn her exquisite cooking skills from her mother’s side. “Why would you waste your time cooking when you could finish a book?!”, she was told as a career path in academia, just like her mother and maternal grandmother, was far more favoured. For Mandana, however, who was born and raised in Iran and moved to London with her family during her teens, cooking Persian food and caring for people was a way of keeping many beautiful childhood memories of her family and friends alive. Differing from the English way of cooking, where food is mainly served to portion size, Mandana still has the mentality that there should always be enough food in the house as “you never know who could knock on the door.”

Noon Panir Sabzi

Herb Platter as Starter

A plate of fresh mixed herbs, feta cheese, and flatbread is a popular starter in any Persian home, a healthy and refreshing appetiser that doesn't require any cooking. Fresh herbs including aromatic herbs such as mint, tarragon, basil, and spring onion are often sold in carts by the roadside. Often still covered in dirt it can take up to three washing sessions to get them cleaned and edible. In Iranian culture herbs are not just for garnish, they are to be eaten as a whole, together with a piece of feta wrapped in a thin slice of flatbread, lavash, or are enjoyed simply as is.

Kashkeh Bademjan

Meze or Starter

Fridays in Iran are what Sundays are in England. People had the day off and would gather with family and friends for lunch. It was a very exciting day, as you knew you would see your cousins and friends. I have many fond childhood memories of spending our Friday lunch at a restaurant called Riverside Restaurant, on the Jajrood river a little bit outside of Tehran. Imagine Hampstead Heath's Kenwood House with a river meandering through the garden with tables scattered around where you can sit and eat. Once the food was ordered, the kids would be running around, playing with the cat you could usually find behind the kitchen. The atmosphere was so joyous. Some of the dishes I have been cooking in London help foster these beautiful childhood memories.

One of the dishes we would have at Riverside is kashkeh bademjan, a rather traditional dish consisting of fried aubergine, mashed and then mixed with dried whey, garnished with fried onions and garlic, dried mint, and a pinch of crushed walnut. With its slightly stronger smell and taste than yoghurt, kashk has a peculiar taste often used in Iranian cuisine. It is a whey protein that is a by-product of cheese production. The yellow water that forms on top when making cheese has multiple health claims and it can either be consumed in liquid or in dried shape. Because of the live bacteria, the probiotics, it is believed that it is good for tummy aches and is often given to children to relieve their symptoms. It is salty and tangy and you want to click your mouth when you eat it. Whenever I make this dish the smell of the fried garlic and onion takes me back to Riverside, but it also reminds me of parties and good times at family homes (the door was always open, of course).

People take pride in decorating the dishes in Iranian cuisine. The food itself is one thing, yet the decoration and presentation is another, comparable with the precision of how people in England decorate cakes. Kashkeh bademjan needs to have a criss cross pattern. My version is rather quick, but there are many more extensive versions out there! For Iranians any type of gathering, whether it is breakfast, lunch, or dinner, is a sense of occasion. It is not that we are trying to show off, it's about celebrating, which is reflected in the food. It is rare to find just a few nuts in a bowl, instead we have food in abundance presented in a pyramid shape to share.

Ingredients

Serves 6-8

Aubergine, 3

Vegetable oil, 5 tbsp

Kashk (dried whey), 3 tbsp

Garlic, chopped, 3 cloves

Onion, chopped, 1

Dried mint, 1 tbsp

Crushed walnut, 1 tbsp

Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Peel the aubergines and cut the heads off before slicing them lengthwise in medium thick slices.

In a frying pan heat 4 tbsp of oil and fry each slice on both sides.

In a pot bring the fried slices of aubergine, fully covered by water, to the boil, leaving them to simmer for 20 minutes or until they are soft in the centre and easy to mash.

With a potato masher mash the aubergines thoroughly before gently folding in the kashk and pouring it onto a platter.

In a small pan, fry the garlic, onions, and dried mint in 1 tbsp of oil for roughly 3-5 minutes, making sure not to let it burn.

Pour the fried mixture on top of the aubergine and garnish with crushed walnuts.

Tahchin

Compressed Rice Cake with Chicken

One of the other infamous dishes that would be ordered at Riverside restaurant is tahchin: a compressed rice cake served in cubes with a delicious caramelised crispy crust, stuffed with chicken marinated in saffron, yoghurt, and egg yolk, and garnished with caramelised barberries and pistachios. With a vast array of rice dishes consumed at almost every meal, rice is considered our oxygen. Each Persian kitchen has a bucket of rice in the corner, usually containing basmati rice, appreciated for its long and elegant grain with a fluffy texture. We can't live without it, just like saffron, turmeric, and rosewater – to name a few of the ingredients that define Persian cooking. Unlike what is often thought of as Iranian cooking, the food is not spicy at all. Instead the aroma defines the cuisine. Imagine the food to be a bunch of lovely scented flowers. In the tahchin for example we're adding rosewater and a zested orange to help evoke even more the incredible aroma that saffron brings to the food.

Ingredients

Serves 6

Chicken thigh fillets, 6 pieces

Onion, 3

Turmeric, 1½ tsp

Salt to taste

Eggs, 6

Ground saffron, 1 tsp

Greek yoghurt (strained yoghurt), 1kg

Zest of orange, 1

Orange blossom water, 1 tsp

Vegetable oil, 1½ cup

Rice, 1 kg

Barberries, 2 tbsp

Pistachios, thinly sliced, 2 tbsp

Butter, 10g

Sugar, 1 tbsp

Method

For the Chicken fillets

In a shallow pot or pan cook your chicken fillets in 1 cup of water with 1 onion chopped in quarters, ½ tsp of turmeric, and salt. With a lid on leave to simmer for 45 mins to 1 hour, until cooked and you are left with 1 cup of chicken juice in the pan, which should be kept for later.

Once cooked, marinate the chicken in 3 egg yolks, 1 kg of Greek yoghurt, plus half of the saffron, orange zest, orange blossom water, and ½ a cup of oil. Cover with cling film and leave overnight in the fridge.

For the Rice

Dice 2 onions and fry in 2 tbsp oil with 1 tsp turmeric until caramelised. Leave aside.

Boil the rice with salt and 4 cups of water, when it has come to boil, check the grains, if softly breaking/snapping (al dente), drain it. If not, leave to cook for a few minutes longer. Remove the chicken from the marinade and leave aside.

Rub a non-stick deep oven dish (30cm x 23cm) with butter, add ½ a cup of oil and heat in the oven.

Mix the rice with 3 eggs yolks and the rest of the marinade.

Pour ½ of the rice mixture in the bottom of the oven dish, place the chicken fillets on top of the rice, cover with the onions, then add the rest of the rice to the top and press firmly down.

This dish is more of a sticky rice unlike all the other Persian dishes which usually have fluffy rice, which is why we press firmly.

Cover with foil and place in the oven for 2 ½ hours at 180 °C.

For the Barberries

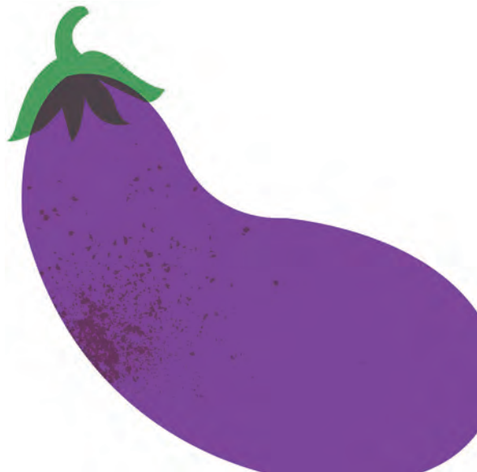
Wash and drain the berries.

Place the butter in a small pan with sugar until melted and fry the berries on a low heat until shiny and plump. Leave aside.

Serving the Dish

After 2 ½ hours take the rice out of the oven, place a tray over the top, firmly hold the sides of the pan with the tray and flip over. The rice should come out like an upside-down cake, crunchy and golden on top.

For the final decoration, scatter the berries over the top, ready to serve and cut the rice in cubes.



Saffron

Not having saffron is like not having salt – it is that important. Saffron is the stamen of crocus flowers, a highly valued spice that is hand picked by women in the Northern part of Iran in the month of November. The stamens can only be picked on the day the crocus flowers bloom, as the next day they will be too old. Imagine the work, as 70,000 crocus flowers have to be picked in order to produce 100 g of saffron – it's a very precious good. The preparation and use of saffron requires some effort: adding a string of saffron to food gives the same result as brewing coffee with whole coffee beans… nothing. To get the best out of the saffron, the strings need to be ground first before you brew it in water, like a tea. Add the saffron, together with a pinch of granulated sugar, to a pestle and mortar and grind it until it becomes the consistency of fine powder. Then pour hot boiled water over it and let it steep for a couple of minutes. The longer it sits, the more intense the aroma. The mixture can easily be kept in the fridge for ten days.

Chai and Noon Panjereh

Tea and Window bread

In Iran chai is of great symbolic importance; it is the reason for people to go to each others' houses for a conversation, similar to how you would meet up over a coffee here. Chai is on the whole day in an Iranian home, ready to be poured for anyone who visits. When guests arrive the first thing you do is offer chai and when they finish their cup, you pour another one. When you stop pouring chai it's almost a way of telling visitors that they have to go now.

Traditionally, serving chai also plays an important role in determining whether a woman is suitable to be married during the visit of her potential future in-laws to her family home, a ceremony called the Khastegari. After the parents of both parties have exchanged the virtues of both the suitor and the bride, the woman will be called in the room by her father, where she would offer the guests tea, dates, and pastries. Her skills will be assessed by her future in-laws on the quality of the tea, her tea pouring skills, and serving methods, which should all reflect her qualities to cook and to host.

Iranian teapots consist of two compartments: the main kettle that is filled with water sits on the stove and has a smaller china teapot on top, often covered with a tea towel to enhance the steaming process. The tea leaves, a mixture of Assam – for the depth and a rich taste – and Earl Grey – for the bergamot aroma – is gently steamed in the china teapot, brewing a rather strong tea. The tea is poured in the cups and topped up with the boiling water. For special occasions I serve chai with noon panjereh (window bread), which is a light fritter I remember buying from bakeries for Nowruz, the Perisan New Year. It's a delicate and delicious treat!

Ingredients

Eggs, 3

Plain flour, sifted, 1 cup

Milk, ½ cup

Cornflour, ½ cup

Vegetable oil (for frying), 3 cups

Icing sugar to dust

Utensils

Rosette iron – this is available online from websites such as amazon.

Method

Whisk the eggs until light and fluffy.

Add the flour, milk, and cornflour gradually, whisking between each, until a smooth consistency has been reached.

Heat the oil in a saucepan.

Once the oil is hot leave the rosette iron in the oil to heat up.

Dip the rosette into the batter so that the sides are covered but not the top. Dip this straight into the hot oil, after about 30 seconds the batter should loosen from the rosette. Flip the noon panjereh to make sure it is crispy on all sides then remove from oil onto a kitchen towel.

Repeat this for the rest of the batter mixture, making sure to heat the rosette in oil before each turn.

Dust the noon panjereh in icing sugar before serving.

Katrina Kollegaeva

“I am a Londoner in a sense; growing up with all these international flavours I was quite snooty, you know, who cares about Russian food? But there is actually something really fascinating about nasha, literally ‘our food’, that’s why I wanted to start sharing food from the former Soviet Union and this is how Russian Revels started.”

Katrina, a storyteller by heart, successfully added to London’s culinary repertoire by sharing her interpretation of nasha through Russian Revels, a supper club series she ran with Karina Baldry. At the forefront of the supper club scene in London, her food and stories were shared in their most playful and thought-provoking forms, turning the sharing of home cooked food into an experience. Informed by her background in food anthropology and shaped by the warm memories of her rather bohemian upbringing in Estonia, the supper clubs were centred on historical and cultural themes that confront diners’ preconceptions of not only Soviet cuisine, but also the culture as a whole. Katrina challenges the initial idea that Eastern European food has little to offer and shows that, although public eating in restaurants hardly occurred during communism, there is a wealth of home cooking and even street food to discover and share.

The often beautifully decorated and elaborate Russian Revels events are not that dissimilar from how one imagines Katrina’s upbringing by her Ukrainian mother and Crimean father. With a wonderful sense of occasion and love of nature, her mother would turn any regular breakfast into a happening with freshly picked wildflowers on the table. Food is a way for Katrina to connect to her past and her parents, who have both passed away but live on through her recipes and storytelling that are shared at both the supper clubs and in her evocative writing. As part of her food writing, Katrina recently discovered that prior to communism there was a flourishing street food scene in Russia, feeding the workers with tiny little pies in a rapidly industrialising Moscow. Although some of this traditional knowledge has been lost, Katrina also notes that people are equally rediscovering their past and this is reflected in the current flourishing food scene in Moscow. As Russian food has evolved, so has Russian Revels. Katrina and Karina have moved on and started a new adventure ‘Produckt.London’, a supper club series in which one food item gets explored, one supper at a time.

Borsch

Borsch is quite a classic dish as far as borsch could be classic, there are many versions. My mother would sometimes make a purely vegetarian borsch the way I am sharing with you here, but most Russians and Ukrainians would say borsch without meat is an anathema. So they would make stock with good beef bones that still have some meat left on them. If the bones are quite fatty, make the stock in advance, let it cool, and collect the coagulated fat from the top. You can then separate the meat from the bones to add to the soup once the borsch is cooked. Depending on the season and what I have in the fridge there are many different vegetables that could be added to the borsch. There is obviously beetroot and some potatoes, just like cabbage and carrots.

We did not have such rich variety of foods available to us growing up as here in England. My mum would use the same ingredients just because we did not have access to anything else. The idea of having different cabbages did not exist, we only had one cabbage: white. Each time I make a borsch it comes out a different colour. Sometimes it is a very bright red, sometimes it is leaning more towards burgundy. It depends on the beetroot, the combination, and how many ingredients you're adding. This is the thing about borsch, you just don't know what is going to come out – it's magical!

Ideally you would want to serve your borsch with vodka, poured into a frozen glass. I only realised the beauty of vodka ten years ago, when I was already way into my London life. Women are not supposed to drink vodka, Russians say! Of course many Russian women do love vodka, me included. I find it pairs really well with strong flavoured dishes, like pickles, herring… it's so palette cleansing. It is genuinely an amazing drink.

Ingredients

Serves at least 10

Onions, chopped finely, 200g

Large clove of garlic, minced, 1

Celery stalks, finely chopped, 2-3

Carrots, grated, 200g

Beetroot, boiled & grated, 600g

Lemon, ½

White cabbage, finely sliced, 250g

Potatoes, cubed, 350g

Oil for cooking

Cold water, 4ltr

Veg stock powder or beef stock, 1tbsp

Salt to taste

Black peppercorns, 7

Bay leaves, 2

Balsamic vinegar or pomegranate molasses, 2-3 tbsp

Sour cream & chopped parsley/dill to serve

Method

In a large, preferably heavy bottomed, saucepan sweat onions in oil for approximately 20-30 minutes. Add a little hot water if they start to catch. Half way through add the celery. Towards the end, add the garlic.

Add carrots and sweat for 5-10 minutes, then the beetroot and cook for another 5-10 minutes. Squeeze the lemon and put the lemon in (the lemon allows colours to come to life and adds a zing).

Add the hot water, allow to come to a boil, then turn the heat down so the soup simmers for the rest of the cooking time.

Add the potatoes, peppercorns, salt, bay leaf, and in another 3-5 minutes the cabbage. Sprinkle in the vegetable stock.

Simmer with the lid half closed until the vegetables are soft, another 10-15 minutes. Switch off the heat and leave to settle.

I sometimes prefer a more mushy, blended texture, so I take a few ladlefuls of the soup, pour them into another bowl and mash, then return to the saucepan.

Borsch is best eaten the following day, with a dollop of sour cream, more sprinkled parsley, dill, and milled black pepper. Do the soup justice by serving it with proper rye bread, or at least some robust sourdough. Na zdorovye!

Buck-ouleh

Like Tabbouleh but with Buckwheat

This is my go-to dish for supper clubs and events. Buckwheat, or kasha as it is often confusingly referred to in English (in Russian kasha is a generic word for a porridge or a savoury stew), is as commonplace in post-Soviet countries as, say, rice in Asia. Where in London this nutty, gluten free grain has only been 'discovered' recently, most Russian kids eat grechka almost daily – with milk and sugar for breakfast, with burgers and frankfurters for dinner, or just as is with a few pickles. You can buy a pack of already roasted buckwheat, which is what we normally eat (in fact, I came across unroasted buckwheat for the first time here in London), in any Russian/Lithuanian – our shop – in London. This way of eating the grain, cold, as a salad, is certainly not the norm though. But mixing the Middle Eastern tradition with the Eastern European really makes sense here I think. Buckwheat likes the company of other strong flavours, and to contrast with fresher, crunchier playmates. So feel free to play around with whatever veggies you have here, depending on the season. During colder months you could add kohlrabi, kale, or even cabbage.

