

# 30-dinners in 30-days

by Jules Clancy

VIDEO edition



A 30-day program for dramatically better meals

For the newest addition to my family.  
With Love xx

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1st Edition.

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About the author

# ----HOW TO USE---- THIS eWORKBOOK

THANK YOU for supporting Stonesoup and picking up a copy of '30-dinners in 30-days'.

This eWorkbook is so much more than a regular recipe book. It's a collection of lessons and action steps you can take to make your cooking less of a chore and your dinners more delicious, healthy and more fun!

It's designed to be completed over 30 days with one lesson, one action step and one recipe per day. BUT in reality I don't cook dinner every single day and I certainly don't expect you to either.

So take the lessons and action steps at your own pace. What I do recommend is making a commitment to yourself now. What's a realistic time frame for you to complete the actions in each lesson? One or two lessons per week? Or more?

Just make sure it's something you feel comfortable with. Then schedule time in your calendar to stick with your plan.

I also recommend reading through the whole workbook now or over the next week. This will give you a general 'feel' for how your cooking and your dinners are going to change - the 'big picture' overview that will help you keep going when things get tough.

# ----MAKING THE---- MOST OF THIS eWORKBOOK

## 1. Save it in multiple locations.

Work computer, home computer, smart phone and ipad. You will always have these recipes at your fingertips.

Perfect for last minute planning or for when you find yourself in the supermarket stuck for what to cook for dinner.

## 2. Find exactly what you want with the search function.

Got mushrooms in the fridge? A quick search and you'll have all the mushroom recipes ready to choose from.

## 3. Jump straight to your chosen page with the hyperlinks.

My favourite feature. Just click on the links and be taken instantly to your chosen page. The bookmarks help navigation as well.

## 4. Be inspired by browsing the interactive index(es).

There are indexes to browse by the seasons, your mood, different cuisines, and recipe type.

## 5. Make the most of the variations.

Each recipe has at least 4 suggestions for alternatives to suit different dietary requirements.

So if you think a recipe might not be exactly right for you, make sure you check out the variation suggestions. The variations are also there to keep things interesting. If you enjoy a particular recipe, challenge yourself next time to try one of the different options.

# RECIPE index

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DAY one.

Reframe how you  
think about cooking  
dinner...

## ----DAY 1. LESSON----

We'll start you off gently today. We're not going to be talking about fancy techniques or how you really should organise your pantry.

Today's lesson is all about how you think about and approach cooking as an activity.

The biggest difference I've noticed between people who enjoy cooking and those that 'hate' it isn't skill level or ability. It isn't whether they have a state-of-the-art kitchen. It isn't the amount of 'spare' time they have or the number of people they have to feed.

The biggest difference is their attitude towards cooking. You see, people like me who love cooking, see it as a pleasurable activity. It's something that brings a little joy to their day.

Whereas people who don't enjoy cooking see it as a 'chore' or as another task they have to complete, like taking out the garbage.

So which camp do you fall into?

If you're already a cooking fan, that's great. I want you to keep up the good work. And don't worry, there will be plenty more challenging lessons ahead for you in this workbook.

If you're someone who sees cooking as a chore, you're actually in luck!

Todays lesson has the potential to make a big difference for you and the enjoyment you get out of cooking.

But before we get to the action steps to help you get there, let's have a look at the reasons why I love cooking. The aim here is to help inspire you to start 'reframing' and thinking about the whole activity in a new and more fun way...

### 4 reasons I LOVE cooking.

#### 1. Cooking allows me to relax & unwind.

It's my favourite time of day. I love just being in the kitchen with my thoughts and my ingredients.

#### 2. It has a real physical outcome and end point.

So much of our work and productivity these days is geared towards outputs that we can't see, smell and touch, like an empty email inbox. So I love knowing that at the end of my time in the kitchen I'm going to have plates of real and hopefully delicious food.

#### 3. It's a chance to 'be in the moment'.

The older I get the more I realise how short life is and how easy it is to be always thinking of the future or wishing my life away. When I'm cooking I can focus on being in the moment - a bit like a mini meditation session.

#### 4. It can be a great way to show love and get lots of praise!

Cooking for my family and friends is one of my favourite ways to show my love. And let's face it, I'm only human and there are few nicer feelings than when someone has enjoyed your cooking and is generous with the praise.

## ----DAY 1. ACTIONS----

Now it's your turn. All you need to do today is write a list of the reasons why YOU do love cooking. Or if you're not there yet, the reasons why you possibly could love cooking.

## ----DAY 1. RECIPE----

### Quick Steak & Rocket Salad



*quick steak & rocket salad*

# Quick Steak & Rocket Salad

Inspired by a lunch I had at Matricinella on a recent trip to Rome. I love a warm salad for a quick dinner. There's something about having part of the meal served warm that makes it feel more substantial and 'dinner-like'. There are 2 benefits to chopping the steak into slivers. First it cooks in a flash and second it tenderises the meat. Win win! You can easily increase this recipe. If cooking for more than 2 people I'd cook the beef in batches to make sure it browns properly and doesn't get crowded in the pan.

## Enough for 1...

1 steak about 200g (7oz)  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
2 handfuls rocket (arugula), washed & dried  
parmesan shavings, to serve

## METHOD

1. Heat your frying pan on a very high heat. Trim any fat from the steak and slice into super fine strips. Drizzle with a little olive oil and season.
2. Cook beef in the hot pan for about 1 minute. Then stir and keep cooking till browned on all sides.
3. Meanwhile, combine lemon juice and 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil in a bowl.
4. When the steak is cooked transfer to the lemon dressing. Toss in rocket leaves. Serve with parmesan shaved over.

## VARIATIONS

**vegetarian** – skip the parmesan and replace the steak with halloumi sliced into batons.

**vegan** – replace the steak with sliced field or portabello mushrooms. You'll need 1-2 per person and they'll take more like 7-8 minutes to cook. Replace the parmesan with either chunks of avocado or some slivered almonds.

**chicken** – replace steak with a chicken breast or thigh fillets. Make sure the chicken is cooked through before tossing in the dressing.

**different leaves** – I love the bitterness of rocket but you could use any salad leaves. A little radicchio is lovely here in the Autumn or Winter.

**dairy-free** – replace the parmesan with a handful of toasted breadcrumbs, some halved cherry tomatoes or just skip it.



DAY two.

Make Space to  
Create...

## ----DAY 2. LESSON----

You've heard the old saying 'use it or lose it'. Well I'm afraid it applies to your kitchen as well.

If you aren't using your kitchen to cook, the space tends to get filled up with other things. Like New Yorker Carrie Bradshaw storing sweaters in the oven.

If you haven't been cooking much lately, chances are your kitchen has started to be overtaken by other items. A bit of clutter creep.

The good news is, reclaiming your kitchen and finding space to create isn't necessarily going to be that hard. Or take loads of time.

But before we get to the action step for today's lesson, let's look at some reasons why decluttering your kitchen is going to help your cooking.

### *What are the benefits of having 'space to create'?*

#### **1. Saves you time.**

When you're in a hurry to get dinner on the table, being able to walk in to the kitchen and start cooking without having to first clear space is huge.

#### **2. Saves you money.**

Having space already cleared and ready to go makes it much easier to get started. Which means you're more likely to cook rather than giving in and ordering take out.

#### **3. Makes you healthier.**

See the reasons above about eating less take out and commercially produced food? Well while it's saving you money it's also saving you from less healthy food choices.

#### **4. Makes cooking less of a 'chore'.**

Yesterday we discussed the benefits of seeing cooking as fun rather than work. It's much easier to keep thinking of cooking as fun if there isn't a load of crap to clean away before you get started. Simple really.

## ----DAY 2. ACTION----

Take a look around your kitchen space. Do you have at least one area where you can chop and prepare food?

If yes, great!

If no, you have some work to do. Just clear yourself one space for chopping and preparing food, preferably close to your stove top. It doesn't have to be huge. And you don't have to spring clean your whole kitchen. Just this one little space.

## ----LEARN MORE----

Leo Babauta from Zen Habits is a master at living a clutter-free life.

If you'd like to learn more about making space to create here are some of the best free articles on Leo's blog:

[\\*The Ultimate Guide to Conquering Your Clutter](#)

[\\*How To Tackle Your Clutter](#)  
(includes a video of a webinar at the bottom)

## ----DAY 2. RECIPE----

### *Lentils with Ricotta*

*lentils with ricotta*



# Lentils with Ricotta

This lentil dish was inspired by dinner I had at a fabulous little wine bar/restaurant called 'Au Passage' in Paris. They served their lentils with watercress instead of parsley so feel free to use watercress if you want this dish to feel more 'Parisian'.

## Enough for 2...

200g (7oz) french style green lentils (puy lentils)  
2 tablespoons sherry or red wine vinegar  
2 tablespoons soy sauce  
8 tablespoons full fat ricotta  
2 large handfuls flat leaf parsley leaves

## METHOD

1. Place lentils in a medium saucepan and cover generously with water. Cover and bring to the boil.
2. Remove lid and simmer for 10-15 minutes or until the lentils are tender.
3. Drain lentils and return to the pan. Season with vinegar, soy and 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Taste and add salt as needed.
4. Divide lentils between 2 bowls. Top with ricotta, parsley and lashings of ground black pepper.

## VARIATIONS

**short on time?** - use canned lentils. You'll need about 1.5 regular cans - no need to boil them.

**soy-free** – season with salt instead of the soy sauce.

**dairy-free** – serve with a poached or fried egg or two instead of the ricotta.

**vegan** – replace ricotta with chunks of avocado or a big dollop of hummus.

**no ricotta?** – other soft cheese such as goats cheese, cottage cheese, creamy blue or natural yoghurt.

**different greens** – salad leaves, rocket (arugula), baby spinach, mint or basil would all be great.

**different legumes** – try red or brown lentils. Just watch the cooking time so they don't turn to mush.

**carnivore** – toss in crispy bacon or some finely sliced prosciutto.



DAY *three.*

*Find a favourite  
pantry recipe...*

## ----DAY 3. LESSON----

I consider my pantry my best silent 'kitchen helper' when it comes to getting quick dinners on the table. And you should do the same.

Before you start thinking, 'but my pantry is such a mess' or 'I really have no idea how to stock a proper pantry', don't stress.

We'll delve into the depths of how to 'spring clean' your pantry and how to stock it later in this workbook. For now I just want you to start thinking of your pantry as your friend. And I want your new friend to start making life easier for you.

Ready?

### *For your pantry to really help you it just needs to do two things:*

1. Supply enough of the right ingredients to make a particular meal.
2. Help you remember you have said ingredients when you're feeling tired & hungry.

So let's look at the 3 easy steps you need to take to set yourself up with a reliable pantry backup.

### STEP 1. Choose 2 pantry recipes.

These are going to be your 'go-to' recipes when you're tired and hungry. But don't worry, you can change your favourite pantry recipes whenever you like, the important thing is that you choose 2 to start with.

### STEP 2. Buy the ingredients for those recipes.

It doesn't matter how you look at it, unless you have actual ingredients in the house, you won't be able to cook.

So make sure you buy some ingredients that you know will actually go together to make something delicious and quick. Then move onto step 3.

### STEP 3. Relax.

Pat yourself on the back and remember that next time you need a quick, emergency meal, instead of resorting to pizza, just head home and have some fun whipping up one of your delicious pantry dinners.

It's that simple.

## ----DAY 3. ACTION----

Today you need to follow steps 1, 2 and 3. Here's a list of pantry recipes to help you choose:

### **Pantry recipes in this workbook:**

- \* Pea & pesto soup
- \* Broccoli & brown rice (use frozen broccoli)
- \* Lentils with bacon (use frozen bacon)
- \* Thai red curry & sweet potato soup
- \* Green pea curry  
(replace snow peas with frozen peas)
- \* Ketchup 'baked' beans

### **Pantry recipes on Stonesoup:**

- \* Warm chickpea salad
- \* Addictive green curry of broccoli soup  
(using frozen broccoli)
- \* Spaghetti with rosemary & garlic
- \* Smoky tomato & lentil soup

## ----LEARN MORE----

Keen to get going on revamping your pantry? Check out the Bonus Lesson in this workbook for: [How to Spring Clean Your Pantry](#). We also cover stocking and getting the most out of using your pantry in the [Solve Your Dinner Dilemma](#) online cooking class at the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School.