Ingredients

Serves: about 20-25 — tapas style

For the buck-ouleh

Red peppers, 4

Buckwheat, 500g

Spring onions, small bunch

Radishes, 10-15

Parsley, large bunch

For the dressing

Coriander seeds, 4 tbsp

Lemons, juiced, 2

Runny honey, 3-4 tbsp

Capers, 4 tbsp

Dijon mustard, 2 tbsp

Salt and pepper to taste

Olive oil

Method

Preheat the oven to 180 C, roast the peppers until they've collapsed and blackened (about 30-45 minutes). When done, put them into a plastic bag and cool a little. Then peel off the skin, take the seeds out, and tear them into strips of about 1-2 cm wide.

Whilst the peppers are doing their business, rinse buckwheat in plenty of cold water. Cover with about 3 cms of cold water, bring to the boil, add salt, and simmer until all water is evaporated (about 15 minutes). Let it cool.

Chop the spring onions and parsley, and slice radishes into halves or quarters.

Make the dressing by grinding the coriander and then mixing with all the other dressing ingredients well.

Toss the buckwheat with the peppers, radishes, herbs, and the dressing. Taste and add whatever you feel is missing, or you would like more of!

Kama & Mascarpone Truffles

I was lucky enough to meet a now well known food writer in Estonia; Pille, who runs the lovely foodblog Nami Nami. Her interpretation of Estonian food has always inspired me. Kama truffles are her recipe, but I have been making them for so long in different varieties that they really became a signature item as part of the supper clubs and other events and are quite easy to make.

Kama

Kama flour is an unusual ingredient, quintessential to Estonian cooking and culture, that has been rediscovered and reappropriated for its unique taste and versatility. It is an ancient brown looking flour mix comprising roasted rye, wheat, barley, and peas with a nutty flavour. Historically kama was a non-perishable, easy-to-carry food that could be quickly fashioned into a stomach-filling snack by rolling it into butter or lard; it didn't require baking, as it was already roasted. When kama is mixed with kefir it becomes a thick smoothie: this is how we would have it for breakfast when growing up. Now kama has become quite fashionable, with lots of kama related products on the shelves of Estonian supermarkets. I've a dream to bring it to the UK!

Ingredients

Makes: 20

For the truffles:

Mascarpone, 250g

Sugar, 3 tbsp

Raisins, 2 tbsp

Chopped nuts*, 2 tbsp

Cream liqueur **, a dash

For the coating:

Kama flour, 3 tbsp

Cocoa powder, 3 tbsp

Desiccated coconut with grated white chocolate, 3 tbsp

Method

Mix all the ingredients for the truffles together and put into the fridge for a while. Once they have a firm consistency form them into small balls.

Divide the different coatings over 3 plates.

Roll in the different coatings and keep in the fridge until ready to serve.

** I used walnuts, although hazelnuts would have been more 'authentic', as these are the only nuts native to Estonia.*

*** I used Vana Tallinn cream liqueur, but Bailey's would do.*

Irem Aksu

“Istanbul’s minority cuisines need to be made visible and shared with other people as their contribution to Turkish cuisine as a whole has been tremendous. Food is not really for dividing or division, you can’t say it belongs to one region or community, no it belongs to the city of these people and the homes that created them.”

Human rights activism in its most delicious and beautiful form is one way of describing Irem’s cooking for her supper club series and business, Topik London, Food Without Borders. Her love and passion for food and people consolidates in her kitchen that breathes the smokiness of freekeh, also known as firik in Turkish, and the warm notes of cinnamon and cloves. Irem, a journalist by trade, who was born and raised in Turkey and lived for many years in Istanbul, had not thought of turning to professional cooking until she moved to London. Here, her engagement with Counterpoint Arts, an organisation to support and produce the arts by and about migrants and refugees, naturally led her in this direction.

Irem participated in the Dis/Placed Exhibition organised by Counterpoints Arts by sharing food and stories from the minority groups that make up Istanbul, a metropole that is shaped by the people who have been migrating there for centuries. Although influenced by the Ottoman Empire’s palace kitchen and Anatolian practices, the cuisine equally draws upon a vast array of seafood and all the minority groups the city hosts, including Jewish, Istanbul Greeks, Armenian, Kurdish, Arabic, and Circassian communities. These groups have enriched the city with their food, identities, traditions, and stories that often stay hidden behind the closed doors of Istanbul homes. Yet it was behind one of these doors that Irem’s interest in unveiling and sharing the recipes and stories of minority cultures was sparked when she was served topik, an Armenian meze dish, during an Easter gathering at a friend’s house. Topik, a dough made out of chickpeas, potatoes, and tahini – and stuffed with cinnamon, caramelised onions, pine nuts, and currants – is one of the many dishes that can rarely be found in the city’s popular meyhanes, where people often gather with friends for meze and raki (a traditional Turkish spirit distilled with grape and aniseed), but Irem shares the dish during her engaging supper club series in London. After her training at Ottolenghi’s, Irem worked as a chef at E5 Bakehouse but, moving on with her own culinary journey, she can now be found at the October Gallery in London where she holds a chef residency.

Eksili Kofte

Meatballs in Lemon Sauce

Eksili kofte reminds me of my attachment to the cities in Turkey and the places that I lived in and enjoyed. My mum would often make this dish when I was growing up, and it has become my go-to comfort food when I'm cooking at home. Tomato or its paste-based dishes are very common in Turkey, as it is for the rest of southern Mediterranean regions and countries. However, I always loved the pale looking lemon-egg sauce version of this meatball dish. The heartiness combined with the juiciness of the lemon reminds me of home and triggers a very comforting sensation. As a student, when my monthly allowance was running low, I enjoyed eating eksili kofte, also known as terbiyeli, in the lokantas, the tradesmans' restaurants found within each borough. Lokantas are fairly cheap and their daily lunch menu offers seasonable, stew-like, home-style cooked dishes. If you were born or grew up in a little village or if you were part of a close-knit community in the city, it would not be uncommon to find a group of women rolling the meatballs together. Communal food preparation is quite common and the meatballs are no exception to this: making tomato or pepper paste, and pickling and preserving summer produce are also done by a group of, mainly, housewives. The same goes for rolling the dough for and making manti (Turkish dumplings), boreks, or baklava. These are all very labour intensive and time-consuming dishes, which are made in a communal space. Imagine one person kneading the dough, while the other one is dividing it, one is preparing the stuffing, whereas another is opening the dough and stuffing it. It's amazing to see the teamwork reflected in the dishes.

Ingredients

Serves 4

Minced lamb, 150g

Minced beef, 100g

Rice, soaked in hot water for 10 mins and drained, 1 tbsp

Onion, grated, 1

Parsley, finely chopped, 1 handful

Wheat flour, 1 tbsp

Olive oil, 2 tbsp

Carrot, sliced in 1-2 inch thick slices, 1

Large potato, cut into 2-3 inch chunks, 1

Celery leaves, 1 handful

Bay leaves, 2

Salt and pepper to taste

Water or homemade veg/meat stock, 1 ltr

Fresh parsley leaves to garnish

Pul biber, sprinkle

For the Sauce

Lemon, juiced, ½

Egg yolk, 1

Yogurt, 2 tbsp

Method

In a large bowl, mix together the minced beef and lamb, onion, rice, chopped parsley, black pepper, and 1 tsp of salt until combined.

Sprinkle 2 tbsp of whole wheat flour onto a sheet pan, and then begin to make small meatballs and roll them in the flour to coat them (do this by rocking the pan back and forth when all meatballs are done, rather than rolling them in the flour individually).

In a large soup pot, heat 2 tbsp of olive oil and toss in the chopped carrots and bay leaves. Sauté for about 5 minutes.

Add 1 litre of water or stock, season with a pinch of sea salt flakes and 2-3 rounds of freshly ground pepper and bring to a simmer. Add the potatoes, celery leaves, and meatballs, and cook (covered) for 20-25 minutes over a low heat, gently stirring every 5-10 minutes.

In a small bowl, whisk together the egg yolk, lemon juice, and yogurt. Slowly temper the liquid with the cooking liquid in your bowl, and then add the mixture back into to the pot. Cook the entire dish for another 1-2 minutes, and then serve hot with a sprinkle of Turkish pul biber (red pepper flakes) and parsley leaves.

Yoghurt

Yoghurt, one of the main ingredients rooted in the nomadic cultural time of Turkey, is still very common in Turkish cuisine and one of my favourite ingredients. I absolutely love the tanginess of it and how versatile it is. It's not only used for making Turkish cacik or a jajik, an Armenian meze dish (see page 37), similar to what the Greeks call tzatziki, it's been used for making sauces and soups too. In the winter we would make a hot yoghurt soup, in the summer a cold one with lots of mint, barley, green lentils, or bulgur – it's very delicious. Those yoghurt soups are called yayla corbasi. My dad, who is from the Black Sea region in the northern part of Turkey, loves yoghurt and would always make his own at home. The region he comes from has a wet sea climate and the soil is fertile with lots of green grass and wildflowers, which means the cows produce the most delicious milk. This results in the well-rounded butter and cheeses that I watched my aunties make when I spent my summers there. I've kept the tradition of yoghurt making going. In contrast to the rather creamy conventional yoghurt you find in the supermarket, home made yoghurt often has a rather watery consistency. For making it you need a good quality, preferably raw, milk. You have to boil the milk for 10-15 minutes when it is raw, but just heat it up to 90-95C when it has been pasteurised. When the temperature has dropped to 42-45C you pour the milk in a sterilised jar that has a lid and add some of the old yoghurt that acts as a starting culture (for 1 ltr of milk, add 1tbsp of yoghurt). You then stir it with a wooden spoon, close the lid and, wrapped in a cloth, keep it in a quite dark and warm place, like the oven for example or a dark corner in the house, for 4 hours. The magic will start happening when the temperature reaches 35-40 C. Yoghurt actually doesn't go off easily, it can stay longer than three weeks in the fridge, but over time it will start to taste more sour.

Bulgur Pilav

with Fresh Peas and Dried Almonds

Both my parents were good cooks and I remember there were the occasional fights in the kitchen about the dishes being cooked, as they would mainly be from their own region. My mother was not much of a fan of the dairy-heavy Black Sea influenced dishes; she would much prefer the lighter Anatolian influenced dishes with lots of grains and vegetables with which she grew up. But my dad did not want to give up 'his' dishes either. Luckily and to the advantage of my brother, sister, and me, both cuisines were cooked and served eventually. The really rich, fertile, and diverse soil and different climates of Turkey allow for a wide array of vegetables, grains, and pulses to grow and different animals to live on the land, and this is reflected in the many varied dishes from all over. I was lucky enough to spend my summers at both sides of the country where I had the opportunity to experience collecting fresh eggs from the chickens and observe different cooking techniques. Experiencing these processes in their local context gave me a bit more perspective and understanding of how these products and dishes are actually produced.

By watching and observing my mum I learned many dishes and techniques. Pilav is a rather simple dish that is very common in many Turkish homes. It mainly consists of rice or bulgur combined with some seasonal and local vegetables and herbs. Depending on the season, it might be aubergine and green beans, or peas, herbs, and tomatoes that are mixed with the bulgur. My mum used to cook this dish frequently, and the recipe I'm sharing is how it would taste in our home. It lends itself nicely as a side dish with a stew or for sharing, as was done in my mum's village that was based in the Anatolian side of Turkey. I vividly remember the big wooden plateaus, like a raised floor, where you would sit and eat with wooden spoons on the 'floor'. Regardless of the simplicity of the dish, the taste of fresh vegetables just harvested from the soil has always stayed with me. The freekeh that I'm mixing in is a young wheat that is harvested when the leaves are still green. It is frosted with smoke and adds a lovely smokey taste to the pilav, a beautiful product of the south eastern region of Turkey and a popular ingredient in Syrian cuisine too.

Ingredients

Serves 4 (side dish)

Cracked bulgur wheat, medium or freekeh, 1 cup

Green peas, 50g

Butter, 1 tbsp

Olive oil, 1 tbsp

Onion, finely chopped, 1

Almonds, 40g

Green Turkish pepper, chopped, 1

Garlic cloves, chopped fine, 2

Dried mint, 1 tsp

Salt, 1 tsp

Freshly ground black pepper, pinch

Chicken stock or water, 1.5 cup

Fresh dill and mint, chopped, handful

Method

Rinse the bulgur until the water becomes clean and drain it. Put aside.

Add the butter and olive oil into the pan. Once the butter is melted, add the onion and cook until soft. Add the pepper and garlic and sauté for two more minutes over a medium heat.

Add the bulgur, peas, salt, pepper, dried mint, and water or stock to the pan.

Cover and cook over a low-medium heat until all the water is absorbed and there are "eyes" in the surface of the bulgur, about 15 minutes (do not stir the pilav).

Remove from the heat and let it rest for 5 minutes with the lid on.

Roughly chop the almonds. Add the almonds and chopped fresh dill and mint to the well-rested pilav before serving.

When the dish has reached the final stage I like to add a squeeze of lemon or the zest of a lemon because I love its zingy flavour.

Dried Apricot and Raisin Hosaf

Chilled Dried Fruit Compote

Hosaf is a delicious and refreshing drink, common in many cities and regions, that suits your stomach well on a hot summer day or after a meal. People also have it during the Ramadan and break their fast with hosaf. The name comes from the Farsi word hos-ab, which means beautiful water. It is a sweet drink with dried fruits that is kept chilled in the fridge and served in a bowl with a spoon. When serving, the fruits need to be visible so you can pick them out – just like I did as a child. Growing up on home cooked food helps develop a certain palate and taste for how specific dishes need to taste, you create an ideal type. The version that I'm sharing here is the one my mum used to make; with less sugar than usual it's a bit more tangy and refreshing. You can use any of the dried fruits instead of dried apricots, for example figs, prunes, apples or raisins.

Ingredients

Serves 4

Dried apricot, 100g

Raisins, 50g

Caster sugar, 50g

Water, 500ml

Cinnamon stick, 1

Cloves, 2

Apricot kernels (optional), 10

(keep the kernels in hot water for 5 mins and peel the skin off before you add it to your hosaf)

Lemon, squeeze

A sprig of thyme or fresh

Mint leaves to serve

Ice cubes to serve

Method

Cut the dried apricots into halves. Wash the raisins and apricots, then drain.

Add the water and dried fruits to bring to a rolling boil on a medium heat with the lid on for about 15 minutes. Then add the sugar, cinnamon stick, cloves, and squeeze of lemon to the pan and continue to boil for 5 more minutes.

Let the hosaf cool down first. Discard the cinnamon sticks and cloves. Then let it sit for a few hours, a day is better, before eating, as the fruits will release their flavour and make the juice tastier.

You can add ice cubes and a sprig of thyme before you drink/eat it.

Natalie Nevart Griffith

“I’ve always loved food, researching and comparing recipes, and planning dinners for family and friends or just myself. Food is ultimately a tool for communication and bringing people together. To put it simply, it’s love on a plate.”

The sound of rice sizzling and crackling, the aromas of stuffed vine leaves bubbling away, traditional Armenian music, and a beautiful spoon collection are just a few of the many delights one gets to experience in Natalie’s home. The spoon is the principal piece of cutlery at the Armenian table and the household in which Natalie grew up, and most dishes can be eaten with a spoon and fork, no knives required! Natalie’s mother is Armenian and was born and raised in Masjed Soleyman, west of Isfahan in Central Iran, before moving to England, where she married Natalie’s Welsh father. Her mother had never been to Armenia until she and Natalie visited recently in 2015, and it was the food, the familiarity of people’s faces, and their welcoming nature that fostered a real connection to their roots. Hosting and entertaining had always felt natural to Natalie and, with the encouragement of her friends and family, she started her enchanting supper club series Natalie’s Armenian Kitchen from her home in South London. The suppers are a natural extension of a custom often experienced in Armenia, an expression of love and warmth by welcoming people into your home to share food and, of course, good conversation. There is an expression in Armenian when you welcome a new guest to your home: ‘May your feet in this house bring good luck!’ As a child, Natalie would spend hours in the kitchen watching and observing her mother closely, and learning the intricate techniques and herb and spice combinations used in Persian-Armenian cooking. Both countries have a long and rich culinary history going back centuries and Natalie’s supper club celebrates both cuisines. Natalie enjoys sharing not just her knowledge of the food, but also its culture and history with her guests.