## ----DAY 3. RECIPE----

### Pea & Pesto Soup

A close-up photograph of a large, dark-colored Dutch oven or stockpot filled with green peas. The peas are submerged in water, which is bubbling slightly, indicating they are being cooked. The pot has two handles visible on the left and right sides. It sits on a dark wooden surface. To the left of the pot, a white and black striped cloth napkin is partially visible.

*pea & pesto soup*

# Pea & Pesto Soup

Frozen peas are seriously one of the best pantry (or freezer) ingredients. I love that they don't require any prep and can actually taste better than fresh peas. This is a great 'pantry' recipe to have up your sleeve. It's perfect for nights when you need dinner to be on the table in 10 minutes or less.

## Enough for 2...

500g (1lb) frozen peas

2-4 tablespoons pesto

## METHOD

1. Bring 2 1/2 cups water to the boil in a medium pot.
2. Add peas and cook for 5 minutes, or until the peas are hot and tender.
3. Puree with a stick blender. Stir in a little pesto, taste and add more if desired. Season.

## VARIATIONS

**vegan / dairy-free** – either replace the pesto with a large handful of torn basil leaves or use a vegan pesto like this [Sicilian nut pesto](#).

**no pesto?** – the peas on their own make a really lovely pure soup. Or add in a few handfuls of grated parmesan.

**pesto-lovers** – if you are using good quality home made pesto, you might like to serve with a big dollop of pesto on top.

**richer** – add in a few tablespoon of butter when pureeing the soup.



DAY four.

Save on washing up...

# ----DAY 4. LESSON----

Is washing up a necessary evil? I've had more than a few people tell me that while they have a love of cooking, they tend not to venture into the kitchen as much as they'd like because they just hate the cleaning up part.

I understand where they're coming from but cooking doesn't have to be like that. So today I thought we'd look at some tips for keeping the piles of dishes at bay.

## Reduce

Reduce the amount of equipment you use by embracing simplicity. Keeping the amount of equipment in your kitchen to a minimum will help – you can't dirty things that don't exist! But more on that to come...

**Seek out one pot meals** or things that can be made and eaten from the same pot.

## One pot recipes in this workbook:

- \* Lentils with ricotta
- \* Pea & pesto soup
- \* Chorizo with kale
- \* Broccoli & brown rice
- \* Lentils with bacon
- \* Cumulus spiced eggs
- \* Chicken with peppers
- \* Chickpea & tomato soup

- \* Thai red curry & sweet potato soup
- \* Green pea curry
- \* Ketchup 'baked' beans
- \* Chickpea & rosemary baked frittata
- \* Shaved snowpea & ham salad
- \* Magic sausage supper
- \* Curried quinoa with yoghurt
- \* Green pea curry
- \* Simple fish stew

## One pot recipes on Stonesoup:

- \* Curried scrambled tofu with spinach
- \* Simple soba noodle soup
- \* Butter beans with tomato & chorizo

## Serve in the cooking pot.

The whole idea of transferring your creations to a separate platter or serving dish is great if you have an army of servants to help clean up. But not a great idea if you're the cook and the cleaner. If your saucepans aren't good looking enough for the table, it might be better to invest in more attractive cookware and skip the serving ware.

## Clean as you go.

There are always a few minutes here and there when you're waiting for a pot to boil or for something to finish cooking. Make it a habit to use this time to get a start on the cleaning up. My favourite 'when I have a second' tasks are to put away ingredients I'm finished with and stacking (or unstacking) the dishwasher.

## Reuse

If you need a spoon, reach for the one you've already used rather than grabbing a clean one every time. Same goes for pots and pans. A quick rinse will have most things ready to go again in only a few seconds.

## Recycle

Compostable or recyclable plates and cups will certainly save on washing up. It doesn't really feel right using them everyday. I save this option for picnics or large parties.

# ----DAY 4. ACTION----

1. When you're cooking next, challenge yourself to have all the excess ingredients put back in their places before you serve dinner.
2. Then when you're feeling like you've got the ingredient putting away habit under control, challenge yourself to stack as many used items into the dishwasher as you can. Or if you don't have a dish, start the washing up process as you go.
3. Add at least one 'one pot' recipe from the list in today's lesson to your repertoire.

# ----DAY 4. RECIPE----

## Broccoli with Brown Rice



*broccoli with brown rice*

# Broccoli with Brown Rice

This is a brilliant little pantry recipe if you're using frozen broccoli. It's also a favourite one pot meal when you're in the mood for something nourishing. By charring the broccoli in a hot pot, we end up with a far more complex tasting green than just boring old steamed broccoli. I also love using pouches of 'parcooked' rice from the supermarket for a super quick dinner.

## per person...

1 head broccoli, rinsed and chopped  
1 cup coconut milk  
250g (9oz) cooked brown rice  
1 small red chilli, finely chopped

## METHOD

1. Heat a large saucepan on a very high heat. Add a little oil and the broccoli. Jam on the lid and cook for 2 minutes.
2. Stir and jam the lid back on for another 2 minutes.
3. Reduce the heat to medium low. Add the coconut milk, rice and chilli.
4. Cover again and cook for another 2 minutes or until everything is hot and the rice is tender.

## VARIATIONS

**can't find pre-cooked rice** – just simmer brown rice in plenty of boiling water until tender (about 20 minutes). Drain and cool. Can be frozen in ready to use portions.

**no coconut milk?** - replace with vegetable or chicken stock or 1/2 cup unsweetened coconut cream diluted with 1/2 cup water.

**herby** - serve with a handful of chopped basil or parsley leaves.

**slow-carb / grain-free** - replace the brown rice with cooked red lentils.

**paleo** - double the broccoli, skip the rice and serve with generous handfuls of almonds or cashews.



DAY five.

*Choose the best  
shopping list system  
for you...*

## ----DAY 5. LESSON----

One of the quickest ways to make sure you don't end up cooking on a regular basis is to live in a house that doesn't have any ingredients.

We've discussed the benefits of having at least 2 pantry based recipes in Lesson 3.

But how do you make sure you've got the right ingredients in the house on an ongoing basis?

If you're like me and don't happen to be blessed with a photographic memory, the next best option is to develop some sort of shopping list 'system'.

The thing is it doesn't really matter what your system is, just as long as it works for you.

Here's how my system works...

### **STEP 1. Keep an 'ongoing list' for pantry items & non-food stuff**

All you need is somewhere to record when you're running out of things as you think of them. Doing this as you go takes hardly any time or effort. And it makes your shopping list writing much more streamlined!

#### **options include:**

##### **1. an app on your phone**

I've recently started using a 'shopping list' app. It's brilliant. I just add things in as I think of them and then check them off as I shop. It also has a function so I can email or text my list of items to someone else if I'm outsourcing the shopping.

##### **2. a notepad**

Old school but still effective! My Mum used to swear by her magnetic notepad on the fridge.

##### **3. chalkboard / whiteboard**

Can make a nice decorative feature in your kitchen. The downside is you need to copy it over to your 'take with you list'.

I have a friend who uses a chalkboard in her kitchen and just takes a photo of it with her phone on her way to the supermarket.

### **STEP 2. Work out what you're going to need.**

Use whatever meal planning system you're happy with. And add these items to your shopping list.

## ----DAY 5. ACTION----

Resolve to keep an 'ongoing list' for pantry items and non food stuff. Then decide on the list option that suits your situation best. It may be one of the options listed on the left, or something completely new. Remember the most important part is that your system works for you.

## ----LEARN MORE----

The whole topping of weekly meal planning could fill another book 4 times the size of this workbook (and it has)!

If you're keen to learn more about meal planning, I recommend checking out my eCookbook called the [2-Minute Meal Plan System](#).

## ----DAY 5. RECIPE----

### **Chorizo with Kale**

*chorizo with kale*



# Chorizo with Kale

Adapted from my favourite food writer, Nigel Slater, in his latest book the 'Kitchen Diaries II'. This is now a firm favourite in our house and there has been much discussion on possible variations. See below for ideas...

## Enough for 2...

2 chorizo, sliced

1-2 cloves garlic, peeled & sliced

1 large bunch kale, finely sliced crosswise

1/2 lemon

handful roasted almonds

## METHOD

1. Heat a frying pan on a medium high heat. Add a little oil and the chorizo. Cook for 2-3 minutes or until well browned on the first side.
2. Turn and cook for a few seconds on the other side. Remove from the pan to a clean plate.
3. Add garlic and kale to the chorizo oil in the pan and stir fry for 2-3 minutes or until kale is wilted and tender.
4. Return chorizo to the pan to warm up. Taste and season with salt, pepper and a small squeeze of lemon. Serve with almonds sprinkled over.

## VARIATIONS

**vegetarian** – replace chorizo with sliced halloumi and add in a teaspoon smoked paprika with the kale.

**vegan** – replace the chorizo with 2 large red onions or bell peppers (capsicum) chopped. Cook on a medium heat until soft. Add kale and 1 teaspoon smoked paprika and continue to cook as per the recipe. Double the almonds to serve.

**no chorizo?** – spec, bacon, pancetta, salami or even ham.

**different greens** – Try cavolo nero, collard greens, spinach, silverbeet (chard), rainbow chard, even baby spinach or defrosted frozen spinach. Cabbage, brussels sprouts, broccoli, asparagus, broccoli rabe can also be used but will need a little longer to cook.

**nut-free** – skip the almonds or replace with toasted bread crumbs.

**budget / more substantial** – toss in a can of chickpeas. Or serve topped with a poached or fried egg.



DAY six.

*Cook with the  
Seasons...*

## ----DAY 6. LESSON----

There's been a lot of talk about food and seasonality over the last decade or so. Maybe too much talk.

While I agree that growing your own veg and eating with the seasons is an admirable goal, (and one I'd like to achieve), I also recognise that it isn't practical, or desirable for everyone to eat that way. We just don't have enough space in the world.

So rather than preach at you about the seasons, I thought I'd share my personal rules about seasonality. The aim is to give you a starting place for developing your own...

### 1. Some vegetables should really only be eaten at certain times of the year.

And others aren't so sensitive. For example I can buy pretty decent broccoli any time of the year, but asparagus are something I think are only worth bothering with in the Spring.

### 2. Just because something is on 'special' doesn't mean it's in season where you live.

One of the things that makes it difficult to keep track of seasonality is the global nature of food commerce these days. I've noticed that there are two times of the year when

cherries are on special. Once during the Australian Summer, when it's actually cherry season here. And secondly when it's Summer and cherry season in the Northern Hemisphere.

### 3. Even if you can buy something out of season, it's nice to impose your own limits.

I love the concept of seasonality. Limiting availability of different foods to certain times of the year makes life (and menu planning) a bit more interesting. Even though I can sometimes buy relatively decent fresh tomatoes outside of Summer, I tend to choose canned tomatoes or tomato paste. And save lovely fragrant fresh tomatoes for tomato salads only in the height of Summer.

## ----MY SEASONAL VEGETABLES----

### Summer

- § tomato
- § bell peppers [capsicum]
- § peas [fresh] including snow peas & sugar snap peas
- § beans
- § summer squash
- § eggplant [aubergine]
- § zucchini flowers
- § sweetcorn

### Autumn (Fall)

- § pumpkin [squash]
- § wild mushrooms

### Winter

- § brussels sprouts
- § cabbage [although I do buy it more frequently than just winter]
- § parsnip
- § turnip
- § swedes [rutabagas]
- § radicchio
- § celery root [celeriac]
- § horseradish
- § jerusalem artichoke
- § kohlrabi

### Spring

- § artichoke
- § asparagus
- § broad beans

# MY YEAR ---ROUND--- VEGETABLES

- § avocado
- § broccoli [autumn / winter]
- § broccolini [autumn / winter]
- § bok choy & other asian greens
- § belgian endive [witlof]
- § beets [autumn / winter]
- § cauliflower [autumn / winter]
- § carrot [autumn / winter]
- § collard greens [autumn / winter]
- § cucumber [spring / summer]
- § celery
- § garlic [summer]
- § fennel [autumn / winter]
- § leeks [spring / summer]
- § lettuce [spring / summer]
- § mushrooms [autumn]
- § onion [autumn / winter]
- § peas [frozen]
- § potato [autumn / winter]
- § radish [summer]
- § salad greens
- § swiss chard or silverbeet [autumn / winter]
- § sweet potato [autumn / winter]
- § spinach [autumn / winter]
- § zucchini or courgettes [summer]

*Note: The season listed in brackets denotes the traditional 'season' for each veg.*

## ----DAY 6. ACTION----

Make a date to visit a local farmers market or if there isn't one in your area visit your local veggie shop.

For bonus points, buy at least one vegetable that you haven't cooked with before. When you get home google (or do a search on Stonesoup!) for your ingredient and choose a recipe.

## ----LEARN MORE----

The best way to learn about the seasons is to start growing your own vegetables. I've been loving 'The Little Veggie Patch Co. Book' for a real beginners guide.

My other favourite gardening resource is a blog called [Gardennerd.com](http://Gardennerd.com).

## ----DAY 6. RECIPE----

### Raw Broccoli Pesto Pasta

*raw broccoli pesto pasta*



# Raw Broccoli Pesto Pasta

I only came up with this idea the other day. I was in the mood for pesto but when I checked on the bunch of basil I had in the fridge, I was sorely disappointed to find it wilted and starting to grow mould. Luckily there was a sprightly bunch of broccolini near by and a new pesto was born...

## Enough for 2...

1 bunch broccolini  
1 handful cashews  
1 handful grated parmesan, plus extra to serve  
squeeze lemon juice  
200g (7oz) pasta

## METHOD

1. Bring a pot of salted water to boil for your pasta.
2. Meanwhile, trim broccolini and remove last inch of the stems.
3. Whizz broccolini and cashews in a food processor until finely chopped. Add parmesan, lemon juice and about 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Whizz again.
4. If too thick, add a little more oil. Taste and season.
5. Cook pasta until al dente. Drain and return to the saucepan. Stir through enough pesto to make a good sauce.

## VARIATIONS

**regular pesto** – replace broccolini with basil leaves.

**gluten-free / slow carb** – replace pasta with a drained can of chickpeas or white beans. Warm in a little oil then stir in the pesto.

**nut-free** - replace cashews with extra parmesan or sourdough bread crumbs.

**dairy-free** - replace the parmesan with extra cashews or different nuts such as almonds or pinenuts. Or use a handful of fresh bread crumbs instead.

**more substantial** - toss a few handfuls of cooked chicken into the pesto or serve with a poached egg on top.

**different veg** - cooked beets make a brilliant pesto. I'm also planning on trying raw cauliflower, grilled zucchini, cooked eggplant and steamed carrot.

**garlic** - add a small clove of garlic.



**DAY** seven.

*Master the art of  
storing your produce...*

## ----DAY 7. LESSON----

Storing fresh produce can be a little daunting. And it can be quite expensive if you get it wrong.

But don't worry! It doesn't have to be that hard. There are a two simple rules you can follow to keep your veg fresh and tasty for as long as possible. This will save you money and that guilty feeling that goes with throwing away things that have gone bad.

### **RULE 1. If in doubt keep it in the fridge.**

Most chemical reactions slow down at cooler temperatures. Same with micro-organism growth.

In general cooler = longer shelf life.

There are, of course, exceptions. **I store the following at room temperature**, in the pantry, preferable in a dark place:

**-potatoes** – in a hessian sack – allows them to breathe & protects from light.

**-whole avocado** (sensitive to chilling injury) once cut, though I tend to keep in the fridge.

**-garlic**

**-onions** – in a hessian sack – allows them to breathe & protects from light.

**-tomatoes** (sensitive to chilling injury) refrigeration changes their texture and dulls their flavour.

**-bananas** (sensitive to chilling injury).

**-lemons** – I love having a big bowl of lemons on the dining room table. They will last longer in the fridge though.

**-anything** that is under ripe.

Interestingly, my brother gave me his big flashy fridge last year, and I've noticed my veg are lasting significantly longer in the new fridge than in our tiny old fridge.

### **RULE 2. Use the veg crisper AND store in plastic bags.**

The refrigeration process removes moisture from the air inside your fridge, making it particularly drying.

Because veg and fruit tend to have high water contents, they are very sensitive to drying. You know yourself, if you leave a lettuce in the fridge uncovered, it will wilt pretty quickly.

The solution is to make the most of the crisper section of the fridge – and have it set to the 'veg' storage setting.

I also tend to keep my veg wrapped in plastic bags as extra protection.

#### **A note about ethylene.**

Bananas produce lots of ethylene gas as they ripen. And ethylene can speed up the ripening process in other produce. So if you

have something like an avocado that you want to ripen quickly, just pop it in a paper bag with a ripe banana and it will happen in no time. But if you want things to last longer, keep them away from your bananas.

## ----DAY 7. ACTION----

Open your fridge and have a good look at how you're storing things. Are there potatoes, onions, tomatoes or garlic in there? Then get them out!

Is everything covered and protected from drying out? If not, pop your veg in plastic bags or wrap in foil to protect. Or cover with cling wrap.

## ----LEARN MORE----

If you'd like to learn more, check out [10 tips for optimal vegetable storage](#) on Stonesoup.

## ----DAY 7. RECIPE----

### **Spiced Beef with Chickpeas**



*spiced beef with chickpeas*

# Spiced Beef with Chickpeas

This dish was inspired by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's lamb, chickpeas and spinach in his fabulous book 'Three Good Things on a Plate'. Here we're using thinly sliced steak because it cooks quickly and keeps the beef nice and tender. It also gives more surface area for the lovely spices to spread over.

## Enough for 2...

1 tablespoon baharat spice blend  
2 steaks  
1 can chickpeas (400g / 14oz), drained  
1 large bag baby spinach leaves  
squeeze lemon juice

## METHOD

1. Heat a large frying pan on a very high heat.
2. Meanwhile combine spices with 2 tablespoons olive oil. Season. Finely slice steaks and toss in the spiced oil.
3. Stir fry steak for about 2 minutes or until the steak is well browned and you can't see any pink bits.
4. Reduce the heat to low. Remove steak and place in a clean bowl.
5. Add chickpeas and spinach to the pan. Cook for another 2 minutes or until the spinach has started to wilt. Season with a squeeze of lemon.

## VARIATIONS

**no baharat?** – use your favourite spice blend for steak or make your own. Just combine 1 teaspoon each paprika, ground cumin and ground black pepper.

**vegetarian** – replace the steak with sliced halloumi. Pan fry for a few minutes on one side and then turn rather than trying to stir fry the halloumi OR cook chickpeas and spinach until just wilted then fry 2 eggs in the pan. Serve chickpeas and spinach topped with fried egg and sprinkle over a little spice.

**vegan** - replace beef with 2-3 large field mushrooms. Cook until mushies are browned and tender. Will take 5-10 minutes.

**different legumes** - replace chickpeas with canned or cooked beans or lentils.

**different greens** - regular spinach, kale, collard greens, silver beet will all work. Just make sure they're well washed and slice finely so the greens cook quickly.

**saucy** - serve with a dollop of natural yoghurt on top.



DAY *eight.*

Pickup some  
Takeaway for  
dinner...

# ----DAY 8. LESSON----

The lesson today is simple. Just because you're interested in cooking at home more, doesn't mean you have to make everything from scratch every night of the week.

We all have days when things don't go to plan and we end up literally running out of the office much later than we'd like.

It's on those types of days that I recommend either reaching for one of your super quick pantry recipes. OR making life easy on yourself and harnessing the convenience of takeaway food (or take out) for good.

Here are some of my favourite ways to 'tweak' takeaway so you get maximum convenience with a little more health.

## 1. Barbeque chicken.

My local supermarket sells surprisingly tasty whole or half barbecue chickens. Sometimes I just grab one of these with a few lemons and a bag of washed salad leaves. I then quarter the chicken and serve with a big handful of salad and a lemon half on the side.

OR I remove the chicken from the bone and toss the meat into a salad like the BBQ Chicken noodle salad on the next page.

## 2. Fried or grilled fish.

Pop into your favourite fish & chips joint and order some fish (forget the chips). Grab a bag of washed salad leaves and some good quality whole egg mayonnaise (pref one without added sugar).

## 3. Takeaway pizza.

Skip any combo deals with greasy garlic bread and soft drinks. Then order less pizza than you normally would. You know there never are any leftovers so why make life harder for yourselves by ordering too much. Then use the money you would have spent on extra pizza and order one or two salads.

Or pickup a bag of washed leaves to make your own salad. I also love eating my pizza with a large handful of rocket (arugula) on top to freshen things up.

## 4. Thai / Chinese.

Skip the rice and order an extra serving of stir fried veggies to use as an accompaniment to everything else. Be careful to only order as much food as you need.

## 5. Lebanese / Turkish.

Only order one kebab or turkish pizza to share. And make up the rest of your meal by exploring the fresh and tasty world of lebanese salads and dips which tend to be pretty healthy.

## 6. Indian.

I tend to skip the naan bread and rice and order a side of dahl (lentils) instead. Sometimes I'll make some cauliflower 'rice' (just whizz raw cauliflower in the food processor) to go with the curries.

## 7. Mexican.

Traditional Mexican food tends to be pretty healthy with all the beans and fresh salsa. I find the biggest danger is over ordering. Especially the burrito as big as your head problem. So think about sharing a burrito or going to smaller tacos instead.

# ----DAY 8. ACTION----

No pressure on this one but next time you have a crazy day, pull out your day 8 'healthy takeaway' card and give one of the ideas here a go.

# ----DAY 8. RECIPE----

## BBQ Chicken Noodle Salad

*BBQ chicken noodle salad*



# BBQ Chicken Noodle Salad

This is easily my favourite 'takeaway' meal to pull out when the day has got away from me. I'm still amazed at how tasty the BBQ chickens are from my local supermarket. 'Shelf fresh' noodles are hokkien or other soft noodles that are stable at room temperature, you'll find them in with the Asian produce. Or try the fresh noodles from the chiller section. If you'd prefer an even healthier option, skip the noodles in favour of one of the gluten free variations below.

## Enough for 2...

200g (7oz) 'shelf fresh' noodles  
1 tablespoon sherry, rice or red wine vinegar  
1 tablespoon wholegrain mustard  
1/2 BBQ chicken  
1 bag washed salad leaves

## METHOD

1. Place noodles in a heat proof bowl and cover with boiling water.
2. Whisk together vinegar, mustard and 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Season.
3. Using your hands remove chicken meat from the bone and toss in the dressing.
4. Drain the noodles well and add to the dressing.
5. Toss in the salad leaves and serve immediately.

## VARIATIONS

**Asian dressing** – replace the vinegar and mustard with 1 tablespoon each lime juice and fish sauce. A little chilli won't go astray either.

**gluten-free** - replace noodles with a drained can of butter beans, cannellini beans, black beans, lentils or chickpeas.

**noodle alternatives** - if you can find soft hokkien or udon noodles, dry rice noodles or mung bean noodles will work - just prepare as per the packet instructions then drain and add to the salad.

**vegetarian** - replace the chicken with 3-4 hard boiled eggs.

**vegan** - replace the chicken with a mixture of grilled or marinated veg from the deli. Eggplant (aubergine), peppers (capsicum), artichokes and mushrooms are all favourites.



DAY nine.

Get a kitchen  
equipment plan...

# ----DAY 9. LESSON----

Just as a talented photographer can take great photos with any old camera, I really believe that the same is true of cooks and kitchen equipment.

So PLEASE don't feel like you need to rush out and buy a heap of new equipment to help you become a better cook. It will cost you a lot of money and really the only way to become a better cook is to practice... get into the kitchen and just try things.

That being said, good quality equipment can make life easier and more pleasurable. So here are my list of absolute kitchen equipment essentials to give you a place to start.

## *The Absolute Essentials*

This list is assuming that you're not planning on baking OR entertaining. Just cooking for you and your family.

### **1. sharp knife**

Cooking without a sharp knife is no fun for anyone. A cheap cook's knife is OK for the short term, but a top quality knife would be the first thing I'd invest in. Go to a good quality cookware shop and explore the different options. Don't be tempted by fancy knife sets, you're much better off spending all your money on one amazing knife.