Chelo

Persian Steamed Rice with Butter Crust

Eating chelo is probably one of my earliest food memories. As a child, my fascination was certainly my mother's food and although we also ate British cuisine, it was the exotic and fragrant flavours of Iran and Armenia that got me most excited. I wasn't the only fan championing my mother's cooking; the whole neighbourhood would request her rice whenever there was a party. Although preparing the rice requires a lot of work, it also works very well being prepared in advance, which makes it the ultimate party food. My mum uses a long grain basmati rice in her cooking, which is best for the preparation of Persian rice, whereas Armenians use a shorter grain rice and most often the absorption method. In Iran, the quality of your rice cooking is taken very seriously and seen as a sort of barometer for the quality of all your dishes.

As with many Persian-Armenian dishes, the cooking and quantities will come down to judgement by eye and taste, rather than following recipes to the fullest detail. The preparation of chelo has a few crucial stages. First the rice is rinsed thoroughly and soaked for two hours in salted water; this softens the rice and removes the starch, which ensures lighter fluffier grains. The rice is then placed in fresh water and brought to the boil and left to simmer for no more than ten minutes, so it becomes 'al dente' but not too soft. Then, the water is drained off and the rice is rinsed with cold water, prior to returning it to the pan and layering it with generous amounts of salted butter diluted in a little water. The pan is covered with a lid wrapped in a tea-towel (to absorb the steam) and is cooked over a medium heat for roughly forty-five minutes so the bottom part of the rice forms into a crispy, caramelised crust: in Farsi this is called tah-dig, literally 'bottom of the pan'. This is the 'simple' version we have at home, but the rice can be layered with onions, barberries, fresh herbs, and meat and this is called polo. Ideally the rice is turned out whole onto a plate so it looks like a cake. This is one of the dishes that people enjoy the most at my supper clubs, passing the rice around and enjoying the crunchy tah-dig – the most delicious thing in the world!

Ingredients

Serves 4

Basmati rice, 600g

Salted butter, 125g

Plenty of salt, 2 tbsp

Method

Wash and soak your rice in a large pan in plenty of salted cold water for at least 2 hours.

Drain the water then add plenty of boiling water with more salt to the rice and gently simmer for approximately 8-10 minutes until the rice is 'al dente' and not fully cooked. It's important not to overcook the rice at this stage.

Drain the water and wash the rice under cold water, letting all the water drain away.

In the empty pan, heat half of the butter with a little water. Once melted, pour half of the butter/water into a cup. With a large flat spoon or small flat plate layer the rice into the pan, pouring the butter on each layer and try to avoid damaging the grains of rice.

Once you've finished layering the rice in to the pan, stick a knife in a few times and insert some more knobs of butter (don't be scared, the more butter the better). Wrap the lid of the pan with the tea towel and cover the pan.

Cook on a medium-low heat for a good 45 minutes until the bottom of the rice becomes crispy and brown

Variations: You can add slices of potato on the bottom of the pan or layers of fried onion, saffron, barberries, sour cherries, or fresh green herbs.

Mixed Fresh Herbs

It is common in both Iran and Armenia to have a plate of fresh herbs on the table, with cheese and lavash, a traditional flatbread, often served as a starter. Imagine abundant fresh coriander, parsley, mint, tarragon, and my favourite, reyhan, a purple basil which has a sweeter richer flavour than green basil. Unfortunately it's not so easy to source reyhan in the UK, but it can be used in dried form and works very well in salads and dolma. In Armenia there is a special flat bread stuffed with up to ten or more different fresh herbs, wild plants, and greens called jingalov hats, and no one recipe will be the same. You will find this bread being prepared outdoors on hotplates in markets across Armenia but it comes originally from Artsakh, a region bordering Azerbaijan. It's just the most delicious thing you will ever eat!

Dolma

My real love of cooking for people started when I moved abroad to France and Italy as part of my university degree. The dish I chose to share with my friends for a dinner party was dolma, which is a very time-consuming dish to make, but an absolute staple and star of the cuisine. I was insistent on making them using my mother's recipe so I rang her from Italy and got the long list of ingredients. However finding all of these in Bologna, where I was living at the time, such as the vine leaves, fresh coriander, and minced lamb, was quite a challenge! But I managed to get everything and it was all a success. From that moment I have never stopped cooking for friends, which eventually has evolved into hosting supper clubs from my home.

Dolma, stuffed vine leaves (or other vegetables can be used), are not consumed on a daily basis in Armenian households. They are a celebration dish as they take quite some time to prepare. Depending on the family and the local availability of ingredients, there are many variations of dolma. The recipe I am sharing here is how my mother and grandmother would make them, including the secret ingredient I will share – mild curry powder. It was the ultimate compliment when an Armenian dining guest detected this in my dolma, telling me that she had not had dolma like this since her grandmother's. When using vine leaves that have been preserved in brine, either vacuum packed or in a jar, you must wash and soak them for several hours or overnight. This gets rid of the salty flavour that you want to avoid interfering with the flavours of the filling. After discarding the stem it is also important to note the difference between the two sides; the shiny side needs to be on the outside and the filling is placed on the dull side with the veins.

To make the dolma, you take a small amount of the stuffing, roll it into a ball, place it by the stem of the vine leaf at the bottom, and then fold from here, from left to right, wrapping it tightly. The vine leaves are rather delicate and it's normal to break a few initially. My mum always made dolma in the round shape, which is more typical in Iran. It is also very common to shape them into mini rolls, like little cigars. The broth the dolma cooks in (water, butter, and lemon juice) captures all the flavours of the meat and the herbs and is really delicious; I often drink it like a soup.

Ingredients

Makes approximately 50

Large jar or vacuum pack of vine leaves (approx. 500g), 1

Minced lamb, 1kg

Fresh coriander, large bunch, 1

Fresh parsley, large bunch, 1

Fresh mint, small bunch, 1

Fresh dill, small bunch, 1

Spring onions, 5

Leek, 1

Large garlic cloves, crushed, 2

Basmati rice, 200g

Mild curry powder, 1 tsp

Lemon, grated rind and juice, 1

Olive oil, 1 tbsp

Butter, 100g

Salt and pepper to taste

Optional variation: use cabbage leaves instead and cook in a sauce of tomato, sugar, vinegar, and prunes.

Method

Wash and soak the vine leaves preferably overnight.

Finely chop all the herbs, spring onion, and leek.

In a large bowl combine the chopped herbs with the lamb, rice, lemon rind, garlic, olive oil, curry powder, and a good seasoning of salt and pepper and mix well using your hands.

Take the vine leaves and carefully wrap each one around a small ball of mixture. Note the glossier side of the leaf should be on the outside and trim any stems away.

Place the dolmas compactly in a pan and fill with cold water so to cover them all. Pour the lemon juice on top and place a few knobs of butter between them.

Place a small plate on top of the dolma (to keep them in place) and cook on a low heat for a minimum of 2 hours. Add more boiling water carefully if the water reduces too much.

Jajik

Jajik is a lovely and refreshing yoghurt side dish. It has been interpreted differently throughout the region for centuries and the term used in Armenia is actually a Turkish word. My mum makes the Persian version called mast-o-khiar, which is just yoghurt, chopped cucumber, dried mint, and a little ground cumin. The jajik I often share during dinner parties or supper clubs is the more Armenian version that is made with grated cucumber, chopped fresh dill, dried mint, and crushed garlic. I like to use a combination of strained yoghurt like labneh and natural yoghurt to get the right consistency or you can just use Greek yoghurt.

Ingredients

Serves 4

Turkish/Greek yoghurt, 500g

Cucumber, peeled and grated, 1

Dried mint, 2 tbsp

Fresh dill, chopped, 1 small bunch

Garlic cloves, crushed, 2

Salt and pepper to taste

Olive oil, dash

Method

Peel and grate the cucumber and pass through a sieve to remove any excess liquid.

Combine the cucumber with the yoghurt, mint, dill, garlic, salt, and pepper and top with a dash of olive oil.

Dominique Goltinger

“In Tokyo we used to have a local fishmonger, a tofu maker, and a rice merchant just in front of us. The milkman brought in the milk, and everything was cooked from scratch which is amazing and tastes so different.”

A love for local, sustainable, and simple food – rooted in his childhood – defines Dom’s cooking today. Upon entering his kitchen, one is welcomed by the warming smells of the broth on the stove with which he grew up. With kitchen utensils and spices scattered across the space, and fresh ingredients on the kitchen counter blended with family photos and personal memoirs, Dom’s kitchen feels like an epicentre of warmth and endless food related stories. It was clear he was destined to become a chef from a young age: helping his father cooking in the kitchen and observing the chefs that worked for him held far more sway than going to school and doing homework. Born in Salzburg to his English-Austrian father and Japanese mother, the young family migrated to Japan where they lived in the countryside temporarily before moving in with Dom’s maternal grandparents.

In Tokyo, his father – a butcher by trade – set up a couple of successful meat-centred restaurants, including one that was Austrian in tone. Growing up with parents who encouraged him and his brother to be independent and pursue their goals, Dom left Japan at the age of 18 for a culinary school in Austria. After completion, committed to working in restaurants that cooked from scratch, he moved to London where he started working at the Ivy. From fine dining he transferred to the Gastro Pub scene where he worked with Jeremy Hollingsworth. Eventually he joined Bistro Bruno Loubet, where Bruno became his mentor. He inspired Dom to keep building on his Austrian-Japanese heritage by placing vegetables at the forefront of the menu, with the meat as an accompanying side, cooking vegetables according to the season and in their pure form, and making dishes from scratch with nothing going to waste. From here Dom has run supper clubs where diners got to experience his unique mix of Austrian-Japanese inspired cooking by eating simple classic dishes, made from scratch, that align with the seasons using local ingredients. Dom now mainly works as an independent chef, supporting various restaurants, street food traders, and supper clubs. His next upcoming project is working as the head chef of Maremma, a restaurant set up by the team behind London Cooking Project and Alice Staple, which celebrates dishes from the Maremma region of Tuscany.

Bone Broth with Alpine Cheese Dumplings

This recipe brings me back to lunchtimes with my dad in Tokyo. There would always be a broth on the stove, which would constantly be replenished with water by my dad. There is no recipe for the broth, as my father would feed it with leftover bones or vegetables. No food would ever be wasted and this is where I learned to be resourceful and appreciative of the ingredients. One thing that would always be added, though, is a one-sided charred onion. The subtle burnt flavour adds a beautiful umami aroma to the broth. For my dad, the broth would always be the base for the soup of the day. 'Suppe', as it's called in Austria, always consists of a veal or beef broth with some soup garnishes, either stripped pancakes or knödl made out of polenta or bread, a dumpling basically. Since I was born in Salzburg, which is an alpine area, I suggest adding alpine cheese bread dumplings. Alpine cheese is actually a Gruyere, and you can find it easily in UK supermarkets.

To make the knödl you want to roll the bread and cheese mixture in clingfilm to poach them indirectly, an old technique whereby the ingredients are protected by clingfilm, which prevents them having direct contact with the water. When rolling the mixture in the clingfilm and shaping it into a compressed sausage roll, it's important that the ingredients are evenly spread. I always imagine it being a sushi roll. It's okay when the mixture comes out from the sides – you can always press it back by using the sides of your hands to help it push back in. Once you have the sausage shape, it's a matter of pressing out all the air and pinching, pulling, and rolling the ends so you can tie the ends like a candy. If this doesn't work, the ends could be tied using butcher's string.

Ingredients

Serves 4

For the stock

Veal or chicken bones, 2kg

Onions, 1kg

Carrots, medium, 2

Bay leaves, 2

Garlic bulb, 1

Thyme, 4 sprigs

Celery, 1 bunch

Salt and peppercorns to taste

Chives to garnish

For the dumplings

Stale bread, 50g

Smoked bacon, 2 rashers

Onion, ½

Egg, 1

Alpine or Gruyere cheese, 30g

Parsley, 2 sprigs

Milk to soak

Breadcrumbs, 2 tbsp

Method

Wash and soak the bones in cold water to get rid of any excess blood. Then roast in the oven at 220°/gas mark 7 for 15 minutes. Transfer the roasted the bones into a large pot ready to boil.

Peel and roughly chop all the onions, celery, and carrots, with the exception of one onion, and add them into the pot with the bones.

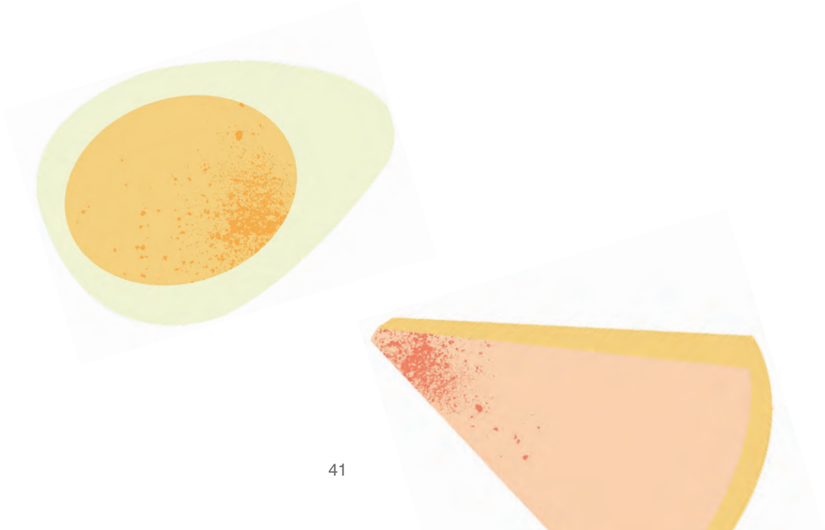
Cut the last onion in half and fry it flat side down until it is charred. Add this into the pot with all the herbs and fill with water until the bones, vegetables, and herbs are covered and simmer for about 6 hours.

For the dumplings, dice the stale bread and soak it in milk until soft. Squeeze out the excess milk. Dice the onion and bacon and sweat together in butter until the onion is transparent.

Mix the soaked bread with eggs, onion mix, grated alpine cheese, chopped parsley, salt, and pepper. If the mix is too wet add some bread crumbs to firm it up. Using cling film, wrap the mix into a 2cm thick sausage and boil it in water for 10 minutes.

Skim the oil off the stock using a spoon then strain the stock to get rid of the bone mix. Reduce to 500ml and season.

Unwrap the dumpling and slice into eight portions. Serve two slices of dumpling in each bowl of soup and garnish with some chives and cracked black pepper.



Chirashi Sushi - *Open Sushi*

Growing up, Chirashi sushi was our Sunday treat. I would call it the Japanese version of a Sunday roast. 'Chirashi sushi' means scattered sushi. It is not that dissimilar from the current trend of the Hawaiian deconstructed poke bowls. It is an open sushi that is presented in a shallow wooden bowl, made out of hickory or another type of hardwood. To plate it up, you start with the rice in the bowl, which is then decorated with any type of sushi grade fish, vegetables, pickles, and some aromatic ingredients. I enjoy serving it with a flat omelette.

This dish lends itself well to sharing occasions, as it is very uncomplicated. In fact, the hardest part is making the sushi rice. When boiling the rice I prefer adding some kombu seaweed to enrich the flavour and this could be used later as a garnish. What makes preparing the rice hard is the ratio of rice to water. My grandma, who I would often help in the kitchen, said you have to cook it on a strong heat for the first couple of minutes until the water is almost overflowing. Then you turn the heat down and cook the rice through until all the water has been absorbed. With the rice on the go, you want to start making the marinade to taste as there are no set measurements. It was usually my job to add the vinegar to the rice, whereas someone else would be responsible to mix it in. It was a hard job as it needed to be done gradually. A very important element in this process is the temperature of both the rice and the marinade, which both need to be hot enough that the vinegar evaporates. If this is not done properly the rice will become a sticky mush, which is not pleasant. The rice is supposed to have the consistency of a solid rice grain yet simultaneously falling apart. Once the rice and vinegar are integrated you let it rest until it's serving time.

For the toppings I typically make a thin omelette, but the ingredients can be adapted to what's locally available and in season. Having a meal together and sharing it with other people is more important than sticking to the 'authentic' ingredients. For this recipe I use ingredients that are all pretty easy to source in the UK. The radishes and coriander are not Japanese, but I happened to have them in the fridge and used them to add flavour and colour. My favourite ingredient, yet the hardest to get a hold of in the UK, is the shiso. It's a herb that could easily be replaced by basil.