You're going to have it for life. My favourite knife is my Irishman's Wustof 17cm cooks knife. For longer term I'd make sure I had a good sharpening system as well. I love the 'furi fingers' system.

### **2. chopping board**

Nothing fancy, but big enough to be able to chop a whole bunch of kale is perfect. For carnivores, having another plastic chopping board to use for raw meat is useful.

### **3. medium frying pan with lid**

Choose a frying pan with a lid for most cooking. Make sure the sides are high enough so you could make a small batch of soup if you felt the urge. No other pot required! Best to get one with ovenproof handles so you can start cooking on the stove top and then finish them off in the oven.

### **4. a bowl per person**

A shallow bowl is most versatile for eating pretty much everything. No plates required!

### **5. cutlery for each person**

### **6. salad bowl**

Large enough to toss the leaves properly.

### **7. a glass per person**

### **8. bottle opener**

For wine or beer drinkers only.

### **9. can opener**

To avoid the need to remember to purchase self-opening cans.

# ----DAY 9. ACTION----

Make the decision to kit out your kitchen with quality not quantity. If you don't have a good quality knife, make a plan to invest in one when you can afford it.

# ----LEARN MORE----

See the following articles from the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School...

\*[Kitchen Equipment Essentials and Nice-to-Haves](#).

\*[Kitchen Equipment To Avoid](#).

# ----DAY 9. RECIPE----

## *Cumulus Spiced Eggs*



*cumulus spiced eggs*

# Cumulus Spiced Eggs

These eggs are a simplified version of a dish served at one of my favourite Melbourne restaurants, Cumulus Inc. They bake the eggs in individual cast iron pots but I've found cooking on the stove top with a lid on so the top of the eggs steam gives just as good results. I like to use an 'arriabata' tomato sauce which has built-in chilli spice. But you could just add your own fresh chilli.

## Enough for 2...

1 jar tomato pasta sauce (about 1 1/2 cups)  
1-2 teaspoons ground coriander  
4 handfuls baby spinach leaves  
4 eggs  
small handful soft goats cheese

## METHOD

1. Heat a little oil in a large frying pan. Add sauce and spice and bring to a simmer.
2. Add baby spinach and stir for about a minute, until the sauce has come back up to a simmer.
3. Make 4 indents in the sauce. Crack an egg into each indent.
4. Cover with a lid and gently simmer for 3-4 minutes or until the egg whites are set and the yolks still runny.
5. Season. Crumble over the goats cheese.

## VARIATIONS

**dairy-free** – serve sprinkled with roast sliced almonds. Or be like Cumulus Inc and serve with dukkah.

**different spices** – try ground cumin, smoked paprika, dried chilli or a mixture. Curry powder would work for a more Indian vibe.

**carnivore / egg-free** – you could cook chicken thigh fillets like this. Will take about 10 minutes, depending on the size.

**vegan** – wilt the spinach into the sauce with the spices. Divide sauce between two plates. Top with chunks of cold avocado and sprinkle over dukkah or roast sliced almonds.



DAY ten.

Make it easy to use  
your freezer...

## ---DAY 10. LESSON---

Do you use your freezer as much as you'd like to?

Well after today's lesson we're going to have you setup to really make the most of this amazing piece of equipment that we pretty much take for granted.

### 3 ways to make it super easy to use your freezer.

#### 1. Get a permanent marker for the kitchen.

I never used to label my food before storing in the freezer which always caused headaches down the road... things look surprisingly alike then they're frozen. Then my Irishman bought a marker for the kitchen and put it in the cutlery drawer. Now I (pretty much) always label because I know I won't have to spend 10 minutes hunting for a marker. My freezer has never been so helpful!

#### 2. Get some ziplock bags.

The best way to freeze food is in small portions, because it defrosts more quickly AND means you only defrost what you need. I love ziplock bags because they don't take up excess space, they're cheap and they're easy to label. I even store my stock and leftover soups in ziplock bags.

#### 3. Start thinking of your freezer as an extension of your pantry.

Frozen food will last for months, if not years so it's just as useful as your pantry for having supplies on hand.

Here are some ideas of 'pantry freezer items' from the supermarket:

- frozen peas
- frozen spinach
- frozen broccoli or cauliflower
- frozen broad beans
- frozen artichokes
- frozen berries
- frozen fish or calamari
- frozen puff pastry

And items you can freeze yourself:

- sliced sourdough or other bread
- bread crumbs
- cooked rice or quinoa
- cooked lentils, beans or chickpeas  
(a great alternative to canned)
- meat & poultry
- sausages
- most leftovers especially curries, soups & stews.

#### Bonus Points

Is your freezer a bit of a mess? Set aside some time to clean out your freezer. Just empty everything onto the kitchen counter or benchtop and then get rid of anything that you can't remember putting into the freezer.

Throw out anything that's past its best before date. And get rid of any 'unidentified' food.

Or start an 'eat everything in the freezer project'. I like to do this before I go on holidays, so I save money on food and I don't leave my freezer full so if something happens to the power when I'm away it won't all go to waste.

## ---DAY 10. ACTIONS---

1. Invest in a permanent marker for the kitchen and some ziplock bags.

2. Start using your freezer as an extra part of your pantry.

3. Make an effort to label and organize everything new that goes into your freezer.

PLUS! If you're super keen, follow the 'bonus points' suggestion for a freezer spring clean.

## ----LEARN MORE----

\* 7 Golden Rules of Freezing Food.

\* Defrosting 101: The Quickest & Safest Method without a Microwave.

\* 8 Time-saving Ideas Using Your Freezer.

## ----DAY 10. RECIPE----

### Lentils with Bacon



*lentils with bacon*

# Lentils with Bacon

Lentils are one of my favourite foods. I just adore their earthy flavour and super filling texture. They're also super high in protein and fiber so are great for vegetarians and carnivores alike. It's worth seeking out the 'French style' or 'Puy' lentils because they retain their shape when cooked, unlike red or brown lentils which tend to turn to mush unless you keep an eagle eye on them. These days my local supermarket stocks French style lentils but you may need to try a good deli or fancy food provider.

## per person...

250g (9oz) French style green lentils  
4-6 slices bacon, chopped  
2 tablespoons sherry or wine vinegar  
1 tablespoons soy sauce  
1 bunch flat leaf parsley, chopped

## METHOD

1. Cover lentils with cold water in a medium saucepan. Bring to a simmer then boil for 10-15 minutes or until lentils are tender. Drain.
2. Add a little oil to the saucepan and cook bacon over a medium high heat for about 5 minutes or until browned and crispy.
3. When the bacon is cooked, add lentils to the pan and season with vinegar, soy and 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil.
4. Toss in parsley. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary.

## VARIATIONS

**different lentils** – will work with red, green or brown lentils, just watch them and stop cooking before they turn to mush.

**vegan** - replace bacon with a few handfuls of roasted almonds (preferable smoked almonds).

**vegetarian** - skip the bacon and serve with a poached egg on top.

**carnivore** - toss in a few handfuls of cooked BBQ chicken once the bacon is crispy.

**soy-free** - season with salt instead of the soy sauce.



DAY eleven.

Reinvent a favourite  
pasta...

## ----DAY II. LESSON----

Do you rely on a favourite 'quick' pasta recipe as an old faithful?

When I was growing up, one of my Mum's favourite 'quick' dinners was penne pasta with bacon and cabanossi. It was (and is) delicious. We all loved it.

But the thing I've come to realise, especially since writing my book 5-Ingredients 10-Minutes, is that pasta dinners aren't as quick as you'd think.

First there's the getting your pot of water to boil and then you're looking at least 7-8 minutes cooking time.

There are short cuts. You can boil the water in a kettle first. And use fresh pasta which only takes a couple of minutes to cook.

### *Here are my favourite ways to 'reinvent' old pasta recipes*

#### **1. Replace the pasta with canned legumes.**

If I'm looking for something healthy and low GI, the first thing I reach for is a can of legumes. Canned beans or chickpeas are brilliant here.

#### **2. Replace the pasta with 'fresh' Asian noodles.**

Things like udon or hokkien which I either heat up by soaking for a minute or so in boiling water, or just add straight to the sauce.

You'd be surprised how well Asian noodles mimic pasta when served with an Italian style sauce.

#### **3. Replace the pasta with vegetable 'noodles'.**

This may not save time, but it makes for a much healthier meal. My two favourites are zucchini or carrot 'noodles' made using a vegetable peeler to create ribbons. These can then be either boiled or heated through in the sauce.

For a short pasta alternative, try chopping cauliflower into florettes and simmering until just tender. Zucchini sliced into rounds and cooked in a little oil in a pan also works.

#### **4. Serve the pasta sauce on a bed of salad leaves or greens.**

This works for heartier pasta sauces like a ragu or classic bolognese. Just pile your sauce on top of loads of baby spinach and you have a great one bowl meal!

## ----DAY II. ACTION----

Think of your family-favourite pasta recipe and decide which way to try 'reinventing' it next time.

## ----DAY II. RECIPE----

### **Butter Beans with Cabanossi & Bacon**

*butter beans with cabanossi & bacon*



# Butter Beans with Cabanossi & Bacon

Adapted from '[And the Love is Free](#)'. My mum used to make this with short pasta, usually penne. It was one of my all time favourites. In this version I've simplified things by cutting out the onion. And made it lower GI or 'slow carb' with the use of canned butter beans instead of cooked pasta. This version is also gluten-free.

## Enough for 2...

2 slices bacon, chopped  
1 stick cabanossi, sliced into rounds  
1/2 cup commercial tomato based pasta sauce  
1/2 green capsicum (bell pepper) chopped  
1 can butter beans (400g / 14oz), drained

## METHOD

1. Heat a little oil in a fry pan and cook bacon over a medium heat until browned.
2. Add cabanossi and cook for another few minutes to brown lightly.
3. Add sauce, capsicum and drained butter beans. Simmer for a few minutes until everything is hot. Taste & season.

## VARIATIONS

**vegetarian** – replace the bacon with a red capsicum (bell pepper). And replace the cabanossi with feta or bocconcini scattered over at the end.

**vegan** – replace the bacon with a red capsicum (bell pepper) and replace the cabanossi with a handful of semi dried or sun dried tomatoes.

**cheesy** – serve sprinkled generously with freshly grated parmesan cheese.

**pasta** – replace the butter beans with cooked pasta such as penne. You'll need about 150g (5oz) dried pasta cooked according to the packet directions.

**different beans / lentils** – feel free to use other canned beans, lentils or chickpeas. Home cooked legumes can also be used, you'll need about 240g (7oz) cooked drained legumes.



DAY twelve.

Master the basics of  
Seasoning...

## ---DAY 12. LESSON---

When I was first getting into cooking, I always felt a little lost when I got to the part of the recipe that said 'season to taste'. I'd just add in some salt and pepper, cross my fingers and 'hope' for the best.

All that changed for me on a trip to Mexico...

Taking a class in Mexican cooking just outside Oaxaca, I learned a lot more than the fact that fried grasshoppers are delicious. I learned what it means to season properly. And what a massive difference it can make to how things taste.

We made a pretty ho-hum fish soup. Then with the help of our instructor, seasoned it until it was a delicious soup. A soup that danced on our palates.

From that day on I've learned to take the time to season my food. I can't tell you what a difference it's made to my cooking.

It only takes a minute or so. And a few basic ingredients. Time well spent...

### What is seasoning?

Seasoning is about improving the flavour of your food mostly via the addition of salt and pepper. Herbs, spices, sweet things and acidic things can also be considered seasoning.

### 7 tips for seasoning like a pro

#### 1. Think about the saltiness of your ingredients

One of the best ways to anticipate whether you're going to need any extra seasoning is to have a think about how much salt each ingredient is contributing. If there are olives, anchovies, capers or bacon, for example, the dish is probably sufficiently salty.

#### 2. Beware of taste saturation

Remember that when your taste buds have been exposed to something a few times, they become less sensitive to those flavours. So if you've been tasting and tweaking for a while, it's good to have a break and a glass of water OR get a second opinion from someone else.

#### 3. Consider your accompaniments & the end use

If you're making a filling for pies, remember that it's going to be eaten with the pastry so a little bit more salt might not be a bad thing.