Ingredients

Serves 4

For the sushi rice

Sushi rice, 100g

Rice vinegar, 40ml

Kombu, 1 small piece

Sugar, 1 tbsp

Soy sauce to taste

Salt to taste

For the garnish

Eggs, 2

Salmon caviar, 20g

Sashimi grade tuna or salmon, 100g

Nori seaweed sheet, 1

Pickled ginger, 10g

Picked lotus roots, 20g

Radishes, 2

Shiso leaves, 2

Wasabi, 1 tsp

Method

Wash and rinse the rice 3 times. Put the rice and kombu in a pot with 1.5 times the volume of water to rice. Bring to the boil over a high heat and with a lid on the pot. Once boiling, lower the heat so the rice is simmering and cook for about 10 minutes or until the water has been completely absorbed. Turn off the heat and leave to rest for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile make the sushi marinade by bringing the vinegar, sugar, salt, and soy sauce to the boil. Turn off the heat once it starts to boil.

Mix the rice and marinade together while both are still hot and let it rest in the pan with a lid on.

Slice the fish into ½ cm pieces.

Beat the eggs well and make a flat omelette, ensuring it doesn't brown when cooking. Slice the omelette, nori sheet, and radishes into matchstick size pieces about 3mm thick.

Place the sushi rice onto a flat serving dish and scatter all the other ingredients on top in an organised mess.

Shiso

Growing up in Japan I remember having shiso in the garden, which is a herb related to the mint family. It has a woody, juicy, and rich taste, and the dark green, almost purple leaves, have so much flavour, that it is one of my favourite herbs to use. I see it as the Japanese basil and recommend replacing it with basil, if you cannot find it. Shiso can often be found in Japanese supermarkets. I recommend going to the Japan Centre in Central London, for example, or to Golders Green, where there is a big Japanese community. Shiso lends itself pretty well to freezing, which I recommend since it's only sparsely needed and allows you to have 'fresh' shiso every time you need it. Bear in mind that freezing will change the colour into a more burgundy red, but it won't affect the flavour.

Mushy Pea and Mint Egg Yolk Raviolo with Truffled Beurre Blanc

This dish has a lot to do with my mentor, Bruno Loubet, who taught and inspired me to cook from scratch and how to centre dishes around vegetables instead of meat. It seems to be the dish that appears in a lot of my cooking and supper clubs, and it really has that 'wow' effect. This recipe is inspired by the time I worked at Bistro Bruno Loubet where we had stuffed quail garnished with ravioli florentine on the menu. The ravioli had a filling of spinach and ricotta, with a raw egg yolk in the middle. To give it my twist, I combined it with a dish that I really enjoy, minted mushy peas, and it paired surprisingly well.

It's not a very long recipe and it sounds very simple, but it's not easy.

To make decent food, you need to take your time and let it rest. When you stress and want to get it done quickly it won't work. The beauty of this dish is not to rush. I've noticed the dough gets really soft and has this beautiful shine when I prolong the kneading time and let it rest properly. This is the work of the gluten that forms a protein chain making the dough supple, resistant, and easy to digest. When I make pasta dough I tend to use the best eggs. The hardest part of the recipe is putting the egg yolk in. I use duck eggs because they are richer in taste – delicate, but rich. You have to create a nest for the yolk otherwise it won't sit in there. Once you've put your egg yolks in the nest you cover them with the other half of the pasta, then you use a cutter to cut them out.

Ingredients

Serves 4

For the pasta

'00' pasta flour, 100g

Egg, 1

Olive oil, 1 tsp

Water, 1 tbsp

For the filling

Duck egg yolks, 4

Peas, frozen, 100g

Shallots, 1

Garlic, 1 clove

Butter, 20g

Sprig of mint, 1

Pecorino, 20g

For the beurre blanc

Truffle slices or truffle paste, 1 tsp

Butter, 40g

Tarragon vinegar, 1 tsp

For the garnish

Pea shoots

Sugar snap peas

Pecorino shavings

Method

For the pasta, mix all the ingredients and knead well until the dough is smooth, which could take up to 5-10 minutes either by hand or an electric mixer with a dough hook. For the exact instructions I recommend you to look it up online. (In case you don't have the time to make pasta from scratch, you can easily replace them by wonton sheets).

For the filling, slice the shallots and garlic and sweat in a frying pan with a knob of butter until translucent.

Add the peas and mint and, with the occasional stir, gently heat it for a couple more minutes.

Add the mixture to a food processor and blend until it is a coarse puree. Season the puree with finely grated pecorino and let it chill.

Using a pasta machine, roll out the pasta in 2 long sheets.

Dust a flat surface with some flour and place one of the pasta sheets on there.

With the minty peas mixture, form four 'bird nests' on the sheet allowing enough space for the size of the raw egg yolks and fill them with the yolks.

Place the remaining pasta sheet on top, and cut out the ravioli with a pasta cutter, or, following the contours of the bird nest, cut it out with a sharp knife instead. Set the ravioli aside and make the beurre blanc.

In a saucepan bring the vinegar and truffle to a gentle boil and gradually add the chilled butter until emulsified and has a cream like texture.

Boil the pasta for 2 minutes without cooking the egg yolk and serve it with beurre blanc, sugar snaps, pea shoots, and pecorino.

Jenny Phung

“Before the whole supper club scene came up, and before it was the model to share meals with dining guests, this is how we eat at home – how I’ve always eaten. And I prefer to eat like that, it’s weird to have just one dish.”

Jenny’s cooking reads like an eclectic storybook in which food, art, and sharing are combined in order to challenge people’s perception of Chinese food and culture. Her dishes, little artworks in themselves, are described as a modern interpretation of Chinese cuisine, inspired by Jenny’s personal roots and influenced by her travels through Japan, Vietnam, and Korea.

Jenny’s parents, who are Chinese by descent, were born in Vietnam and then welcomed to Manchester over thirty years ago, where they set up a Chinese restaurant with the help of a family friend. Jenny virtually grew up in the Chinese family restaurant and would often find herself in the kitchen, sitting on the counter next to the boiled rice. Her task of dishing out the rice into takeaway containers was the perfect spot to closely observe and learn from her father, who was the cook. But it was also a reality check: her parents worked all the time and had to get on with the job, even when they were tired and their arms were aching. As a natural consequence of her upbringing, Jenny grew up in the food business, even running one of her parents’ restaurants for five years. But having such experience at a young age also made Jenny want to disconnect from professional cooking, so she moved to London to study arts with the aim of never touching a wok again.

It was not until she graduated and started travelling with her partner that Jenny reconnected with food. In Australia, where they lived on a strict budget, she started cooking again – this time mainly vegetarian dishes. But it wasn’t until the couple visited Japan, where they would frequently visit the small neighbourhood restaurants with limited seating and talk to other diners, that Jenny’s love for food and cooking kicked in again. Returning to England, she decided she wanted to start cooking and hosting supper clubs and moved back to Manchester briefly to get trained properly by her father, before launching her successful Ling Ling’s Supper Club Series in London. This is centred on bringing people together by collectively sitting around a table and sharing dishes. What started as Ling Ling’s supper club has evolved into Jenny opening Ling’s café in Haggerston. Ling’s café is an Asian inspired café centred around mouthwatering Chinese brunches, Asian inspired sandwiches, great coffee, and catering services.

Poached Chicken, Ginger Sauce, and Mung Bean Noodles

Now that I'm back in the kitchen again professionally I don't really cook at home anymore, which results in me eating broth with noodles and some vegetables in its plainest form. For many people it is too plain, yet for me it is very comforting and the dish I grew up with. Broth especially evokes warm memories of my grandmother, who would always have a mouth-watering bone broth on the go. Being aware of my fondness for noodle soups, she would just whip up a simple version in next to no time using any vegetable that was available to her.

A rather dressed up version of a noodle dish that is close to my heart is poached chicken in ginger sauce, which my parents taught me. It reflects Cantonese home cooking to its core, Hong Kong in particular. It is a refreshing dish that I would serve with mung bean noodle salad, which can be eaten hot or cold. The method I'm sharing here is the hot version, it's the Cantonese way of preparing the dish and how my dad usually makes it. He literally woks it for a few seconds over a high heat and dinner is ready!

Ingredients

Serves 4

Whole chicken, 1

Ginger, scrubbed, 500g

Spring onions, 1 bunch

Light soy sauce, ¼ cup

Dark soy sauce, 1 tbsp

Salt, 2 tsp

Mung bean noodles, 80g

Sesame seeds, toasted, 1 tbsp

Sambal, pinch

Sunflower oil, enough to cover

Method

Poach the chicken by filling a pot with water so the chicken is fully submerged. Bringing the water to the boil, lower the chicken with tongs making sure it fills the chicken cavity. When the boiling point has been reached pull the chicken back up out of the pan, making sure the water drains from it.

Repeat this process three times.

Submerging the chicken with tongs, bring the water to the boil again and let it simmer on a low heat for 45 minutes.

Check whether the chicken is cooked by using a probe thermometer, ensuring the internal temperature of the thigh has reached over 63C degrees. When cooked, remove the chicken from the water and let it cool down until you can touch it.

Shred the tender meat, excluding the skin and bones. Cover with a small amount of stock to keep the meat tender until you're ready to use it.

To make the ginger sauce, mince the ginger in a food processor and add to a pan large enough to hold all the sauce comfortably. Add enough sunflower oil to cover all the ginger and heat up the mixture.

Add both soy sauces and salt and stir around whilst heating the mixture gently. Shred a bunch of spring onions and add to the pan. Mix up everything and it's done: it doesn't have to cook for long or be hot, the gentle heat is enough to 'cook' it.

Soak the mung bean noodles in boiling water for 1 minute, check the texture of the noodles and, when ready, strain and rinse through with cold water. Leave to drain.

Now everything is ready to be mixed up according to your taste.

Add the poached chicken, the ginger sauce, and mung bean noodles together and mix well. Here you can add other ingredients if you like. I like to add mint, coriander, and pickled red onions.

Toss well and serve topped with toasted sesame seeds, fried onions, and a pinch of sambal for spice.

Chilli

I use sambal for garnishing dishes. It is Malaysian minced chilli that has quite a lot of heat if you were to eat it on its own. However, I try to mix it in with the sesame oil, rice vinegar, and the occasional shrimp, similar to my dad, as part of a dressing. It adds depth to the sauce and ultimately to the dish. Often when people say they can't have spicy food, I still encourage them to taste it as, contrary to what one is expecting, it is not that hot when mixed with other ingredients. I used to add a lot of chilli to my food, to the extent that I couldn't taste any other ingredient anymore. My father encouraged me to step away from consuming chilli he said: 'as a chef you need to be able to taste everything.' So I've been taking a little chilli break.

Poached King Prawn, Chicken, and Thai Basil Wontons

On Fridays I used to have a residency at Mae and Harvey, famed for wontons. Wontons, roughly translated as clouds in Cantonese, date back to the Qing Dynasty around 1644 and consist of a divine combination of your filling wrapped in a thin sheet. When Charlie and I went to Tai Pei we could not stop eating them. Discovering new regional specific cuisines and flavour combinations is reflected in my cooking, and one of the reasons I like travelling so much. I enjoy sharing the dishes I have grown up on combined with new influences and ideas inspired by travelling and reading a lot.

Only having started this journey recently I feel like I'm still at the beginning of what may keep evolving depending on experiences and stages in life. I suppose keeping changing and adding to the menu is what cooking is about and a healthy way of keeping yourself and others engaged. The way that I cook king prawn Thai basil wontons is loosely based on the Taiwanese 'three cup basil chicken'. What stood out and inspired me in that dish was the combination of the chicken stir-fried in oyster sauce accompanied by lots of Thai basil. I started combining this with king prawns and turned them into wontons and they became really popular. It is important that the wonton pastry sheets are thin; this is how they stand out from other dumplings that usually have a thicker pastry. The right pastry sheets are hard to find as when you find your favourite brand it's hard to switch to others, but my favourite ones are sold in Longdan, a Vietnamese supermarket in Shoreditch and Hoxton. In making the wontons you can be creative and make any shape you want as long as you make sure to push the air bubbles out when wrapping them.

Ingredients

Serves 4

King prawns, shelled and deveined, 750g

Chicken thighs, 2

Oyster sauce, 1 tbsp

Soy sauce, 1 tbsp

Sesame oil, 1 tbsp

Ginger, grated, 1 tbsp

Shaoxing rice wine vinegar, 1 tbsp

Light brown sugar, pinch

Salt & white pepper to taste

Thai basil, chopped

Wonton wrappers, frozen, 1 pack

Egg, whisked, 1

Coriander stems or spring onions to garnish

Method

Roughly cut up the king prawns and leave to one side.

Finely chop a whole bunch of Thai basil and set aside.

Mince up 2 chicken thighs with 1 tablespoon of soy sauce, 1 tablespoon of oyster sauce, a little grated ginger, a pinch of light brown sugar and salt, 1 tablespoon of sesame oil, and 1 tablespoon of Shaoxing wine.

Add the chicken mix to a bowl with the prawns and Thai basil and mix until evenly distributed.

Using defrosted wontons wrappers (I don't make my own!) take a wrapper and fill in the middle about a rounded teaspoon of mixture.

Dip your finger into the whisked egg or water and moisten the bottom edge of the wrapper. Then fold in half whilst scrunching up the wrapper and enclosing the filling within it and smoothing out any air and pressing the seal.

In a pot, bring water to the boil and once it comes up to a rolling boil, add the wontons but not too much as to crowd the pot. Turn the heat down and let them poach for a couple of minutes.

Once the wontons have been floating for approximately 30 seconds check to see if they're done. You can see if it's cooked by checking the prawn in the wonton: if you can see the pink of the flesh through the thin wrapper skins, it's done.

Serve by adding a little chilli oil and black vinegar and any greens you have at hand... spring onions, chives, herbs, anything and eat immediately!

Pickled Cabbage

In Chinese cuisine a meal would usually be started with pickles and cold meats. I have been reluctant to add some types of pickles to Ling Ling's menu until people got more used to my cooking. Pickles are often an underestimated menu item, but when people try them there is usually no way back. I had forgotten about pickled cabbage until I went to Taipei, where I ate it and realised why this simple traditional pickle was the best and I had to put it on my menu. When I encourage people to try pickles they are often pleasantly surprised. I vividly remember one diner, who did not like cabbage or celery at all, spoke to me towards the end of one of the supper clubs to share how he fell in love with those vegetables after eating the pickles. It amazes me how different ways of preparing an ingredient can change peoples' perceptions of that particular food. In China and in Chinese households it would be very common to pickle. My auntie is the living example: she – the polar opposite of my dining guest – doesn't eat vegetables in any other form than being pickled. Visiting her place and opening the fridge, one would just find endless jars of pickles. Outside there is a kitchen with the sink filled with more pickles, staying there, fermenting for months…

Ingredients

Yields 2 litres

Cabbage, 1kg

Medium carrots, thinly sliced, 2

Salt, ¼ cup

Rice wine vinegar, 1 cup

Sugar, 1 cup

Bay leaves, 2

Sichuan peppercorns, 3 tbsp

Water, 1 cup

Method

Cut up cabbage into large bitesize pieces and add this with the finely chopped carrots into a large mixing bowl and sprinkle with salt.

Use your hands to evenly distribute the salt and massage it into the vegetables a little.

Put a heavy lid on the bowl and leave in a cool area or the fridge to marinate the cabbage and remove excess water. This should take about an hour.

Make the master pickling solution. Heat up 1 cup of water, 1 cup of rice wine vinegar, and 1 cup of sugar (I sometimes use less depending on how I'm feeling) until the sugar dissolves.

You can also add spices such as 2 bay leaves and 3 tablespoons of Sichuan peppercorns, or you can leave it plain.

Once the cabbage is marinated you will see a pool of water underneath the mixture. Wash and rinse around 2 to 3 times to make sure you've got rid of all the salt.

Squeeze out the excess water from the cabbage and place into a sterilised glass or ceramic container pushing the mixture down as you go. Add the pickling solution and leave to pickle in the fridge. I like to leave a week to pickle but it can be ready in around 3 days.

Emily Hadwen

“What strikes me over and over again is how cross-cultural connections are fostered when people start sharing food related memories. Seeing people finding those similarities is something that I love about running supper clubs.”

Connecting people by sharing home cooked Greek food inspired by her family recipes, stories, and culture is what Emily, one of the two co-founders of Yaya Supperclub, is all about. With her vibrancy and warmth, spending a day in her kitchen feels like being transported to the Northern part of Greece. Her mother’s roots in the proximity of Thessaloniki and the skill of measuring ingredients ‘by the eye’ are the foundations of Yaya. Emily’s parents met in Crete, a Greek island, where her father was teaching English. Not long after they moved to Ilford, where Emily grew up speaking English and Greek. But the family’s summers would be spent at Emily’s grandparents’ village house which reinforced her Greek identity and started her passion for cooking, as she helped her grandmother shell the peas and chop locally grown ingredients in the olive oil and oregano scented kitchen.