#### 4. Allow for the serving temperature.

The colder things are, the duller the flavours (or really the less we perceive them). Best to taste and season at the serving temperature if you can, otherwise try and allow for differences in temperature.

#### 5. Always err on the 'less is more'.

Removing excess salt is pretty much impossible, so best to season gradually.

#### 6. Consider individual preferences and sensitivities.

Everyone is different. People who rarely eat salty food will be more sensitive than those who eat out all the time. Likewise, younger people tend to be more taste sensitive than the elderly. The answer is to season as much as you think it needs, but serve some salt at the table for your guests to fine tune.

#### 7. It's OK to expectorate.

One of the most useful skills I learnt as a winemaker was how to spit. I know this can be gross, but I'd much rather spit as I'm seasoning and still feel hungry when I sit down to dinner.

## ---DAY 12. ACTION---

Next time you're cooking and the recipe says to 'season', take a minute to really taste the food and ask yourself 'Could this be better with some more salt or pepper?'

## ----LEARN MORE----

We go into much greater depth on the art of seasoning in the [Solve Your Dinner Dilemma class](#) at the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School.

## ----DAY 12. RECIPE----

### Spiced Beef with Hummus

*spiced beef with hummus*



# Spiced Beef with Hummus

This is one of my all time favourite ways to use minced (ground) beef without any tomato products. It's based on a Lebanese dish and is great with lamb as well. Baharat is a wonderful Lebanese spice blend containing 7 different spices. It adds a gorgeous fragrance but if you can't find it, see below for an easy alternative home made spice blend.

## Enough for 2-3...

2 onions, peeled & diced  
500g (1lb) minced (ground) beef  
2 teaspoons baharat  
handful pine nuts  
8-10 large tablespoons hummus

## METHOD

1. Heat a generous glug of oil in a large frying pan. Cook onion over a medium heat for about 5 minutes, until starting to soften but not brown.
2. Add beef and increase the heat to high. Cook, stirring often until the beef is well browned all over.
3. Add the baharat and stir fry for another minute or so. Taste and season.
4. Serve spiced beef on a bed of hummus with pine nuts sprinkled over. Good with a green salad.

## VARIATIONS

**can't find baharat?** – No problem. Just use 1/2 teaspoon each of ground coriander, cumin, paprika and cinnamon.

**even more minimalist baharat substitute** – just use ground cumin.

**vegetarian / vegan** – replace the beef with lentils that have been simmered in water until tender (anywhere from 15-30 minutes) and drained. Drizzle in a little extra virgin olive oil to make up for the lentils being low in fat.

**budget** – skip the pine nuts or use toasted bread crumbs instead. You might like to add in some lentils as well to make the beef go further.

**home made hummus** – just whizz together a can of chickpeas with 1-2 cloves garlic and 3 tablespoons each lemon juice, tahini and the canning liquid.



DAY thirteen.

Try a little  
'muse en place'...

## ---DAY 13. LESSON---

Ever eaten at a restaurant with an exposed kitchen so you could watch the chefs at work? Ever noticed all the little containers and bottles of sauces they have at their work stations?

Well you've seen 'mise en place' in action.

### What is Mise en place?

Mise en place is a French term that I roughly translate as 'put in place'. In cooking it's used to describe the practice of chefs preparing food up to a point where it is ready to be used in a dish during food service.

It may be as simple as washing and picking herbs into individual leaves or chopping vegetables. Or more complicated like caramelising onions or slow cooking meats.

The main benefit in a restaurant is that it makes it much quicker and easier to get food on the table after the customer has ordered.

The secondary benefit is that the preparation can help to extend the shelf life of fresh produce.

**How can we home cooks use this chef secret to our advantage?**

#### 1. Prep when we have time to save time later.

By taking the time on weekends to do a little 'mise en place' preparation, we can make it much quicker and easier to get dinner on the table when we come home from work late and everyone is hungry.

#### 2. Prolong the shelf life of our produce.

A slow cooked meat dish will last for a few weeks in the fridge, whereas fresh meat can only be a few days. Same goes for wilted spinach vs a bunch of spinach.

Examples of Mise en place from this workbook.

\*Roast butternut pumpkin

Examples of Mise en place from Stonesoup.

- \* Roast beets
- \* Balsamic onions
- \* Versatile lentils
- \* Boiled eggs
- \* Sicilian nut pesto
- \* Slow roast tomatoes

## ---DAY 13. ACTION---

1. Choose one day in the next week to try a little 'mise en place'. I usually do it on the weekend or a Monday night.

2. Pick one of the recipes from the list and prepare your ingredient.

3. Use your prepared ingredient in at least 2 different meals over the next week or so.

### ----LEARN MORE----

There's a whole masterclass devoted to 'Mise en place' called '[The Weekend Cook](#)' at the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School. We also touch on Mise in the '[Master Your Meal Plan](#)' class.

## ---DAY 13. RECIPES---

**Roast Butternut Pumpkin  
Roast Butternut & Chickpea Salad**



*roast butternut pumpkin*

# Roast Butternut Pumpkin

I adore roast pumpkin, sweet potato or butternut squash. But I used to hardly make it because it always felt like a huge hassle to peel the damn things. So one day I thought I'd cook them peel and all and take the peel off once they were done. The good news is the roast skins actually taste really lovely. Since then I haven't ever peeled. So much quicker. I also leave the seeds in partly to save time, but mostly because I love to eat roast pumpkin seeds. Will keep in the fridge for a few weeks.

1/2 butternut squash

1-2 teaspoons cumin or coriander seeds, optional

1-2 teaspoons chilli flakes or powder, optional

## VARIATIONS

**different veg** – any pumpkin such as Jap or Queensland blue. Sweet potato or yams are also lovely like this.

**short on time?** - chop into cubes about 2cm (1in). Should only take about 20 minutes to roast.

## METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 200C (400F).
2. Chop butternut squash (pumpkin) in half, crosswise. Then chop each half into 6-8 wedges.
3. Place wedges on a baking tray. Drizzle generously with oil and sprinkle over spices, if using. Scatter liberally with sea salt flakes.
4. Bake for 30 – 45 mins or until wedges are deeply browned on the edges and tender in the middle.





*butternut & chickpea salad*

# Butternut & Chickpea Salad

This is a brilliant light dinner for Autumn when the days are getting cooler and shorter.

## Enough for 2...

4-6 wedges roast butternut squash ([recipe HERE](#))  
1 can chickpeas, drained  
2 handfuls baby spinach  
small handful almonds  
4-6 tablespoons natural yoghurt

## METHOD

1. If the squash is cold, warm in the oven (200C/400F for 10 mins) or heat with a little oil in a frying pan.
2. Add chickpeas and allow to warm for a few minutes.
3. Divide baby spinach on two plates. Top with warm chickpeas and squash.
4. Season yoghurt generously with salt and pepper and drizzle over the salad. Top with almonds.

## VARIATIONS

**dairy-free / vegan** – make a tahini dressing instead using 2 tablespoons each tahini, lemon juice, water and olive oil.

**don't have any roast squash?** – replace with other roast veg OR some roast red capsicum (bell peppers). Or finely sliced fresh red capsicum (bell peppers).

**nut-free** – just skip the almonds or replace with a handful of toasted sourdough breadcrumbs.

**chickpea alternatives** – any cooked or canned legumes are good here. Try cannellini beans or lentils. Puy or French-style lentils are particularly lovely. Or just double the roast squash and forget about the chickpeas.



*roast butternut hummus*

# Roast Butternut 'Hummus'

Roast veg make a wonderful substitute for chickpeas in hummus. This is easily the best I've tried. If you're a little doubtful, feel free to add in some chickpeas as well. Serve anywhere you'd use regular hummus.

**Enough for about 1 cup...**

250g (1/2lb) roast butternut squash ([recipe HERE](#))  
3 tablespoons lemon juice  
3 tablespoons tahini  
1-2 cloves garlic, peeled

## METHOD

1. Whizz all ingredients in a food processor until smooth and creamy. Taste and season.

## VARIATIONS

**regular hummus** – replace butternut with a drained can of chickpeas and 3 tablespoons of the canning liquid.

**different veg** – roast carrots, roast beets, roast parsnip.

**lentil hummus** – replace butternut with a drained can of lentils and 3 tablespoons of the canning liquid.

**can't find tahini?** – use peanut butter instead – preferably one without added sugar.



*roast butternut curry*



# Roast Butternut Curry

The sweetness of butternut works really well with the deeply savoury spiciness of an Indian curry. To make it more substantial, feel free to toss in some cooked or canned lentils or cooked meat such as chicken. Lovely with flatbread, steamed rice or cauliflower 'rice' (raw grated cauliflower).

## Enough for 2...

1 heaped tablespoon garam marsala  
1/2 - 1 teaspoon chilli flakes or powder  
1 can tomatoes (400g / 14oz)  
4-6 tablespoons coconut milk  
6-8 wedges roast butternut squash ([recipe HERE](#)),  
chopped into chunks

## METHOD

1. Heat a little oil in a medium frying pan. Add spices and cook for about 20 seconds.
2. Add tomatoes and simmer for 5 minutes or until the sauce has reduced a little.
3. Stir in coconut milk. Taste and season.
4. Add butternut chunks and bring back to a simmer.

## VARIATIONS

**no garam marsala?** – Use a good quality curry powder instead. Reduce the quantity to about 2 teaspoons and taste before adding more. You may want to skip the extra chilli. Or replace with equal parts ground coriander and ground cumin.

**higher protein / more substantial** – add in some cooked chicken, beef, chickpeas or lentils.

**dairy-lovers** – replace coconut milk with whipping cream.

**herby** - serve with fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves OR add in a few handfuls of fresh curry leaves to simmer with the tomatoes.

DAY fourteen.

Glam up your  
leftovers...

## ---DAY 14. LESSON---

Leftovers can be a saviour or a pest, depending on your perspective and of course the leftover!

So today's lesson is all about making leftovers more glamorous, or at least more useful.

### *1. Avoid having leftovers in the first place.*

Unless you want to eat the same meal again, it's best to plan not to have leftovers. I find that leftovers tend to happen naturally and if you plan for leftovers you're asking to be inundated. Especially when cooking for large crowds like at Christmas or Thanksgiving.

### *2. Share.*

If you have guests, give them a little parcel to take home. Or think about taking leftovers in to work the next day.

### *3. Get creative.*

One of the least appealing aspects of leftovers is having to eat the same meal for days. Take the time to get a bit creative and mix things up. Recipes like egg fried rice, baked frittata and even roast butternut curry can be miracles for turning leftover bits and pieces into a wonderful, refreshing meal.

### *4. Use your freezer.*

Freezing leftovers is brilliant if you've got to the stage where you are bored with eating the same old thing. It's amazing how a break of a few weeks while your leftovers are in the freezer can make them appealing once again.

### *5. Invest in some good quality containers.*

A few years ago I started replacing my old crappy plastic containers with lovely glass Pyrex ones with plastic lids. They make even the ugliest leftovers look special. AND I've found they tend to seal better and keep leftovers for longer.

And best of all they can go straight into the oven (without the lid) to warm things up.

## ---DAY 14. ACTION---

Review your leftover situation. Are you happy with how things are? If yes, great.

If not, think about ways you can employ the 5 lessons from today, especially numbers 4 and 5.

## ----LEARN MORE----

On Stonesoup [The Dos and Don'ts of Keeping Leftovers Safe](#).

## ----DAY 14. RECIPE----

### *Chicken with Peppers*



*chicken with peppers*

# Chicken with Peppers

Inspired by Niki Segnit from 'The Flavour Thesaurus'. I know this dish sounds way too simple to be any good. But trust me, you're in for a real treat! The red capsicum cooks down and releases its sweet juices to form the most heavenly sauce. I like to serve this simply with a fresh green salad to mop up the juices. Steamed rice or crusty bread could also be used.

## Enough for 2...

4-6 chicken drumsticks

2-3 large red capsicum (bell peppers), chopped

## METHOD

1. Preheat your oven to 200C (400F).
2. Place chicken in an oven proof dish. Top with sliced capsicum (peppers). Drizzle generously with olive oil. Season.
3. Bake covered for about 30 minutes.
4. Remove the lid and bake until the peppers are reduced and tender and the chicken is golden and cooked, about another 20-30 minutes.

## VARIATIONS

**vegan** – replace the drumsticks with field or portabello mushrooms. You probably won't need to cook as long.

**vegetarian** – cook the peppers as described above without the chicken. Use the cooked peppers as a sauce to serve with pan fried halloumi.

**hot!** – pop in a few or more red chillies with the capsicum.

**smoky** – sprinkle 1-2 teaspoons smoked paprika over the chicken to intensify the sweet capsicum (pepper) flavour.

**different veg** – feel free to add in some chopped red onion or whole cloves of garlic. Yellow capsicum (peppers) can also be used but don't bother trying green ones.

**budget** – reduce the amount of chicken per person and add in a drained can of chickpeas.



DAY fifteen.

Make eggs for  
dinner...

## ---DAY 15. LESSON---

It's funny but I tend to think of eggs for breakfast or lunch, but for a long time I didn't consider eggs for dinner.

But here's the thing, eggs are the most complete source of protein. They're also full of other goodies.

Worried about your cholesterol? Well that old theory that you should limit your egg intake has been disproven.

So apart from all the nutritional benefits, eggs are quick to cook and they keep in the fridge for weeks so I practically think of them as a pantry staple.

### 6 ways to add more eggs into your dinners...

#### 1. Put and egg on it.

There aren't many meals that aren't improved with a fried or poached egg. One of my favourite 'single girl' dinners when I'm home alone is to sauté some greens with a little garlic and serve with a poached egg.

#### 2. Add a poached egg to soups.

Veggie based soups especially can benefit from an eggy protein hit.

#### 3. Make a frittata.

I especially love baked frittatas for dinner. The possibilities are endless, kinda like pizza toppings. (See today's recipe)

#### 4. Add hard boiled eggs at the last minute.

Since they're already cooked through and you don't want to over cook.

#### 5. Don't forget about soft boiled eggs and toast 'soldiers'.

When my Mum was running short on time, she'd boil up a big batch of eggs for us kids and serve with hot buttered toast cut into fingers. Fun and delish!

#### 6. Scramble 'em

My friend Mel used to thrive on her meal of 'bachelorette eggs' which are eggs scrambled in the microwave and served in half an avocado. Or try [Tetsuya's scrambled eggs](#).

### Eggecelent egg recipes in this workbook:

\* [Chickpea & rosemary frittata](#)

\* [Cumulus spiced eggs](#)

## ---DAY 15. ACTION---

If you do eat eggs, plan a quick weeknight egg based dinner some time in the next week.

Or try some scrambled tofu either curried or with tomatoes and peppers.

## ----DAY 15. RECIPE----

### [Chickpea & Rosemary Baked Frittata](#)



chickpea & rosemary baked frittata

# Chickpea & Rosemary Frittata

A frittata is just an Italian version of an omelette. Having a good frittata recipe in your repertoire is an incredibly useful idea. When you need a quick vegetarian protein hit, there are few things more satisfying. I love this frittata with the fragrance of rosemary and the comfort of chickpeas. It's all day dining really. Weekend breakfast or brunch? Just add hot buttered toast. Simple supper? A generous glass of wine and you're good to go.

## Enough for 2...

4 eggs  
large handful freshly grated parmesan cheese  
1 can chickpeas (400g / 14oz), drained  
2 sprigs rosemary, leaves picked

## METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 200C (400F) and place a baking tray on the middle shelf.
2. Line a 20cm (8in) springform pan with baking paper & grease generously with olive oil.
3. Whisk together lightly eggs and parmesan. Season.
4. Place chickpeas in the prepared tin. Pour over the egg mixture & scatter over the rosemary. Season.
5. Place on the preheated tray and bake until golden and puffy and the centre feels firm and springy, about 15 minutes.

## VARIATIONS

**chickpea-free / paleo** - replace the chickpeas with cooked potato or 2 extra eggs.

**dairy-free** - skip the cheese and season with extra salt. OR replace with some roasted red peppers or halved cherry tomatoes.

**rosemary alternatives** - thyme, fresh basil, parsley, chilli or just skip it.

**carnivore** - replace chickpeas with 2-3 sliced cooked sausages or a few handfuls of BBQ chicken.



DAY sixteen.

Spice up your life...

## ----DAY 16. LESSON----

Once you have the basics of seasoning with salt & pepper under control (see Day 12), it's time to branch out and explore the mystical world of spices.

By harnessing the power of these exotic flavourings, I can guarantee you'll never get bored with your cooking. You'll discover how easy it is to tweak your favourite recipes so that they taste a little different each time.

And the best bit is that your spices will sit in your pantry waiting for you.

So take it slow. Start with dried chili flakes, chili powder, or whole chilies, then add 1-2 of the following to your repertoire at a time:

### **Ground cumin.**

Cumin is also called the 'curry' spice. Combine a tablespoon of this with an equal amount of olive oil, then use it to marinate your steak before cooking. A pinch of cumin will also add a new dimension of flavor to a tub of hummus.

### **Ground coriander.**

Has a fresh 'lemony' flavour. Sprinkle some over cooked fish or pork. It's also brilliant when added to your spinach or other wilted greens.

### **Curry powder.**

Add a few teaspoons to your lentils before heating them for lunch. I love to add a little to my scrambled eggs. Great for adding a curry vibe to your food.

### **Garam Marsala.**

An Indian spice blend that is similar to curry power but in a more understated way. It's my go-to spice for adding curry flavour.

### **Smoked paprika.**

Use as a dry rub on chicken before grilling. It's also wonderful with tomato-based dishes or anywhere you want to add some smokiness. It's also great for adding depth to vegetarian dishes.

### **Sumac.**

A middle eastern spice that has a gorgeous deep red colour and zesty lemony flavour. Works well anywhere you'd normally use lemon especially with fish or chicken.

### **Fennel seeds.**

I love their aniseedy flavour. A classic match with pork but also surprisingly good with lamb. I also use them to make fennel tea.

### **Turmeric.**

A super bright yellow spice used in Indian and middle eastern cooking. The flavour is exotic. It's a great anti-inflammatory and has

been linked with reduced tumour growth in [cancer](#) patients. I've included it here because it's something I've been meaning to use more often!

## ---DAY 16. ACTION---

You get to choose from 2 possible actions today.

1. If the spice section of your pantry is looking a little out of control, plan some time for a spice spring clean. Just ditch anything past its use by date. Simple.

or

2. If your spice box is under control, decide to explore a new spice. Choose something you haven't used before and then make a commitment to use it in two different meals in the next week.

## ---LEARN MORE---

On Stonesoup:

- \* [An interview with a spice master.](#)
- \* [How to stock a minimalist spice collection.](#)

## ---DAY 16. RECIPE---

### **Ketchup Baked Beans**

*ketchup baked beans*



# Ketchup Baked Beans

Commercial baked beans can be OK if you're stuck but I find they tend to be quite sweet and contain added sugar which you really don't need. These beans aren't really baked because we're cooking them on the stove but you get the drift. The smoked paprika isn't critical but if you can get your hands on some I encourage you to try it. It adds the most wonderfully complex smokey flavours.

## Enough for 1-2...

1 onion, chopped

1 can white beans (400g / 14oz), drained

3-4 tablespoons tomato ketchup

2 teaspoons smoked paprika, optional

## METHOD

1. Heat a little oil in a frying pan. Add onion and cook on a low to medium heat until soft.
2. Add beans, tomato ketchup and paprika, if using, and bring to a simmer.
3. Taste and season. Serve with a few tablespoons extra virgin olive oil for richness.

## VARIATIONS

**carnivore** - Great with some chopped bacon or chorizo browned in the pan first.

**ketchup baked chickpeas** - replace canned beans with my favourite legume.

**fresh** - replace the canned beans with shelled fresh broad beans or borlotti beans. They will need to simmer for 5-10 minutes and you may need to add a little water if it's drying out too much.

**hot** - replace the paprika with a dash of dried chilli powder or cayenne.

**more substantial** - serve alongside poached or fried eggs.

**gluten-free** - make sure you're using a GF soy sauce or tamari.



DAY seventeen.

Upgrade your knife...

## ----DAY 17. LESSON----

Are 'knife skills' something you don't feel that confident with? Well you're not alone. Most people who are just getting into cooking say they'd like to improve the way they handle their knife.

But to be honest, I don't think knife skills are as important as you'd think. Sure most cooking involves some sort of chopping, but on a domestic level does it really matter whether it takes you 20 seconds or 2 minutes to peel and dice an onion?

If you're in a commercial kitchen chopping bags of onions, it's a big deal. But surely the extra time it takes you isn't really significant.

Of course it is important that you know how to be safe when you're wielding your dangerous kitchen equipment. So focus on safety first and trust me, the speed and confidence will flow naturally.

### 7 tips for knife safety

#### 1. get a good knife sharpening system.

I can't stress how much easier your life will be if you keep your knives sharp. Not to mention safer and you'll be quicker. I'm a big fan of the 'Furi fingers' because they're the most foolproof system I've used. But whatever works for you. Just choose something.

#### 2. choose a safe storage place.

It's dangerous to have your super-sharp knife knocking about in your cutlery drawer. Not to mention, not the greatest for your knives. Best option is a knife magnet so your knives are safe and accessible. Next best thing is to invest in cheap plastic blade covers. Or make your own cover with cardboard and sticky tape.

#### 3. use an appropriate cutting surface.

I have a wooden all purpose board I use for most general jobs, and then plastic ones for raw meat, fish, poultry and veg. I wash the plastic boards on the hottest cycle in my dishwasher.

#### 4. don't put your knives in the dishwasher.

#### 5. be very careful cleaning knives.

Rinse under running water. Pass a doubled up wash cloth down the length of the blade to remove any debris. Then rinse again, dry with a clean tea towel or paper towel and put it away.

#### 6. never leave knives in the sink.

Especially in a sink of soapy water. Accident waiting to happen.

#### 7. be careful passing knives.

Either place it on a bench so the other person can pick up. OR hold by the spine with the cutting edge facing down and pass the handle towards the other person.

## ----DAY 17. ACTION----

1. If you're not confident with your knife skills, [watch this video](#) to learn the safest technique.
2. Review your current knife situation. If you're not happy with your knife, make a plan to invest in ONE great chef's knife when you can. Remember we're after quality NOT quantity.
3. Have your knife sharpened by a professional. Then make sure you sharpen on a regular basis, either at home or professionally.

## ----LEARN MORE----

We dig deep into knife skills in the Solve Your Dinner Dilemma class at the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School. [Click here](#) to join the waiting list and be notified when the doors open to new students again.

## ----DAY 17. RECIPE----

### Shaved Snowpea & Ham Salad

*shaved snowpea & ham salad*



# Shaved Snowpea & Ham Salad

Please don't feel like you need to have amazing knife skills to make this salad. While it is lovely if your snow peas are super finely shredded, it's also great with more of a chunky snowpea vibe. This is one of those salads you can make ahead and it will stay crunchy even with the dressing tossed in.

## per person...

1 tablespoon dijon mustard  
1 tablespoon rice vinegar or lemon juice  
250g (1/2 lb) snow peas (mange tout)  
2 handfuls shredded ham

## METHOD

1. Mix mustard, vinegar or lemon juice and 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil in a mixing bowl. Season but remember the ham will be quite salty.
2. Trim the tops from the snowpeas and remove the strings. Slice as finely as you can using a sharp knife and a steady hand but don't stress too much.
3. Toss the shaved snowpeas in the dressing and serve salad topped with the ham.

## VARIATIONS

**different veg** – shaved cabbage is great although it needs to be super fine. Try green beans or asparagus or zucchini.

**vegetarian** – replace ham with halved hard boiled eggs.

**vegan** – skip the ham and serve with a drained can of chickpeas or chunks of avocado instead.

**leafier** –toss in a handful of mint or parsley leaves or some snow pea sprouts.



DAY eighteen.

Let dinner cook  
itself...

## ---DAY 18. LESSON---

I love meals that can be whipped up in a flash of activity.

But I'm also a huge fan of 'set and forget' dinners.

These take much longer to cook but in many cases the actual active time required is less than that of a quick meal.

Plus there's the bonus of slow cooked or roasted meals often tasting far more complex and delicious than the actual amount of effort that went into them.

Always a good thing for the cook!