As Emily got older food not only became a form of connecting to her cultural heritage, but also a vehicle for communicating and sharing knowledge with other people. Noting that Greek food in London was often misunderstood, she and her friend Lou started Yaya Supperclub in 2016. At Yaya, which means granny in Greek, they share home cooked Greek food the way that Emily’s yaya and Great Aunt Sofia would cook back home. Emily frequently returns to the village to collect the ‘me to mati’ (measuring according to the eye) recipes from her family’s handwritten cookbooks and learn more techniques and stories to share with others at the supper clubs, where diners are encouraged to chat with each other and preferably passionately debate in the manner that is central in Greek culture.

Strapatsada -
Στραπατσάδα

This is a really simple dish, basically eggs and tomato. Greek cuisine is often led by women, but this recipe is actually my great grandfather's. Although having men cook has become more common now, at that time it was not. This was the one dish my great grandfather could make; his signature dish that you'd have for breakfast or lunch. My great grandad grew up during a very poor time in Greece, where he was part of the army during the Second World War. The family legend goes that towards the end of the war, still being a 19 year old kid, he walked all the way back to the village from Albania. This recipe reflects both the economic situation of that time and the people of that generation – being resourceful with what was on hand. Back in the day, this would have been the most affordable meal he could possibly make as the tomatoes would come from the land and the eggs from their chickens.

For this recipe I grate the tomato. It is a technique often observed in Greek home cooking and for some reason it helps bring out the tomato flavour, almost making the sauce juicier. Interestingly, I have never seen my grandmother cut vegetables on a chopping board as all ingredients would mainly be cut in her hand or grated with a grater. She would even grate the onions, which would be soaked in water first to get rid of the sharpness. I think it's a rather Greek technique that, again, reflects the economic situation from which these dishes have sprouted.

Ingredients

Serves 2

Large eggs, 3

Ripe tomato, 1

Dried Greek oregano, pinch

Greek feta cheese, good quality, 300g

Greek olive oil, high quality, good glug

Salt and pepper to taste

Sourdough bread (optional), to serve

Method

Grate the tomato (easier with a box grater) until all the flesh is grated and you're left with the tomato skin in your hand. Throw the tomato skin away.

Heat the olive oil on a medium heat in a frying pan.

Crack the eggs into a small bowl and briefly whisk with a fork until the egg is mixed together. Season the eggs with salt and pepper.

Once the olive oil is hot, turn the heat down and add the grated tomato to the pan.

Season the tomato and cook it through. This should take a few minutes.

Add the eggs to the pan and slowly stir with a wooden spoon.

Once the eggs are just under cooked – so still quite wet – take the pan off the heat.

To serve, place the eggs on a plate and sprinkle with oregano, crumble the feta, and drizzle with olive oil.

Olive oil

Most people in Greece have their own plot of land where they grow their own olives to make their own oil. In our family we have our own plot and olive oil, which has a rather yellowy colour and a lovely well rounded fresh and fruity aroma. Food from our land was so important to my mum that she'd always have to stock up during those Greek summers to take it back to the UK. Yet transporting it back and it arriving home in one piece was not guaranteed. I vividly remember as a kid stuffing all our suitcases with olive oil, feta, family almonds, and bottles of ouzo and by the time that we got home, more often than not, it would all have exploded in our suitcase, covering our clothes in olive oil and feta brine. Isle of Olive in London Fields sells really good Greek olive oil.

Spanakorizo -
Σπανακόρυζο

This is the classic dish my mom would make on a weeknight at home when I was growing up. She would serve it at room temperature on the table with a tin of sardines, bread, and some salad. This dish does not only symbolise the homely sensation of Greek food, it also represents the heart of 'Lathera-cuisine'. In lathera cooking, olive oil is treated like any other ingredient, tomato for example, and forms the central part of the dish. As a strict orthodox Greek, my grandmother would fast a lot, preparing and serving mainly plant-based lathera dishes during Lent. It has tons of dill in it, which is a very northern Greek ingredient, and reflects the region's connection to the Balkans/Russia.

Ingredients

Serves 4

Spinach, 500g

Long grain rice, 2 tbsp

Small red onion, 1

Spring onions, ½ bunch

Lemon, 1

Greek olive oil, high quality, 3 tbsp

Fresh dill, 1 bunch

Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Chop the spinach and wilt it in a pan with a little boiling water. Squeeze it well through a sieve and set aside.

Chop the red onion and spring onions.

Finely chop the dill and set it aside.

Heat the olive oil in a medium-sized pan. Once the oil is hot, add the red onion and spring onions and sauté them in the oil.

Add the wilted spinach to the sautéed onions. Mix them together.

Add the rice and then add a cup or so of cold water.

Add the juice of the lemon and the chopped dill, and season well with salt and pepper.

Mix everything together and cook it for 15 minutes or so. Taste as you go, as you may want to add more lemon juice or seasoning.

Leave it to cool down as it is best eaten at room temperature with a chunk of feta on the side. It's even better the day after.

Greek coffee with Revani - ελληνικό καφέ Ρεβανί

Greek coffee and revani epitomises the influence of the Ottoman Empire in Thessaloniki cuisine. The coffee would traditionally be made in a briki, a copper coffee pot, prepared on warm sand. It is an art form that I haven't perfected yet, but experiencing a coffee cooked on sand is delicious with a smooth, rich, and chocolatey taste. After siesta, people would dress up and go out for their volta, an afternoon stroll in the local square where it's all about seeing and being seen, and men would play backgammon on the square and women got the latest news updates. You would have a small cup of very strong coffee with a heavenly slice of revani, a semolina cake with syrup and a refreshing orange flavour – my mum's favourite. The amounts of sugar definitely make up for the otherwise healthy Greek diet, but the secret to health is probably having a bit of a treat.

For the revani

Ingredients

Makes around 30 small squares

For the cake

Fine grain semolina, 165g

Sugar, 200g

Plain flour, 3 tbsp

Baking powder, 1 tsp

Plain yoghurt, full fat, 225g

Medium eggs, 3

Olive oil, 4 tbsp

Vanilla extract, 2 tsp

Orange, zested, 1

Orange, juiced, ¼

Lemon, juiced, ¼

For the syrup

Sugar, 300g

Water, 375ml

Lemon, juiced, ½

Desiccated coconut, to serve

Method

Preheat the oven to 180C.

Make the syrup first as it needs to cool down. Combine the sugar and water in a medium saucepan on a medium heat. Bring the mixture to a boil, stirring well. Once it has reached a boil, reduce the heat to low and let the syrup simmer for about 10 minutes, uncovered.

Add the lemon juice, mix well, and simmer for another 3 minutes.

Turn off the heat and set the pan aside to let the syrup cool down while you make the cake.

Grease a square or rectangular baking dish (around 8"x 10") with two tablespoons of olive oil.

Beat the eggs and the sugar in a large mixing bowl for a few minutes, until the sugar dissolves. Then add the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil, yoghurt, semolina, flour, and baking powder and beat well.

Stir in the vanilla extract, lemon juice, and lemon zest and mix well until you have a smooth batter.

Pour the batter into the greased baking dish and bake in the preheated oven for about 25-30 minutes, until the cake is golden brown.

Once the cake is cooked, drizzle the cooled syrup all over the semolina cake while it's hot. Let the cake absorb the syrup and cool down.

Once cool, cut the revani in square or diamond shapes.

Serve chilled with desiccated coconut sprinkled on top, or crushed pistachio nuts, and a dollop of yoghurt.

For the coffee

Makes one cup

Ingredients and equipment

Greek coffee, 2 tsp

One espresso cup filled with water

Sugar (optional)

Greek coffee pot or briki

Gas hob, or hot sand that is warmed over hot coals

Method

Measure out a full coffee cup (espresso size) of water and pour it into the briki.

Add two teaspoons of coffee and, if using sugar, two teaspoons of sugar, and stir. This ratio is considered a fairly strong coffee – you can do one teaspoon of coffee (and therefore one teaspoon of sugar if you're using it).

Place the briki on a gas hob on a low heat.

Let the coffee heat up very, very slowly – keeping an eye on it at all times so that it doesn't catch.

The surface will slowly start to tremble and then lightly foam at the top. At this point, lift it slightly from the heat until the foam/bubbles settle and then put it on the fire again to let it start foaming again.

Once you've done this, remove the pot from the heat. Be careful not to overboil the coffee otherwise it will lose the foamy top, but also make sure you boil it enough otherwise you will taste the coffee grounds. It is a delicate balancing act!

Serve in a small, espresso-sized coffee cup. Serve the cup on a small saucer with a glass of cold water on the side.

Drinking Greek Coffee

To get the full flavour you should sip the coffee slowly, not quickly like an espresso. Be careful not to drink the grounds at the bottom – once you taste them the coffee is finished.

Rocio Carvajal

“What we now identify as Mexican cuisine was born in the fires and pots of colonial kitchens and was shaped by the hands of Indigenous and Spanish women, who found themselves working together by force and coincidence. For hundreds of years they exchanged cooking techniques and showed each other how ingredients worked.”

That food plays an important role in Rocio’s life becomes clear from the moment one is welcomed into her charming flat with a strong Mexican coffee and a pastry. Rocio, a food history writer, explains that it is customary in Mexico to welcome your guests by always asking them how are they doing, followed by a tempting offer – the question of whether they have eaten. Regardless of the time of the day, and whether they have eaten or not, guests are always encouraged to sit down and eat.

Spending time in Rocio’s kitchen is like being in the most delicious and engaging history class. She takes pride in her diverse background and the ways in which the rich culture of Mexico is reflected in its complex cuisine. Recognising that this heritage and diversity is not always understood, Rocio has dedicated years of work building bridges of dialogue and understanding between the different cultures, and aspires to contribute to changing how Mexican food is perceived. As a nation with over 60 different indigenous groups, a diverse population as a result of colonialism, and a welcoming attitude towards refugees and immigrants, Mexico’s cuisine has incorporated many gastronomic influences into its own repertoire. Good examples of these are Arab tacos, French patisserie, and Jewish fritters to name just a few.

For Rocio, gastronomy is the edible expression of the collective memory, history, and ever-changing identity of a community, which explains why she has always felt drawn to exploring and finding meaning in the stories behind it. Born and raised in Puebla, Mexico, she has spent the last few years travelling between there and London, collecting recipes and documenting stories that she shares in her engaging online magazine SABOR! This is Mexican Food, and the thought-provoking podcast series Pass the Chipotle.

Black Bean Soup

This delicious soup has beans as its base ingredient. And you can't get any closer to indigenous food than this, which sets us up for a great start on a journey into Mexican cuisine. Like corn and chilies, beans are amongst the first ingredients that come to anyone's mind when thinking about Mexican food, and for good reason, as there are around 70 different varieties of beans eaten in Mexico, typically categorised into black, yellow, white, red, purple, pinto, and bayo (brown). In fact, beans were domesticated around the same time as corn, and they are one of the world's best sources of proteins, carbohydrates, and minerals. In Mexico, beans can be eaten when they are still young in the pod, a tasty early harvest. However they are more commonly dried and then boiled so they can be eaten in many different ways: as soups, salads, in tamales, refried, a compliment to rice, and in stews such as frijoles charros, which are beans cooked in a tomato sauce with sausages, bacon, morcilla, or chorizo. As with every legume, beans are often mixed with a variety of herbs, including epazote, hoja santa, and avocado leaf, which adds flavour and eases digestion.

Ingredients

Serves 4

Tins of black beans in water, 2
Vegetable stock, 1 cube
Boiling water, 375ml
Olive oil, 30g
Dried oregano, 2g
Salt and pepper to taste

To garnish

Chili flakes and dried oregano
Shredded mozzarella, 100g
Corn chips, 100g
Avocado, 1

Method

Rinse the beans under running water. Transfer them to a medium pot, add the boiling water and stock cube. Boil for 10 minutes.

Although the beans are cooked, I find them slightly too al dente for a soup and recommend that you liquify them in a blender until they're absolutely smooth.

Rinse and dry the pot you used to boil the beans. Add the olive oil and heat. Pour in the liquified beans and let them sizzle for about two minutes.

Add the oregano and stir well. Lower the heat and simmer for 10 minutes.

Add salt and pepper to taste.

Serve hot and garnish with avocado cubes, mozzarella, and corn chips. You can also use crumbled feta instead of mozzarella.

Manchamantel Enchiladas:

Fruit Mole from Central Mexico

Over time, Mexican food, like other intangible cultural expressions, became a fertile ground for reconciliation and bonding between the indigenous groups, mestizo (mixed race) and Spanish colonisers either through necessity or by will. It was, for example, the collaboration of Indigenous and Spanish cooks that forged the transmission of cultural knowledge and skills that incorporated a range of cooking practices that guided future generations in maintaining Mexico's newly born culinary identity. Manchamantel, which translates literally as tablecloth-stainer, is a dish that captures the great culinary exchange of the colonial period in which flavours from Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, and the New World blend and produce a sublime alchemy of flavours, textures, and aromas. It is usually served with the meat in it and accompanied by freshly made corn tortillas; in this version the meat will be served as filling for the enchiladas.

Ingredients

Serves 4

Ancho chilies, 3
Mulato chilies, 3
Guajillo chilies, 2
Large onion, 1
Garlic cloves, 2
Ripe tomatoes, 5
Doyenne du Comice pear, 1
Peeled almonds, 125g
Granny Smith apples, 2
Ripe plantains, 2
Pineapple, diced, 375g
Freshly ground pepper, 1/3 tsp
Freshly ground cloves, 1/2 tsp
Ground cinnamon, 15g
Pork loin, 300g
Chicken breast, 500g
Fresh parsley, 1 bunch
Peppercorns, 2

Salt to taste
Frying oil, 175ml
Corn tortillas, 18

Method

Remove the stems from the chilies and discard the seeds, place in a bowl and cover with boiling water, allow to soften and hydrate for 20 minutes.

In a large pot add 1.5 litres of water, the onion, 2 peppercorns, parsley, 2 tbsp of oil, and a generous pinch of salt. Cover, bring to a boil and lower the temperature, then add the pork and chicken and cook for 30 minutes on a medium heat.

Remove from the heat and place the meat in a colander to allow cooling. Keep the stock to use later.

In a hot nonstick pan lightly roast the almonds until they turn golden, remove, and reuse the pan to cook the next batch of ingredients.

In the hot pan, place the tomatoes, onion chopped in quarters and garlic, and cook on a high dry heat. The garlic will be ready first, they only need to get a light golden colour on the skin, remove and keep aside. Continue turning the onions and tomatoes. Once the skin starts to come off the tomatoes they are ready.

Remove the skins of the tomatoes, place the pulp in a blender along with the onion and garlic, add one cup of the stock from the meat, the soaked chilies and puree, pass through a fine colander, discard the fibre and return the puree to the blender, add the almonds and process for less than 40 seconds. Keep the enriched puree to use later.

Peel the apples, pear, and plantain and dice into pieces no larger than the tip of your thumb, set aside to use later.

In a clean large soup pot, heat 6 tbsp of frying oil, add the puree and allow to cook and sizzle, add half of the chopped apples, pears, plantain, and ½ cup of pineapple, gently incorporate the ingredients and allow to cook gently.

Add 2 cups of stock, lower the heat, and let it simmer for 5 minutes.

Next add ½ cup of pineapple and the rest of the plantain, apples, and pear along with the remaining stock, sprinkle the cloves, cinnamon, pepper, and salt, stir gently and cover, and let it simmer for 20 minutes on a very low heat. The consistency of the dish should be that of a stew, velvety and full-bodied but still liquid. Keep it hot while assembling the dish.

In a hot nonstick pan, grill the remaining pineapple enough to get a deep charcoal colour on the edges, this will take about 8 minutes, remove from the heat and keep aside, this will be used for garnishing the enchiladas.

Once the chicken and pork are cooler, shred them with your fingers, mix them and keep at hand to use later.

In a clean nonstick pan heat 4 tbsp of frying oil, and one by one fry the tortillas only on one side and for less than a minute, the aim is to obtain a slightly crisp but still soft texture. To add a tortilla to the oil simply lift the one frying and place the fresh one at the bottom and stack them, in this way you will use less oil and the stacked tortillas will keep each other hot and soft. When you have finished frying all the tortillas, carefully place the stack in a plate.

Plating the enchiladas

Take one fried tortilla at a time and gently rub half a tablespoon of manchamantel to line it, next scatter a tablespoon of shredded “flute” meat forming a line in one of the edges, roll the tortilla with your fingers forming a cigar shape and continue filling the rest.

Use shallow individual bowls to serve, place 2 or 3 filled tortillas and cover generously with a full ladle of manchamantel, finish with some grilled pineapple and serve hot.

Rose Petal Ice Cream

Of the many snacks and street foods you can find in Mexico, ice creams, sorbets, lollies, and chilled fruit drinks are amongst the most popular, as they are an essential refreshment when the days get punishingly hot. Helados, or ice creams, come in all sorts of flavours, they are made with milk and have a rich and creamy texture, and while you can find the traditional chocolate, strawberry, or vanilla flavours, you might be surprised to see the variety and combination of flavours. Most of the dishes we recognise today as part of the national cookbook were either created or introduced to the country during the first decades of the colonial period, and this is also the case for this ice cream. In spite of the fact that none of the ingredients are native to Mexico, this floral ice cream is considered a classic dessert and is a favourite in the sunny states of Oaxaca and Morelos. The variety of rose used to prepare this recipe is known as Castilian rose. In spite of its name it is not native from Spain, but instead was introduced to the Iberian Peninsula during the Muslim occupation of the territory around the 8th century. This variety is also known by the more accurate name of Damascus rose, where it was widely cultivated for the delicate pinky-white shades of its petals and its intensely sweet aroma.

But rose petal ice cream is something that is really special in Mexico. Serve the ice cream with buñuelos that are often given as gifts in Mexico, presented in transparent cellophane bags with festive ribbons. They are offered at posadas and presented as part of the desserts for Christmas Dinner.

Ingredients

Yields 1.400 litres

Double cream, 600ml
Half fat crème fraiche, 600ml
Rose syrup, 175ml
Sugar, 250g
Dried rose petals, 175ml

Method

In a small pot, simmer 250ml of crème fraiche and add half of the sugar and half of the rose petals. Allow the rose petals to soften and gently infuse the crème for 4 minutes, remove from the heat, transfer to a plastic container and place in the fridge to chill for 20 minutes.

Pour the rest of the crème fraiche, double cream, and sugar into a bowl and using an electric mixer on a medium speed or hand balloon whisker, whisk until the cream mix becomes velvety.

When ready to make the ice cream, combine the rose syrup with the chilled cream in the ice cream maker and follow the maker's instructions. You might want to adjust the sweetness at this time. Freeze for at least 4-8 hours before serving. Garnish with rose petals and a buñuelo before serving.

To prepare this dish without an ice cream maker, follow all the steps and, after freezing for 30 minutes take out and mix again to prevent the formation of crystals, repeat this four times. Freeze until ready to eat.

Buñuelos

Crisp Sweet Fritters

Ingredients

Makes approximately 35 pieces

Wheat flour, 335g
Milk at room temperature, 560ml
Eggs at room temperature, 2
Butter, melted
Salt, pinch
Baking powder, 1 tsp
Vanilla essence, 1 tsp
Caster sugar, 360g
Frying oil, 500ml
Mould for making buñuelos, 1
Caster sugar to coat the fried buñuelos, 250g
Powdered cinnamon to mix with the caster sugar coating the fried buñuelos, 15g

You will also need

A medium sized pot and a small pot

Paper towels to absorb the excess oil from the fritters

A pair of chopsticks to spin and remove the buñuelos from the oil

Method

In a large bowl, mix the flour, salt, and baking powder.

Next add the milk, vanilla, and eggs and mix vigorously with a balloon whisker. Once you have reduced most of the dough lumps, add the melted butter and continue whisking until the batter is smooth and has no lumps at all. Allow the batter to rest and the baking powder to react while you pre-heat the oil.

In the medium sized pot pour 1½ cups of oil and the remaining ½ cup in the small pot.

Heat both pots for five minutes at a medium constant heat for 10 minutes, be sure that the oil doesn't smoke or it will burn the fritters. Place the mould inside the small pot to preheat it and coat it with the hot oil before using.

Before and after making each buñuelo you must return the mould to its hot oil bath to prevent the batter from sticking to it.

Test the oil by gently pouring a small drop of batter, it must sizzle and puff up immediately.

To make the buñuelos remove the mould from the oil and gently shake off the excess oil, dip into the batter to cover halfway up the mould, shake gently to remove the excess batter and immediately dip into the medium pot allowing the oil to cover completely the shape of the mould while you make quick circular movements to ease the release of the batter. If needed, use a chopstick to help you push off the batter.

Return the mould to the small pot and using one chopstick continue spinning and frying the buñuelo for 15 seconds then turn and fry for another 10 to 15 seconds. It should turn golden brown and very crisp.

Remove the buñuelo from the oil and gently shake to remove the excess oil, place carefully on paper towels. Continue frying the buñuelos.

Only make one buñuelo at a time, it is a time-consuming but very simple process that will ensure an evenly crisp and golden batch.

Prepare a bowl with the caster sugar and cinnamon.

Once you have finished using all the batter, take the buñuelos one by one and toss them gently in the sugar, use your fingers or a spoon to help you coat them perfectly on both sides. It will not only give them a beautiful frosty look, but it will also add the perfect amount of sweetness to this delicate and crisp treat.

Shakirat Akinosho

“In my parents’ house back home you would come and my mum would welcome you, it doesn’t matter who you are or whether she knew you or not, you would be invited regardless. That spirit has always been with me.”

Shakirat, a chef who puts all her love and passion into her eclectic West African cooking style, grew up in Nigeria, where she went to culinary school before moving to England in 2002. In her cosy kitchen with cookbooks everywhere, Shakirat plates up one dish after another. Whilst she plays with the heat, flames dancing to the tune of her cooking, she cleans and clears in the fast-paced and organised manner that leaves no doubt she cooks for a living. When not working in a large kitchen for a major corporation, Shakirat provides catering services and runs supper clubs in pursuit of realising her dream: running SST Cake & Party as a self-sustaining food business.

That Shakirat was destined to cook was clear from an early age. Her parents encouraged her to start cooking from the age of eight: knowing how to cook and present food was cherished in Nigeria as it would make one a good wife. The first dish Shakirat learnt was efo riro, her mother’s favourite dish that she would cook all the time. Shakirat still cooks this at home for her two sons and it consists of spinach, mixed pepper, red hot chilli pepper, onions, and dried locust beans. She recalls not being able to stand the smell of locust beans being dried in the family’s backyard, although they add the most beautiful aroma once added to food. After helping her mother support the family by hawking mango, oranges, and bananas on the Ibandan streets in the Oyo region, Shakirat’s father encouraged her to develop a career in hospitality and sent her to culinary school, where she vividly remembers making her first shepherds’ pie. Instilled with cooking confidence, Shakirat kept up with her passion for food when she arrived in England by cooking weekly for 35 people at the South London Refugee Association, running supper clubs, and providing catering for parties.

Yam Balls, served with Tomato and Mixed Pepper Sauce

In my early twenties I worked in Dolphin Estate, a wealthy area in Lagos, where I managed a beautiful guesthouse in which my boss would receive and host his guests overnight and for meetings. I had a great relationship with him and his family, who had all incorporated me into their life as if I was part of the family. Treating the house like my home, I would welcome and treat each guest with the highest respect. On the days there were no guests I would go out with friends, shopping, and to the cinema. At night I put my mat outside in the compound's courtyard where I would look at the stars until I fell asleep. It was so refreshing, nothing can beat that feeling. At the guesthouse I would cook for my boss, his guests, and his family. Everyone loved my cooking and knowing there are people out there who like your food is a fulfilling feeling. They would often request my fried yam balls in tomato sauce, which we have as a starter, or my fried rice. Eating these dishes here in London evoke all the beautiful memories of the carefree and independent life I lived during that time, like in a movie scene.

Yam

In Nigerian cooking people have a love for starchy foods, like white yams *(dioscorea rotundata)*, plantains, and rice. Accounting for over 70 percent of the world's production, Nigeria is one of the world's largest producers of yam, followed by the Ivory Coast and Ghana. Not to be confused with the orange sweet potatoes which stem from the same family, these big tubers are a beautiful and nourishing staple ingredient to the Nigerian diet that people are not that familiar with here in England. Back home yam is often turned into a dough-like substance, called fufu, which is created by boiling and pounding the yam; this is then served with soups and stews. However, you could just treat the versatile yam as you would use a potato. In this recipe the yam forms the base for the deep fried goodness. Back home not everyone adds fish to the yam balls, but personally I find the smoky flavour and aroma of smoked mackerel pairs well with the refreshing tomato sauce.

Ingredients

Serves 6

Yam, peeled and chopped into medium chunks, 1

Smoked mackerel fillets, skinned, 2

Black pepper to taste

Salt to taste

Stock, ½ cube

Breadcrumbs, 150g

Egg, whisked, 1

Vegetable oil, enough to have the yam balls completely covered for deep frying

Method

Boil the chopped yam in salted water until you could easily stick in a fork, adding water if it gets too starchy.

Drain the yams when cooked, add salt and pepper to taste, ½ of a stock cube (sprinkled) and mix and mash it all together.

Once you have reached a nice mash, crumble the smoked mackerel fillets into the mixture and fold them in.

Shape the mixture into medium sized balls.

Coat the balls in breadcrumbs by first rolling them in a plate of the whisked egg, and then in a plate of breadcrumbs.

Fry the balls in sunflower oil or grill in the oven! You should have enough to make about twenty balls.

For the sauce

Ingredients

Serves 6

Mixed sweet pepper, diced, 3

Onions, finely diced, 1

Tomato puree, 2 tbsp

Sunflower oil, ½ cup

Stock, 1 cube

Curry powder, 1 tsp

Thyme, 1 tsp

Black pepper to taste

Method

In a frying pan, fry the onions in the oil until soft, add the mixed pepper and let them cook gently for 2 minutes.

Add the puree, the stock, curry, thyme, and black pepper and let it cook for 4 minutes on a high heat.

Lower the heat, letting the mixture simmer for 10 more minutes until all the flavours are absorbed and the vegetables are soft.

Serve the balls with the sauce.

Nigerian Fried Rice served with Grilled Chicken

Another dish my boss asked me to make frequently was this fried rice. It's a delicious dish that stands out for its texture combined with the aromas released by the mixed peppers. I always make my food with fresh ingredients, it adds to the flavour and you get the best out of the nutrients. I now often prepare it as part of my catering jobs, as this is the rice served at ceremonies like weddings, birthday parties, and christenings. It really stands out – just like jollof rice, which is another delicious rice variety Nigerians love. When preparing the fried rice, you want to make sure the rice is properly soaked prior to cooking. The meat added to the fried rice would traditionally be what we call 'bush meat' — the meat of non-domesticated animals like wild birds – but it could easily be replaced with beef, goat, or chicken. I remember we would add the meat of the chickens that were running around the house. Reflecting on it, this is still how I best like to have my fried rice.

Ingredients

Serves 4

Golden basmati rice, 300g
Onion, chopped, 1
Chicken, diced & cooked, 250g
Green peas, 1 cup
Sweet corn, 1 cup
Mixed peppers, chopped, 3
Prawns, cooked, 250g
Butter, 65g
Vegetable oil, 4 tbsp
Stock, 4 cubes
All purpose seasoning, 2 tsp
Thyme, 2 tsp
Garlic powder, 2 tsp
Ginger powder, ½ tsp

Method

Prepare the rice following the instruction on the package, or use leftover rice.

Place the butter and 2 tbsp of oil into a large pot and add the onions and sauté them until they are softened.

Add the precooked chicken and prawns and give it a stir before adding the peppers.

In order to reach the grease balance that you prefer, add more butter and oil to taste.

Add 2 stock cubes, and the rest of the vegetables, spices, and herbs and mix everything together.

Taste as you go, and if required add generous amounts of oil, salt, pepper, and a stock cube or two before you mix in your cooked rice.

Leave the mixture to simmer for 10 minutes and give it the occasional stir.

Serve with grilled marinated chicken drumsticks - see next column!

Grilled Marinated Chicken

Ingredients

Serves 4

Chicken drumsticks or thighs, 8
Curry powder, ½ tsp
Thyme, ½ tsp
Onion, diced, 1
Ginger, finely minced, ½ tsp
Garlic, finely minced, ½ tsp
Sweet chilli sauce, 4 tbsp
Soy sauce, 1 tbsp
Stock, 2 cubes
Black pepper to taste
Salt to taste

Method

Make the marinade by mixing all the ingredients together except for the chicken.

Add the chicken and leave it to marinate for 1 hour minimum or preferably overnight.

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees, and cook the chicken with the grill on, for 15 minutes on both sides until golden brown, and cooked through.

When ready to eat serve with the fried rice and pour over the cooking juices of the chicken for moistness.

Mixed Vegetable Sauce served with White Rice

It was my doctor telling me to go on a diet and eat more vegetables that inspired me to make this dish. I created something for myself that is very nourishing and delicious, yet has that comforting sensation I'm looking for in Nigerian food. Although eating vegetables is not that appreciated in Nigerian cuisine, which rather emphasises meats and solid starchy foods like cassava, rice, and pounded yam, I experimented in making a version for myself that I would enjoy coming home to and indulge in. Once I was satisfied I introduced it to Zoe Marks, one of the chefs I was introduced to through SOOP, on one of the occasions I was helping her run vegetarian Sundays at Bonnington Cafe in Vauxhall.
She loved it so we made the dish, the guests really enjoyed it, and it became one of the best selling dishes of the day. Although Nigerians are not known for incorporating many vegetables in their diet, I am happy to see that people have started to include them in their lifestyle for their own health benefits. It is enjoyable receiving text messages from my family and friends back home sharing all their knowledge on the benefits of eating different fruits and vegetables, one of the great things of technology!

Ingredients

Serves 6

Sweetcorn, 1 cup
Green peas, 1 cup
Mixed sweet pepper, chopped, 3
Carrot, diced, ½ cup
Butter, 180g
Spring onion, chopped, 3
Garlic, 1 tsp
All purpose seasoning, 1 tsp
Thyme, 1 tsp
Curry powder, 1 tsp
Stock, 2 cubes
Black pepper to taste

Method

On a medium heat melt the butter in a large pot and add the spring onions and mixed peppers.

Add the stock, spices, and herbs and stir until the peppers begin to soften.

Turn up the heat, being mindful not to burn the butter or vegetables.

Add the peas and corn (if using frozen then ensure they are defrosted).

Add the carrots, and leave to simmer for about 5-10 minutes until everything is cooked through.

Taste, adding salt if necessary.

Take off the hob and serve.

Tamara Tahhan

“I think that it is very important to learn from your family members, otherwise when they stop cooking or when they pass away you lose those dishes. My grandma was the superstar cook, she taught everyone in the family so her cooking and stories live on through us.”

Tamara’s love for her roots and ancestors is reflected in every single dish she prepares in her cosy Clapton kitchen, which is almost as vibrant as her personality. Her mother is from Essex, her father from Jerusalem, and they both inspired Tamara to cook. However, it was the dishes of Palestine that really sparked her interest. After her parents met and lived in Jerusalem for five years, they moved to Essex where Tamara was born and raised. Although her father could easily dish up a mean roast dinner and shepherds’ pie, the family stayed connected to Palestine through the equally important and delicious food his mother taught him to cook. Due to the time consuming nature of preparing Arabic home cooked food, the cuisine does not lend itself well to on-demand dishes in restaurants, which has resulted in the equally delicious fast-food, mainly comprising grilled meats and salads, that dominates the London food scene. Yet this leaves many people unfamiliar with Palestinian home cooking. This is why Tamara started sharing her family recipes and stories not just with family and friends, but also with the wider food community through her Clapton Kitchen cooking classes, supper clubs, and food blog. Working with her father in running a travel agency that hosts pilgrimages to the Middle East ensures Tamara is able to frequently visit Palestine, where many family members still reside, to collect people’s recipes and stories. Many of the family recipes and traditional dishes are often not well recorded and lack a written recipe, instead they consist of embodied practices, comprising ‘a bit of this and that’ and estimates depending on whether fresh ingredients are in season and locally available.

Historically, Palestinians were agricultural people living off the land by growing olives and vegetables, with a small amount of livestock. For religious holidays, harvest, marriages, funerals, and many other occasions, there would be big feasts to which everyone in the vicinity would be invited. For this reason, food would always be prepared in very large quantities and lended itself to being cooked in advance, ready to be assembled on the day of the party. Bread, olives, olive oil, za’atar, and sumac are staples and, for special occasions, there are slow cooked meats (a whole lamb or goat being common) and seasonal vegetables stuffed with rice or bulgur wheat, spices, and often a little meat. Having grown up with this mindset, it is hard for Tamara to prepare food in small portions; it always ends up in a feast!