### **Set & forget recipes from this workbook:**

- \* The magic sausage supper
- \* Summer meatballs
- \* Baked frittata
- \* Chicken with peppers
- \* Sweet potato & red curry soup

### **Set & forget recipes on Stonesoup:**

- \* Pot roast lamb with feta & olives
- \* Lamb shanks with barley & wilted greens
- \* Lamb shanks with chickpeas
- \* Braised mushrooms
- \* Coq au vin
- \* Simplest baked aubergine (eggplant) with tomato & pesto
- \* Roast chicken soup

## ---DAY 18. ACTION---

Choose one 'set and forget' meal and make plans to cook it some time in the next week.

## ----LEARN MORE----

On Stonesoup:

[Is it worthwhile buying a slow cooker?](#)

And there's a masterclass on Slow Cooking (with and without a slow cooker) at the [Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School](#).

## ----DAY 18. RECIPE----

### **The Magic Sausage Supper**



*the magic sausage supper*

# Magic Sausage Supper

So you're probably wondering where the 'magic' comes from. It's all about how this dish turns some pretty common ingredients into something truly delicious. All it takes is a little time in the oven. This is one of those dishes that's best served at the table in the roasting pan so everyone can help themselves and pick at the crispy bits on the bottom of the pan.

## Enough for 2-3...

1/2 butternut pumpkin (squash)  
2 medium onions, quartered lengthwise  
1/2 teaspoon dried chilli flakes  
4 thick sausages  
1 small bunch flat leaf parsley, leaves picked

## METHOD

1. Preheat your oven to 180C (350F).
2. Halve pumpkin crosswise then chop into wedges. Place pumpkin, onion, chilli and sausages in a roasting dish. Drizzle generously with olive oil.
3. Roast for about an hour, stirring at the half way mark. It's ready when everything is golden and tender.
4. Serve with parsley leaves sprinkled over the top.

## VARIATIONS

**different veg** – feel free to play around. Parsnips and sweet potato are lovely. Unpeeled cloves of garlic are also great.

**no sausages?** – use chicken drumsticks or thighs instead.

**spanish** – use fresh chorizo as your sausage and toss in a can of drained chickpeas instead of the pumpkin.

**vegan** – replace sausages with field mushrooms.

**vegetarian** - skip the sausages and serve the roast veg with a poached or fried egg on top.



DAY nineteen.

Make soup for  
dinner...

## ---DAY 19. LESSON---

If you're like me, then soup isn't really something that comes to mind when you're planning what to have for dinner.

At least, it didn't used to come to mind for me. But over the last year or so I've been making an effort to eat more soup. Which has spilled over into my dinners.

### *Why eat more soup?*

#### **1. Soup can be quick.**

While soup tends to conjure up the image of vast pots simmering away for hours, not all soup takes forever. When I was writing '5-ingredients 10-minutes', I found the soup chapter practically just wrote itself.

The secret to super quick soup is to use ingredients that are pre-cooked or will cook in the time it takes to boil the water or stock.

#### **2. Soup fills you up with less calories.**

Because soup contains more water than solid foods, it fills us up with less calories. A study at Penn State confirmed that people who ate a chicken and rice soup as opposed to a solid chicken and rice meal ate 26% less.

#### **3. Soup doesn't necessarily need home made stock to taste amazing.**

One thing that used to keep me away from soup was the misconception that you needed wonderful home made stock to make full flavoured soup. Once I realised that great soup just requires great tasting ingredients, a whole new world of soup opportunities opened up.

#### **4. Soup is very forgiving.**

There tends to be a large window where soup tastes delicious. Unlike a steak which requires clock work precision, it's actually pretty difficult to under or over cook a soup.

And even forgetful cooks who end up with a scorched bottom can usually rectify the situation by transferring the unburned parts to a clean pot and adding the word 'smoked' to the soup title.

#### **5. Soup doesn't require much cleaning up.**

Most soups can be made with just one pot. What's not to love about that?

## ---DAY 19. ACTION---

You guessed it! Your action step is to try having soup for dinner in the next 2 weeks. Even if it's Summer right now - think of all those lovely cooling Asian soups!

## ----LEARN MORE----

On Stonesoup:

- \* [7 tips on making full flavoured soup without stock](#)
- \* [Soup recipe index](#)

## ----DAY 19. RECIPE----

### *Sweet Potato & Red Curry Soup*

*sweet potato soup & red curry soup*



# Sweet Potato & Red Curry Soup

This is a simplified and healthier version of a soup I used to cook all the time when I was first getting into cooking Thai. Still one of my favourites after many, many years. I asked my Irishman what he thought we should call the soup and his response was 'A, B, C, Delicious!' Different curry pastes vary in their intensity so feel free to adjust according to your tastes.

## Enough for 4-6...

1kg (2lb) sweet potato

1 can coconut cream or milk (400mL / 14oz)

4 tablespoons red curry paste

2 tablespoons fish sauce

mint or coriander (cilantro) leaves, to serve, optional

## METHOD

1. Preheat your oven to 200C (400F).
2. Scrub the sweet potato. Chop in half lengthwise then slice into half moons, about 1cm (1/2in) thick.
3. Combine coconut cream or milk, curry paste, fish sauce and 4 cups water in a large oven proof pot. Add sweet potato and bake for 30 minutes.
4. Stir and continue to bake for another 30 minutes or until sweet potato is tender. Puree with a stick blender.
5. Taste, season with more fish sauce or salt as needed and serve with herbs, if using, sprinkled on top.

## VARIATIONS

**chunky soup** – chop the sweet potato into bite sized cubes and skip the pureeing step.

**different curry pastes** – feel free to use green thai curry paste, or yellow or massaman curry pastes. Indian curry pastes can also be used to give a different vibe.

**vegetarian / vegan / can't find fish sauce?** – replace the fish sauce with soy sauce or just season with salt.

**can't find thai curry pastes?** – In Australia they're available in most supermarkets but you may need to track down an Asian grocery store. They can be found online as well and keep for ages so you could order and stock up.

**short on time?** – just simmer on the stove top until sweet potato is tender. Remember to stir every now and then.



DAY twenty.

Explore a new  
ingredient...

# ---DAY 20. LESSON---

It can be easy to fall into a 'food rut' cooking the same things week in week out. I know it happens to me sometimes too.

And you know one of the best ways I find to get myself out of my rut and back into the land of being excited about cooking is to explore a new ingredient.

Finding something new at the farmers market, health food shop, deli or even the supermarket can be a little scary but it's also heaps of fun.

So here are some suggestions to get you started... but don't be limited by my list!

## Farmers Market / Veggie Shop Ideas

**kohlrabi.** One of the weirdest looking veg. I love to shave it and toss raw into salads.

**fennel.** Another root veg that works brilliantly shaved into salads. Can also be roasted.

**celeriac (celery root).** THE ugliest veg. Flavour is somewhere between a potato and celery with a bit of nuttiness thrown in. Mash or bake or raw.

**brussels sprouts.** Don't boil them. Best pan fried or roasted. Great with bacon or chorizo.

**kale / cavolo nero.** One of the most energy dense veg. Steam or saute with garlic.

## Health Food Store Ideas

**smoked tofu.** Tofu tends to be pretty bland, but smoked tofu is a whole different ball game. Like bacon for vegetarians.

**chia seeds.** I hate the term 'superfood' but chia seeds do have impressive nutrition credentials. Sprinkle on salads or soak in coconut milk for a delicious breakfast.

**quinoa.** Super high in protein AND delicious. Boil until tender like pasta then serve like cooked rice or pasta.

**stevia / erythritol.** Two natural sweeteners that can be used to replace sugar without spiking your insulin levels. Great if you're looking to lose weight or quit sugar.

**freeskah.** An exotic form of cracked wheat. Lovely nutty flavour but contains gluten.

## Deli Ideas

**grilled / marinated veg.** Brilliant for antipasto OR adding quick and easy vegetables into your meals.

**flavoured oils.** Great for drizzling as an 'instant sauce'. I love chilli oil or lemon oil.

**sherry vinegar.** My favourite vinegar!

**different cheeses.** There's a whole world of cheese out there. Try gruyere as a replacement for cheddar or pecorino as a replacement for parmesan.

# ---DAY 20. ACTION---

1. Next time you're out and about buying food, challenge yourself to buy an ingredient you haven't used before.
2. When you get home, do a search on Stonesoup for that ingredient (or Google it) and make a plan for how you're going to use it.
3. Actually cook something with your novel ingredient in the next week. It's not until you actually cook and eat something new that you begin to really appreciate it.

# ----LEARN MORE----

A great resource is 'The Cook's Companion' by Stephanie Alexander which is organised by ingredient. Or use the power of the internet!

# ---DAY 20. RECIPE---

## Curried Quinoa with Yoghurt

*curried quinoa with yoghurt*



# Curried Quinoa with Yoghurt

I don't know anyone who has tried quinoa and hasn't loved it. It has a satisfying chewy texture, similar to barley and is the cutest looking little grain-like food. Best of all it's super high in protein and gluten-free.

## Enough for 2-3...

250g (9oz) quinoa

2 tablespoons tomato paste

2-4 teaspoons garam marsala or curry powder

6-8 tablespoons natural yoghurt + extra to serve

2 large handfuls baby spinach, to serve

## METHOD

1. Bring a medium saucepan of water to the boil. Rinse quinoa thoroughly and add to the pan. Simmer until tender about 10-15 minutes.
2. Drain quinoa well and return to the pan. Stir in tomato paste, spices and yoghurt. Taste and season.
3. Serve on a bed of baby spinach with extra yoghurt.

## VARIATIONS

**dairy-free / vegan** – use coconut yoghurt or coconut milk instead of the yoghurt. If using coconut milk a splash of lemon juice may help freshen things up.

**different spices** - make your own curry powder with 2 teaspoons ground cumin, 1 teaspoon turmeric and 1 teaspoon ground coriander seed.

**carnivore** - toss a few handfuls of cooked chicken or beef into the finished dish.

**more substantial** - serve with a poached, fried or boiled egg on top.



DAY twenty one.

Set the table &  
eat a 'proper' dinner...

## ---DAY 21. LESSON---

In my first share house, when I was at university, we hardly ever used the dining table. It was reserved for the odd time we had a 'dinner party'. Not very often.

We shared the cooking. And mostly ate dinner together, but the eating part would always be on the couch in front of the TV.

It always felt a bit wrong or 'naughty' to me. I'd grown up in a house where dinner was always at the table. If there was something on TV, it would have to wait until 'family dinner time' was over. Although to be fair, sometimes dinner would be moved earlier or later to fit in with our TV schedule.

A few years later when I first moved in with my boyfriend at the time, we decided that we both missed eating dinner at the table. And that it was time to start doing it again.

Basically I haven't looked back.

I'm not saying you need to do the same, today's lesson is just a gentle suggestion to try it out some time soon.

Just for one night.

### Why set the table and eat a 'proper' dinner?

#### 1. Closer relationships.

It opens up a time to talk to your loved ones and share what's been going on for each other during the day. For me this is by far the biggest benefit. Having some time to just talk about things. And have a laugh together.

#### 2. Gives your efforts in the kitchen the respect they deserve.

When you've slaved away (even if it did only take 15 minutes), it's easy to get discouraged if everyone just wolfs it down.

Whereas having a table of appreciative mouths makes it so much easier to turn around the next night and do it all again.

#### 3. Helps avoid mindless over eating.

You've had that feeling, you sit down with a big plate of food while you're doing something else and next thing you know the plate is empty and you have no idea where the food went.

Eating at the table doesn't stop speed eating completely (as I've witnessed with my Irishman and a big tray of roast spuds). But for me, it definitely makes it easier to eat more mindfully. Appreciate my food, and stop when I'm full.

### What about when it's just me?

From my happy years living alone, I found it was even more important to set the table and eat a proper meal. Otherwise I'd end up snacking on whatever and not actually eat a balanced meal.

Singletons shouldn't miss out on the pleasures of the table... it can still be fun and beneficial on your own!

## ---DAY 21. ACTION---

Today's action is to eat dinner at the table for no good reason other than to give it a try.

Afterwards ask your family (or yourself) how everyone felt about the experience? Would it be something you'd like to do on a more regular basis? It doesn't have to be every night. Maybe just nominate one or two nights a week to get started.