Musakhan

Musakhan is a traditional and much loved Palestinian dish, said to originate from Tulkarem and Jenin. Musakhan is enjoyed all year round but was often cooked after the harvest to celebrate and show off the new season's olive oil. This is reflected in it being an olive oil heavy dish of simple ingredients. My earliest memory of this dish is watching my tata (grandmother) preparing it for guests when my sisters and I would stay with her in Jerusalem during the summer holidays. My nine-year-old self watched her in the dark, shady kitchen as she layered a huge platter into an impressive display. I watched it with fascination and interest, making mental notes. Nobody cooked like this at home in England. It was a dream dish of food for me, something you could rip into with your hands and experience with smell, touch, taste, and texture – a bonus for a greedy child with no inclination or skill with a knife and fork.

In later years, we would often go to a special place in Bethlehem, renowned for its musakhan. This place is not a restaurant, but the shell of a hotel that was built before the second intifada. Unfortunately, this was not a good time for tourism. With the damage done to the building, no income to fix the damage, and the separation wall being erected right at the back of the property, the building was never finished and doomed to dereliction. Except then it was turned into an 'on demand' restaurant of the highest quality, serving the best musakhan I have ever eaten. We call the place 'Abu George' although Abu George is sadly now deceased. This quasi restaurant-kitchen is now run by his son and elderly mother. In what I am guessing would have been the hotel reception, there is a wild garden where chickens run around and grape vines grow and there is a shed containing a traditional taboon, the dung fuelled underground clay oven. Here you could crouch inside and watch George's mother prepare the delicious bread for the musakhan. On the way back in she would usually also firmly place a fresh egg in each hand. I try to recreate the smokey hot flavour of the taboon oven at home by simply baking the bread on oiled stones I picked up from the East London streets.

Ingredients

Serves 4

For the taboon bread

Strong white bread flour, 350g
Fine whole-wheat flour, plus extra for dusting, 100g
Fast action yeast, 7g
Sugar, 1 tbsp
Natural salt, ½ tbsp
Olive oil, 2 tbsp
Lukewarm water, 330ml
Rose water, 10ml
Water, ideally in a spray bottle, 200ml
Stones for baking (approximately 20)

Method

In a bowl, combine all the dry ingredients (flour, salt, sugar, yeast) together.

Combine the warm water, rose water, sugar, and olive oil in a jug, beating a few times with a fork.

Slowly pour the liquid into the flour by making a rubbing like motion with your fingers to combine the wet and dry ingredients. Continue until all of the liquid is incorporated into the flour and you end up with a sticky dough. If it is dry add a small amount of water. If it is too sticky add a small amount of flour and knead a few times to combine well.

Lightly flour your surface. Work the dough for ten minutes; stretch it with the heel of your hand as far as you can before folding it together into a ball and turning it over and rotating. Repeat this until you can stretch the dough very thinly without it breaking. Fold into a ball and place in a bowl rubbed with olive oil.

Rub some oil on the dough, cover the bowl with cling film and leave it to prove for at least 2 hours. I would recommend leaving it overnight for the best results. If you leave the dough for longer than 2 hours, kneading in-between at sporadic intervals will improve the dough.

When you are ready to make the bread preheat the oven to 220°C and place the baking tray with the stones on it in the oven. The stones will need at least 20 minutes in the oven to heat up before you bake the bread.

Divide the dough into 4 balls, lightly flour your surface and with a rolling pin roll the dough to approximately 1 cm thin round shapes, like a pizza. Poke the surface with your fingertips to make small fingerprint grooves all over it. Let the dough prove for another 20 minutes.

Open the oven and quickly place the breads on the stones. Spray the oven with water, quickly close the door, and bake for approximately 7 minutes. Time is dependent on how hot your oven gets, therefore check it after 5 minutes. Once puffed and lightly coloured, they are ready. Wrap the breads in a tea towel once they are ready to keep them pliable.

For the chicken

Whole chicken, butterflied, 1.5 - 2kg
Sea salt, 4 tsp
Home made chicken stock, 500ml
Cardamom pods and cloves, 3 each
Ground pimento berries (all spice), 1 tsp
Ground cinnamon, ½ tsp
Nutmeg, ½ tsp
Olive oil, 50ml

Method

The day before cooking, butterfly the chicken and rub it all over with 3 tsp sea salt. Loosely cover and leave overnight in the fridge.

Remove the chicken from the fridge a few hours before cooking, so that it reaches room temperature.

Warm up the chicken stock, lightly crush the cardamom pods and add to the stock along with cloves.

Divide the butterflied chicken into 4 pieces, sprinkle with the cinnamon and pimentos berries.

Preheat the oven to 220°C and roast the chicken for 20 minutes.

Reduce the temperature to 190°C, remove the chicken from the oven and ladle 3-4 spoonfuls of stock into the tray, avoiding the chicken skin and cover tightly with tinfoil and roast for 40 minutes more.

Remove the tinfoil and roast the chicken uncovered for 15 minutes.

Set aside to rest.

For the onions

White onions, 5

Sumac, 8

Salt, 1 tsp

Olive oil, 200ml

Method

Chop the onions into a small / medium dice (do not chop the onions too small, they will disappear when cooked).

Fry them in the olive oil on a low heat for approximately 45 minutes until caramelised but still retaining some texture. Half way through the cooking time add the sumac.

To assemble and cook

You will need the chicken, bread, and onions plus a spray bottle with a mixture of 75 ml of stock and 75ml olive oil.

Heat the oven to 200°C .

Take 2 trays covered with stones and place the breads on them, spraying the bread quite generously with the olive oil and stock mixture. Spread the bread with a layer of onions; place one quarter of the chicken on each, brush the skin with the juices from the chicken tray and roast for 10 minutes in the oven together. Remove from the oven, spray the edges of the bread once, baste the chicken with more of the meat juices and allow a few more minutes cooking time.

To serve (optional extras)

Fresh herbs such as parsley or dill, lightly toasted pine nuts, a bowl of garlicky yoghurt with some olive oil mixed into it and a fresh salad.

Allayeh

Allayeh is one of my favourite 'home' foods that is unique to Palestinian tradition. I have only eaten it at home or at families' or friends' homes in Jerusalem and have not yet seen it on any menu. It is a stew consisting of finely chopped lamb's neck cooked with onions, garlic, tomatoes, pimento berries, and pine nuts, served with steaming white rice. I was eating dinner during Ramadan at a family friend's house in Jerusalem a few years ago and they made allayeh for the Iftar (breaking of the fast, or breakfast if you like). My Dad called me to ask what his friends had made and I informed him that they had made a good allayeh. However, unlike his version, it was missing the small and delicious cubes of potato. He laughed and informed me they were not part of the original recipe but in the early years of my parents' marriage, when they moved to the UK, they couldn't afford much meat and put just a small amount of lamb into the dish and padded it out with the potatoes. We liked the potatoes so much they became part of the dish and are here to stay.

Ingredients

Serves 4-6

Lean lamb neck fillet or lean boneless lamb shoulder, 500g

Waxy potatoes, ideally yukon gold or cara variety, 2

Large juicy tomatoes, 6 or 2 cans of good quality plum tomatoes

Good quality tomato puree, 1 tbsp

Large white onion, 1

Clove of garlic, 1

Lemon, juiced, ½

Ground pimentos berries, 3 tsp

Ground cloves, pinch

Nutmeg, pinch

Cinnamon, pinch

Ground coriander, pinch

Sugar, pinch

Salt, 3 tsp

Pine nuts, 100g

Olive oil, 75ml

Optional: red medium heat chilli, 1 (or ½ tsp chilli flakes)

Optional: Parsley, dill, or pomegranate, to serve

Method

Finely dice the onion and finely chop the garlic. If using fresh tomatoes, place them in a large bowl of boiling water for 10 minutes completely covered. Remove from the water and pull off the skins (they should remove easily at this point). Remove the seeds and chop the tomatoes to a fine dice.

Peel and chop the potatoes into small cubes and store in water.

Using a very sharp knife, chop the lamb into small cubes, thumb size.

In a casserole pot or a high-sided saucepan with a fitted lid, add 30ml of the olive oil and the garlic, gently frying for a few minutes and before adding the onion. Fry them together until soft and translucent but not coloured (approximately 5 minutes).

Add all the spices, combine well and cook together for a few more minutes. Add the tomato puree, sugar, lemon juice and the spices and combine well. Cook for a few more minutes before adding the chopped tomatoes. Bring to the boil and then reduce to a simmer.

Add the lamb and brown for 5 minutes before adding the pimento berries, cloves, and cinnamon stick. Add the tomatoes followed by the sugar, salt, and one cup of water. Cook for twenty minutes before adding the meat. The sauce should be thick, however, if it is too thick add a little water, reduce the heat and place a lid on the pot. Cook on a gentle simmer for 1½ hours. 45 minutes before the end of cooking, add the cubes of potato. Check the stew a few times during the cooking for liquid levels. If it is too thick add a little more water. At the end of cooking, if the stew needs thickening up, remove the lid and simmer the stew with the lid removed until you have a thick and bubbling sauce. The meat should be very tender.

Gently heat 35ml oil in a small frying pan, add the pine nuts and fry very gently until lightly golden. Remove from the oil and drain on paper towel or in a sieve. Set aside.

Finally before serving, stir ½ of the pine nuts into the stew, reserving the other half

Serve the stew in bowls, spooned over white rice, with a sprinkle of the reserved pine nuts, optional herbs (mint, parsley or dill), and pomegranate rills for a splash of colour. Diced and fried garlic is also a nice addition.

Pimento Berries

Like everybody else in Palestine, my dad is a massive fan of pimento berries, known as 'allspice' in the UK. It is an obsession possibly only shared in Jamaica, where the berry is indigenous. The spice travelled across from Jamaica to Europe and the Middle East around the 16th century and is a key ingredient in many Palestinian dishes.

Salata

This is a very simple, fresh salad that I grew up with. It is one of those recipes that is perfect as it is. My dad learnt it from my grandmother and I learnt it from my dad. To my satisfaction they taste the same. It is very important to me that some recipes keep that taste of the past as a reminder of those family members who taught and cooked for me in the past and continue to do so. We often eat this as part of a breakfast spread with falafel, hummus, and a parsley omelette. It is a favourite amongst my whole family from Britain to Jerusalem, with everyone fighting for the lemony olive oil residue after the salad is finished to dip their bread into. A lot of small chopping is involved here. The salad should look a bit like a salsa by the end, so a sharp knife is important!

Ingredients

Serves 4

Fresh parsley, 1 bunch

White onion, 1

Juicy tomatoes, 4

Lemons, juiced (zest optional), 2

Salt, 2 tsp

Extra virgin olive oil, 100ml

Method

Skin the tomatoes, remove the core and seeds, and chop them very finely, retaining all the juice.

Skin and finely chop the onion.

Bunch the parsley together and finely chop. Parsley is a resilient herb; if it is not adequately fine from your first effort, keep bunching and chopping until it is very fine. Please persevere with your knife; using a food processor will give you parsley mush. This is such a simple salad, yet its success lies in the finely hand chopped ingredients.

Combine the tomatoes, parsley, and onions. Dress with the fresh lemon juice, a fruity olive oil, and salt. The salt is important to speed up the juice separating from the tomatoes, something usually not desired in a salad but here it is imperative.

Leave the salad for at least 30 minutes to take on a lovely layer of juice at the bottom for the bread for the end of breakfast dipping bonanza.

Kim Wilshaw

“You’ll find Sindhi people everywhere, but you would never find the food in a restaurant, not even in India to where so many of us went back; it’s only in peoples’ homes, it’s very limited. That’s why I’ve always enjoyed home cooked food. I really enjoy the nourishment of it, home cooked food is very special.”

No wonder Kim is a fan of home cooking. Her lovely house is full of family photos and her kitchen is filled with the smells of fresh coriander that evolves into the warm and spicy aromas of tadka dal, one of the dishes she is cooking. The smells make you want to join Kim at the stove and dig in with a spoon. Kim’s culinary journey started after the birth of her two children when she encouraged the cooking of healthy and culturally important food by teaching easy to make and healthy recipes to other mothers from diverse backgrounds in the community. She worked for a time as a psychotherapist, but realised her passion lay in cooking, sharing stories, and supporting others through food, which resulted in a successful supper club series that has evolved into her beautiful delicatessen, Spice Deli. The dishes served at Spice Deli are inspired by Kim’s grandmother’s recipes, her childhood visits to India, her travels, and living in London.

Born in Mumbai, India, Kim moved at a young age with her family to Nigeria, where she spent most of her childhood, before going to boarding school in South India. Her cultural background is hence multi-dimensional: having parents from different parts of India, living in myriad places, and an English food etiquette all informed Kim’s early culinary experiences. Her love for cooking and desire to preserve and share food was triggered by the birth of her children, as she felt it was the only way of passing on her cultural roots and family stories from the Sindh region, a pre-partition province that no longer exists in what is now known as Pakistan. Kim’s family were displaced from the region and not having lived there or being able to become familiar with the language, Kim finds that food has become the ideal means to pass on knowledge of the culture. She has succeeded in this, not just for her children and the community, but also by enriching the London food scene with the opening of Spice Deli off the Finchley Road.

Methi Fish

(cooked in a Karahi with Fenugreek)

This dish is so colourful and such a contrast to what many people think of as Indian cuisine: it is very mild, as our food is not necessarily spicy. This dish is the recipe of my grandmother, who did not like hot food, and it reminds me of her warm presence. She would grow fenugreek in her garden, which she would sun dry prior to wrapping the seeds in small packages for me. Methi is the word for fenugreek and you might find it quite bitter, but it's all about knowing how to balance the dish. I do love methi, until the next day when it comes through your hands and pores – it's quite pungent! As long as you don't have any dates planned you should be fine. Interestingly, it is often given to women who are lactating as it's supposed to increase the milk production. This is a very typical Sindhi dish from the area my family is from. It is a dish that would be eaten daily and when visiting other people's houses. It celebrates a small number of ingredients and, cooked well, it shows what you can make with just a few ingredients and a nice chunky piece of fish. You would usually have all those ingredients at home except for the fresh herbs. Coriander is such an important herb in our cooking that I would not eat any Indian dish without it. Because of its importance I get coriander in big bunches from the greengrocers. Unfortunately, it doesn't lend itself well to freezing so I keep it in a glass of water in the fridge, which helps it last up to ten days.

Ingredients

Serves 4

White fish like cod, 600g

Tomatoes, chopped, 2

Vegetable oil, 1 tbsp

Garlic cloves, 5

Cumin, 2 tsp

Turmeric powder, 1 tsp

Coriander powder, 1 tsp

Red chilli powder, 1 tsp

Dry fenugreek leaves, a pinch

Fresh coriander, chopped, handful

Salt to taste

Method

Fry 5 cloves of crushed garlic in a tablespoon of vegetable oil.

Once browned, add 2 teaspoons of cumin seeds, 1 teaspoon of turmeric powder, 1 teaspoon of coriander powder and 1 teaspoon of red chilli powder. Add a tablespoon of water.

Cook on low heat until the paste comes together.

Add a large pinch of dry fenugreek leaves and a handful of chopped coriander and salt.

Add 2 chopped tomatoes and mix into the paste.

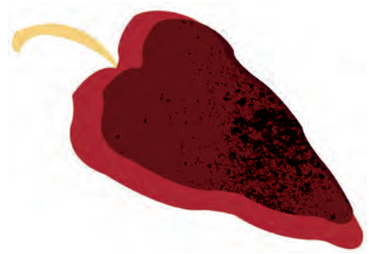
Now add the fish and cook in the paste for 7 to 8 minutes with a little bit of water, just enough to stop the contents of the pan sticking and to steam the fish.

Add salt or more fenugreek to taste.

Spices

As you can imagine, Spice Deli, with its upstairs deli and lower level cafe, is all about celebrating the richness and versatility of spices. You find them blended in with our breakfast naans, salads, pistachio and rosewater friands, and cardamom buns; or packaged in lovely jars filled with ground spices, chutneys, and pickles you can pick up from the shelves. Although I grew up with spices, as seventy percent of the world's spices are from India, they became a cornerstone in my life with the birth of my children. I wanted my children to know about cumin, turmeric, and everything about chillies, and be familiar with the medicinal purposes as well as the heat of Indian food and the customs around it. If the food is too hot, add a dollop of yoghurt to the dish!

So then I started making recipes at home, which resulted in me teaching cooking classes for all the mums in the area, with my baby son on my hips. They'd come with their little ones, and we'd make simple dishes like steamed butternut squash with toasted cumin, finely ground. But they would get a hit of cumin, which supports the immune system – similar to turmeric, chillies, onions, garlic, and ginger. Indian home cooking all starts with the spice box; the masala dhaba. Every home has one and, depending on the region and household's preferences, it is filled with different spices. In our household we have, amongst others, turmeric, mustard seeds, kashmiri chilli powder that's been roasted and ground, cumin seeds and powder, coriander seeds and powder, of which the seeds are often dry roasted in a pan to get the flavours out, and garam masala, which is a combination of cloves, cardamom, cinnamon, cumin, and black pepper. I also have my own chai masala mix, combined with black tea, which is used for Indian tea, called chai, and to each half cup of the tea infusion half a cup of milk would be added, which results in a lovely velvety, yet filling consistency.



Dal Bowl

Tadka Dal with Steamed Rice, Raita, and Pickles

Dal and chaval – that's the first thing I say when I get asked 'what do you want to eat?' It is pure simplicity in a bowl that can't be beaten. 'Chaval' means rice, which goes with the dal. When I went to university it was the first dish I learnt to cook for myself. It is very basic, probably similar to how bread is recognised by the French as a staple to their diet – that is what dal is to Indian people. There is so much poverty in India, but everyone is able to afford dal. To me it is a nourishing and humbling dish. It is one of the recipes we made in the cooking classes I set up for busy mothers in the neighbourhood. Many people think that Indian food is difficult to make, but it certainly is not. We are making recipes that can easily be prepared within an hour, and within an hour you can bash out a lot of food! Dal is easy to make, often loved by children, and lends itself well to freezing; I usually freeze a couple of batches.

There are many types of dals, and all have a different consistency and require a different cooking time. The moong dal for this recipe requires only half an hour cooking time and are available in any supermarket. Prior to making the dal I soak the lentils in water, which reduces the cooking time. Another part of the process in dal or curry making is tadka, which refers to the process of tempering. By tempering you are igniting the heat in the spices and waking them up by the heat of the hot oil or hot ghee, which gives a sizzling sound when the spices are added. I use Kenyan green chillies or finger chillies for dal, which are really needed to add spiciness. The great thing with chillies is that you can easily freeze them, just like the curry leaves, and this helps to avoid wasting them and ensures they are on hand when needed.

I cook the tadka in butter, which adds a sense of comfort. After the tadka is prepared, it is added to the dal, which is seasoned with the ground spices, like turmeric in this case for the nice yellow colour, and salt to taste. Bear in mind that dal keeps thickening after it is done, but this is simply solved by adding more hot water. Never forget that dal is very forgiving, you can adjust it and be playful with it by adding more spice or diluting it with water if needed: a lot comes down to adding to taste. I highly recommend serving it with rice that can easily be made in advance, using the ratio of one cup of rice to two cups of water, a yoghurt like raita, the coolness complements the heat and the spiciness of the dal pretty well, kachumber salad, and pickled mango, which is really spicy!

Ingredients

Serves 4

Moong dal, 1 cup
Turmeric powder, ½ tsp
Salt, 1 tsp
Garlic cloves, 2
Cumin, 1 tsp
Green chillies, 2
Curry leaves, 15
Coriander to garnish

Method

Wash and soak a cup of moong dal in water.

Once washed, add to a pressure cooker along with ½ teaspoon turmeric powder and 1 teaspoon salt.

Close the cooker and after 2 whistles, switch it off.

Once the air has escaped, open and check the consistency of the dal. You might need to add more water and whisk until smooth. Taste and add more salt if required.

For the tadka: temper 2 cloves of garlic, 1 teaspoon cumin, 2 green chillies, and 15 curry leaves in very hot oil.

When the garlic is brown (not burnt!), transfer the tadka into the dal and mix well.

When you are ready to assemble your dal bowl— put the rice at the bottom, then the hot dal, the raita, and a dollop of pickles and freshly chopped coriander.

Kachumber

A simple, refreshing salad accompaniment

Unfortunately salads are not frequently made and served in Indian cuisine, which mainly revolves around hot foods like rice, dal, curries, and breads. Salads are so refreshing and a great complement to dal. At Spice Deli we have around seven mixed salads on display. For kachumber one uses red onion, cucumber, tomato, coriander, some chilli, salt, and lemon juice and that's it – it's just a little refresher!

Ingredients

Serves 4

Red onion, ½

Cucumber, ½

Tomato, 1

Lemon, juiced, ½

Chillies, 1

Salt, Pinch

Method

Mix chopped red onion, cucumber, tomato.

Add lemon juice, chopped chillies, and salt.

Serve with tadka dal and chaval!

Raita

For the raita I'm using low fat yoghurt, only because I want a slightly more liquid consistency than you find with full fat yoghurts here. I usually buy the yoghurts in Turkish supermarkets; they have that nice runny, yet chunky, texture. You can add cucumber or beetroot, both are really nice and refreshing. I also add some nigella seeds, which is optional.

Ingredients

Serves 4

Cucumber, ½

Low fat yogurt, 250g

Salt, pinch

Black onion (nigella) seeds, sprinkle

Method

Grate the cucumber and mix in with the low fat, chunky, watery yogurt. Add salt to taste

For garnishing, add optional black onion seeds or pomegranate seeds.

Ribale Sleiman Haidar

“I can’t imagine eating just one dish. The way I imagine food is like a spread of dishes on the table, so you share and get to try a little bit of everything: different colours, different textures, different tastes.”

With a passion for sharing food and transferring knowledge of her home country, Lebanon, Ribale is the perfect host for Brunch Beirut Supper Club, which she runs together with her partner from their warm and welcoming home. With lots of plants, natural lighting, and family mementos, it is the perfect setting for a Sunday brunch. With the intention to stay in London for one year to complete her Masters in ‘Design in Development’, Ribale moved to London years ago and now finds herself working at the London School of Economics’ Middle East Centre. Living in London has sparked Ribale’s interest in delving deeper into her culinary heritage, and she returns home frequently to research the stories and science behind the dishes she grew up with in order to share them with curious Londoners. The attitude of always being willing to expose itself to new culinary and culturally diverse experiences is probably what she loves most about London and is what Ribale keeps reminding herself on those grey London days, as she says “the beauty of being able to host twelve random people from different places in your home, you can probably only get in London.”

When Ribale moved to London she found it incredible that so many people took an interest in Lebanese cuisine. The food served in the restaurants, however, did not necessarily reflect the home cooking she enjoys most. In her opinion, home cooking is best reflected in the brunch that comprises a wide variety of dishes you keep eating throughout the day. Growing up on the idea of sharing food with many people around the table is what has instilled Ribale’s deep rooted love for having people visit and cooking for them. Prior to starting Brunch Beirut, she tested out some of the dishes on friends to find out what people would be willing to try. Cooked chicken liver did not make it to the menu. It would be very common to have raw minced meat in small quantities for brunch and Ribale recalls her grandmother going to the local butcher on Mondays and Wednesdays, the days that the meat would be fresh, and there the two-year-old Ribale would snack on a piece of raw lamb liver. Although she loves it, Ribale would not eat or serve raw meat in London where her supper clubs are not just about the food, but rather recreating the sensation of the Sunday brunches she would have with family and friends back home.

Loubia bi zeit

Flat Beans in Olive Oil

For a Lebanese brunch you would usually sit around a table with a variety of dishes, spread out on the table, that you share. More important than the food is the setting and sharing – the feeling of getting together with people and enjoying the food at the table. At the supper clubs I share dishes that we would usually have for brunch, which I simplify and adapt to what is locally available in London. Although you are able to find many ingredients used in Lebanese cuisine, it does not have the same freshness or taste as it would at home. Because of the different climate and soil, I usually adapt the recipes to local produce. Sharing the food during the supper clubs is partly about preserving and sharing memories, but it is equally about creating a new way of navigating between the two countries that are home to me. Each time I visit Lebanon, I learn new recipes and background information on the food I share with the diners; at the same time my mum has been learning new techniques and approaches to recipes as I have been sharing with her. This way food fosters a dialogue between two contexts, which is a process that I absolutely enjoy.

Loubia bi zeit, flat beans in olive oil, is very easy to prepare and lends itself well to be served as a starter or as part of a brunch. I love the well-rounded taste of the flat beans in tomato sauce. When you let it sit in the fridge for a couple of days the loubia is enhanced by the garlic and onion and the aroma of the seven spice mix. The sad truth, though, is that it usually does not last more than a couple of hours in our household!

Ingredients

Serves 4

Romano or flat beans, 300g
Olive oil, ½ cup
Onion, chopped, 1
Garlic cloves, thinly sliced, 4
Small ripe tomatoes, 6
Tomato paste, 1 tbsp
Seven spices mix*, ¼ tsp
Salt and black pepper to taste
Parsley for garnish
***available at most grocery shops in the UK**

Method

Heat the olive oil on a medium heat then add the chopped onions and garlic and cook for approximately 5 minutes until the onions are tender and translucent. Add the beans and brown them for another few minutes.

In the meantime, soak the tomatoes in boiling water to make them easier to peel. Peel and cut the tomatoes into chunks.

Add the chopped tomatoes, tomato paste, spices, and seasoning to the pot and cover. Simmer for around 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.

When the beans are tender, turn up the heat for a couple of minutes to allow any excess liquid to evaporate.

Loubia bi zeit is best served cold and tastes even better on the second or third day. It can also be served cooled. Once cool, garnish with parsley and serve with Lebanese flat bread.

Seven Spice Mix

Chances are that most of the dishes in any Lebanese meal have seven spice mix added to them. It is nothing fancy, but a good signifier of Lebanese food. Seven spice mix can be bought ready made in store, but is often also made at home by mixing cumin, cinnamon, black pepper, white pepper, a bit of turmeric, nutmeg, and cloves together.

Fattoush Moghrabieh

Fattoush with a Twist

Lebanese food is a beautiful reflection of the many cultures that have inspired the cuisine: a mixture of Turkish, Moroccan, Palestinian, Syrian as well as the many other influences that are interpreted differently depending on region and the family. I was born and raised in Beirut, but we spent most of the weekends in rural Lebanon in the villages where my parents are from. My mum is from the south and my dad is from Baalbek, in the east, closer to Syria. In my mother's village, only an hour away from Beirut, we ate dishes that people in Beirut would have never heard of. The incredible richness and variety of regionally specific cuisines has always struck me, especially given that Lebanon is such a small country with only 4 million citizens – it is mesmerising.

This recipe is my interpretation of the fattoush salad that you may be familiar with, a fresh salad that is usually served with fried flat bread. My interpretation of the salad is to use moghrabieh, small dried semolina dough balls we make in Lebanon, similar to Moroccan couscous but bigger and chewier. Every time I return from Lebanon I buy it fresh to take home and freeze, but you can buy it in the UK too, where it is generally known as pearl couscous or Israeli couscous. It is usually cooked and eaten as part of a stew with chickpeas, chicken, and beef, but if it is just boiled like pasta and added to the fattoush it turns it into a meal, rather than a side salad. The tanginess of the lemon and sumac combined with the fresh ingredients make it so lovely. This is a fairly simple dish that lends itself well for either lunch or dinner, bearing in mind that the key to success is the freshness of the ingredients.

Ingredients

Serves 4

For the fattoush:

Moghrabieh (Pearl couscous), 1 cup
Fresh mint, handful
Lebanese cucumbers, 2
Tomatoes, 2
Radishes, 5
Spring onions, 2
Small romaine lettuce, 1
Parsley leaves, handful
Almond flakes, small handful
Pomegranate seeds, small handful

For the dressing:

Lemon, 1
Olive oil, 50ml
Salt, ½ tsp
Sumac, ¼ tsp

Method

Drop the moghrabieh in a pan of boiling water and boil until soft but still a bit chewy. If using fresh moghrabieh, this can be done in a few minutes. Dry moghrabieh needs approximately 10 minutes.

Drain and let the mograbieh and leave to cool.

Chop the cucumbers, tomatoes, radishes, mint, parsley, onions, and lettuce into chunky pieces to keep the flavours and give the salad texture.

In a small dry pan, fry the almond flakes making sure you constantly stir them. Be careful as they can burn quickly.

To make the dressing, mix all the ingredients in a small jar and shake really well to make sure the sumac doesn't clump together.

In a large bowl, mix all ingredients, top with the dressing, and enjoy!

Batata Harra

Spicy Potatoes

Sharing food is one of the defining elements of Lebanese cuisine, and a practice I have embodied as a part of my identity. It sometimes results in funny situations when going out for dinner with my London friends. In Lebanese cooking the concept of appetisers and main courses does not really exist; instead you have a variety of small dishes on the table that you keep nibbling from. So when going to restaurants I often suggest sharing the dishes, as trying everything is fun, and my friends, having internalised a rather individualistic approach, jokingly become more protective over their food – they do not want to share, which often causes a lot of laughter. In Lebanon sharing food is an expression of hospitality; you would want to give your guests the best food experience as a gesture to make them feel comfortable and welcome. Whenever I go visit my grandmother for lunch and she finds a beautiful piece of tomato on her plate she passes it on to her guests and insist they eat it.

The batata harra is another sharing dish we have for lunch. It is very comforting and you want to keep eating it. It literally means spicy potatoes, inspired by Andhra Pradesh's 'gunpowder' potato. They specifically remind me of the potatoes my grandmother makes. She makes them into a tomato stew with lamb, which I absolutely adore but have never succeeded in recreating. I have stopped trying now, so it is an extra incentive to go home. This is one of the reasons I add my personal touch to the family recipes, as it never works out as good as my mother's or grandmother's version. This version of spicy chopped potatoes dipped in a garlicky yoghurt sauce is easy to make and delicious. It lends itself very well to brunch, in a wrap, or as a bbq side dish.

Ingredients

Serves 4

For the potatoes

Vegetable oil, 3 cups
Cyprus potatoes, 2
Fresh coriander, 1 bunch
Chilli flakes to taste
Cloves of garlic, crushed, 2
Small green chilli, 1
Salt and pepper to taste

For the yoghurt sauce

Greek yoghurt, 1 cup
Water, 2 tbsp
Salt, to taste
Dried mint, 1 tbsp
Clove of garlic, crushed, ½

Method

Cut the potatoes into small cubes.

Heat the vegetable oil to frying temperature in a deep pan. Once ready (you can test the temperature by dropping a potato in and waiting for it to sizzle), deep-fry the potatoes until golden and crunchy.

In the meantime, chop the coriander and slice the green chilli.

Once the potatoes are cooked, transfer into a frying pan and mix well with the crushed garlic, chilli flakes, seasoning, and half the chopped coriander. Fry them for a few minutes to lightly cook the coriander and garlic.

To serve, top with the rest of the fresh coriander and the sliced green chilli.

To make the yoghurt sauce, mix all the ingredients and whisk well to combine.

Batata harra is best served fresh and hot. It goes really well dipped in garlicky yogurt and wrapped in Lebanese flat bread.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost the project team of Emma-Jayne Abbots, Jolien Benjamin, Jack Fleming and Deborah Toner would like to give their heartfelt thanks to all of the chefs and cooks who contributed to the Food Stories project and who so openly shared their stories and recipes, not to mention their kitchens and food, with us. Without their support and enthusiasm for the project, this book wouldn't have been possible. Our thanks and appreciation also go to Elodie Vincendeau for her work in helping collect and collate the stories contained in this book, Rocio Carvajal for her beautiful photography and passionate engagement with the project, and Clara Ernst for her wonderful illustrations. All have contributed to making this book a truly collaborative endeavour and a stimulating, highly enjoyable, and creative experience. Our thanks also go to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for their generous funding and to Jakob Klein and the SOAS Food Studies Centre for their intellectual and practical support. We also thank Ana Martins, Anna Charalambidou, and Hazel Thomas for their collaboration and dedication to the research project that helped to give inspiration for this book.

On a more personal note, Emma-Jayne Abbots would like to thank David Blair for asking all the right questions at the right time, and for his constant love, patience, and support both during the production of this book and beyond. Jolien Benjamin is beyond grateful for the support and encouragement she has experienced from her family, friends, and mentors during the production of the book. She can't thank Mani Mani enough for his ongoing love and support. A very special thanks goes out to Piri Tamminen, whose everlasting love and presence has been felt at all times, kiitos. Jack Fleming would like to thank his dog Dana for providing plenty of stress-free evenings away from work! Finally, Deborah Toner would like to thank Rebecca Earle for teaching her so much about food and the many ways it shapes our histories, our lives, our selves.