## ---DAY 21. RECIPE---

### Quick Pork Ragu

*quick pork ragu*



# Quick Pork Ragu

If you're not normally a huge sausage fan, I highly recommend seeking out a super good quality butcher who preferably makes their own sausages and trying them out. Trust me there's a whole world of difference between a cheap and nasty banger and one made with love.

## Enough for 2...

- 3-4 thick pork sausages
- 1 can tomatoes
- 2-3 tablespoons butter
- 4 large handfuls baby spinach leaves

## METHOD

1. Heat a little oil in a large frying pan or skillet on a medium high heat.
2. Remove sausage meat from the casings and crumble into the pan. Discard casings.
3. Cook for 3-5 minutes, stirring to break up the chunks, until the meat is starting to brown.

## VARIATIONS

**vegan** – replace sausages with 1 drained can of lentils or about 250g (9oz) of cooked red or green lentils and swap the butter for olive oil.

**different sausages** – pork are a firm favourite in our house but feel free to use other sausages such as beef or chicken if you like them.

**herby** – cook a few thyme leaves or rosemary in with the sausages.

**budget** – replace half of the sausages with cooked or canned white beans.

**more substantial** - feel free to serve the ragu with your favourite cooked pasta, preferably something short like rigatoni or penne.



DAY twenty two.

Make dinner in  
advance...

## ---DAY 22. LESSON---

We've talked about 'mise en place' or preparing ingredients in advance. Today we're going to take this idea a step further and look at preparing whole meals in advance.

Over the last few years, I've had plenty of experience preparing meals in advance. Especially when I've been working on a new online cooking class or a new cookbook.

I've discovered that the most efficient way to create a heap of new recipes is to set aside one or two days a week for cooking and photography. Which means I end up with heaps of meals made in advance that we then eat through during the week.

The side benefit I've discovered is just how stress-free it is to have dinner already made and just have to heat and serve.

So if you find yourself struggling to get dinner on the table each night, I highly recommend trying this technique of 'cooking in advance'.

It's actually very rewarding and doesn't take as much planning as you might think. And often you'll find your food actually tastes better after having a little 'spell' in the fridge.

### Which types of meals work best for cooking in advance?

**Soups, stews and curries.** Basically anything with lots of liquid to protect it from drying out during the reheating process.

**Anything 'slow cooked'.** Typically better after the chilling and reheating process.

**Anything you'd normally serve at room temperature.** No need to reheat. Just get it out of the fridge before dinner.

### 6 tips for reheating like a pro?

**1. Keep sauces separate.** Most sauces are best at a different temperature to the main event. Also prevents liquid from the sauce seeping into the rest of the meal and making everything soggy.

**2. Add leafy greens and herbs at the last minute.** Helps to keep them fresher and avoid wilting.

**3. Use a gentle 'rising' oven.** Allows time for the heat to penetrate to the middle without burning on the edges. Pop your food from the fridge into the oven and then turn your oven on so the food 'preheats' with the oven.

**4. Cover to avoid drying out.** Foil works best.

**5. Add extra liquid if needed.** If your liquid has been absorbed by other ingredients, don't be afraid to add a little water.

**6. Direct heat in a hot pan is the quickest.** If you're in a hurry, just bang everything in a hot frying pan with a little olive oil and stir to warm it evenly.

## ---DAY 22. ACTION---

Do try this at home! Make some time to cook a meal that you'll eat later in the week. It might be on the weekend, or on a Monday night after you've finished dinner.

Even better, turbo charge the system by cooking a double batch and freezing one portion for the week after.

## ---DAY 22. RECIPE---

### Summer Meatballs

summer meatballs



# Summer Meatballs

I don't know about you but I tend to think of meatballs as a wintery type dish. But they can be given a summery makeover. All it takes is a super fresh lemony sauce and serving on a bed of baby spinach instead of the more usual, hearty meatball accompaniments.

## per person...

500g (1lb) minced (ground) beef  
75g (3oz) almond meal  
2 cups chicken stock  
1/3 cup lemon juice  
natural yoghurt, to serve  
2 large handfuls baby spinach, to serve

## METHOD

1. Preheat your oven to 200C (400F). Mix beef and almonds. Season. Form into meatballs using a tablespoon and your hands.
2. Place meatballs in a medium baking tray. Top with lemon juice and stock. Bake for 30 minutes or until well browned and cooked through.
3. Serve on a bed of baby spinach with yoghurt drizzled over the top.

## VARIATIONS

**vegetarian** – make these lentil balls and cook with the lemon + vegetable stock mixture instead of the tomato based sauce.

**less 'meaty'** - soften 2 large chopped onions in a little oil. Combine cooked onions with the beef and almond meal mixture.

**nut-free** - replace almond meal with soft bread crumbs.

**budget** - make the meatballs go further by serving on a bed of mashed potatoes, with pasta or with crust bread and butter.

**wintery meatballs** - replace stock and lemon juice with tomato puree or canned tomatoes and serve with grated parmesan instead of the yoghurt.

**dairy-free** - make a gremolata by chopping together a handful of parsley, zest of one lemon and 1/2 clove garlic. Sprinkle on top instead of the yoghurt.



DAY twenty three.

Make the most of a  
'convenience'  
ingredient...

## ---DAY 23. LESSON---

Just because you're cooking, doesn't mean you need to make everything yourself from scratch.

I'm a big fan of using commercial ingredients to 'cheat' where possible.

No need to be 'cooking purists' here. As long as the end result tastes great, I'm not too concerned about how we get there.

### *Some of my favourite 'convenient' ingredients include...*

#### **Hummus.**

My favourite sauce / accompaniment. Don't be constrained thinking of it as just a dip or something that only goes with falafels. Serve grilled chicken on a bed of hummus and you've got an instant meal.

#### **Grilled veg from your deli.**

One of the quickest ways to add cooked veg to a meal. If they come packed in oil, make sure you drain them well on paper towel to get rid of the excess. Great in salads or pretty much anywhere you need more veg. I've even used them to make a super quick veggie lasagne before.

#### **Thai curry pastes.**

For speedy fragrant curries. Also great for adding exotic flavours to your soups.

#### **Pesto.**

Brilliant as an instant sauce to serve with things like grilled chicken. I also use to add flavour to soups or sandwiches or even as a highlight ingredient on top of a salad.

#### **Frozen peas.**

For an instant green veg fix from your 'pantry'. Or combine with pesto for a super quick pea & pesto soup.

#### **Canned chickpeas.**

Just rinse, drain and toss with lemon juice, olive oil and grated parmesan for a super comforting salad. Also great in soups or as an accompaniment to stir fries or grilled meat.

#### **Natural yoghurt.**

For adding healthy creaminess. Use instead of olive oil in salad dressings. Dollop on top of salads. I also love to season with salt and pepper and serve as a sauce with salmon, lamb or meatballs.

#### **Olive tapenade.**

From the deli or supermarket in a jar. Makes a great sauce especially to serve with meaty fish such as swordfish or tuna.

#### **Tomato ketchup.**

Surprised to see it here? Actually ketchup is great for adding sweet tomatoey flavour to soups or slow cooked dishes. Or even a quick cheat's version of baked beans. Also love to dress it up with some finely chopped chilli and a splash of soy sauce for a more adult sauce.

## ---DAY 23. ACTION---

Have a flick through the suggestions in today's lesson. Are there any that you think you'd like to use more often? If yes, then add at least one to your shopping list and make sure you have them in your pantry.

## ---DAY 23. RECIPE---

### *Green Pea Curry*

*green pea curry*



# Green Pea Curry

I used to make my own Thai curry pastes from scratch but these days I find the commercial ones are good enough not to bother with the DIY option any more. So don't feel guilty about using a paste from the supermarket. Although if I was cooking this for a Saturday night dinner party I would go to the extra effort. I like serving this in big bowls with spoons for scooping the sauce but you could equally serve on a bed of steamed rice or cauliflower 'rice' (finely grated raw cauli). For a more authentic flavour use fish sauce to season rather than just salt.

## per person...

- 3-4 tablespoons Thai green curry paste
- 1 can coconut milk (400mL or 1 1/2 cups)
- 2 handfuls frozen peas
- 2 handfuls snow peas, trimmed
- 300g (10oz) firm tofu, chopped

## METHOD

1. Heat a medium saucepan on a medium high heat.
2. Add the curry paste and cook for 30 seconds before adding the coconut milk. Stir.
3. Add the peas, snow peas and tofu. Cover and cook for 5 minutes.
4. After 5 minutes check that everything is hot and cooked to your liking. Taste and season.

## VARIATIONS

**pantry** – replace the snow peas with extra frozen peas.

**carnivore** – replace the tofu with finely sliced chicken breast or steak. After the initial 5 minutes, simmer uncovered until the meat is cooked to your liking. Depending on how finely you've sliced your chicken or steak it may take from another 2-5 minutes.

**more fragrant** – add a few finely shredded kaffir lime leaves or serve with a big handful of fresh herbs such as basil, Thai basil, mint or coriander (cilantro).

**different veg** – replace peas and / or snowpeas with zucchini (courgettes), sugar snap peas, broccoli, broccolini, asparagus, broad beans, finely sliced eggplant (aubergine), Thai eggplant, capsicum (bell peppers), cauliflower or bok choy. Adjust the cooking time to suit the veg – most will be fine in the 5 minutes but some may need a little longer.



DAY twenty four.

Explore a new  
cuisine...

## ---DAY 24. LESSON---

Is there a type of ethnic restaurant in your area that you either haven't eaten at ever or it's been a really long time?

Well for today's lesson we're getting excited about cooking a different cuisine. It's one of my favourite ways to bring a fresh perspective and some excitement into my cooking.

One of my favourite classes I ran last year at the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School was Healthy Thai. It gave me a brilliant excuse to get back into Thai cooking... so much fun.

*Here are some of my favourite cuisines to get your ideas flowing...*

### **French.**

After a recent trip to Paris I've been super excited about all things French. While the fancy 'haute cuisine' may be an option, I'd prefer to stick to the bistro classics like roast chicken and steak frites.

### **Moroccan.**

There's something about Moroccan food which reminds me of Italy which makes it quite familiar. Yet they use some really lovely exotic ingredients like preserved lemons and spice blends like 'ras el hanout' which add a whole new dimension.

### **Lebanese.**

So much more than kebabs, hummus and tabbouleh. Love their use of fresh herbs and vegetables to keep everything quite light and healthy.

### **Mexican.**

The thing I miss most about my days living in California is access to great inexpensive Mexican food. It's a whole world apart from the cheesy-gloopy Mexican we get here in Australia. So when I need Mexican, I have to make it myself.

### **Thai.**

Fresh and fragrant. Doesn't require as many exotic ingredients as you'd imagine.

### **Chinese.**

Actually you could start exploring the different regions of China and be occupied for more than a life time. I've had 'Chinese' all over the world from Spain to Cuba and it's amazing how the Chinese adapt their cuisine to suit local ingredients and tastes.

### **Indian.**

Again, a big country with many different regional cuisines. One of my first loves. Great for vegetarians.

### **Italian.**

A perennial favourite. This could be your excuse to perfect your home pizza making skills.

### **Spanish.**

Often forgotten in favour of Italy and France, I really LOVE spanish food. Especially the concept of tapas or small shared plates. Get started with some chorizo or smoked paprika.

### **Japanese.**

Super healthy and way more diverse than just sushi rolls and miso soup.

## ---DAY 24. ACTION---

1. Next time you're planning to eat out, choose a type of restaurant you haven't eaten at before. And go!
2. Google (or search Stonesoup) for one of your favourite dishes from the meal when you get home.
3. Make a plan to cook something from that cuisine in the next week.

## ---DAY 24. RECIPE---

### *Spanish Chicken with Chickpeas*

*spanish chicken with chickpeas*



# Spanish Chicken with Chickpeas

I haven't ever eaten a dish like this in Spain, so think of it more as an interpretation than a classic dish.

## Enough for 2...

- 2 large chicken thigh fillets
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- 1 can chickpeas (400g / 14oz), drained
- 1 punnet cherry tomatoes (250g / 1/2lb)
- 1 small handful almonds

## METHOD

1. Place chicken between 2 sheets kitchen paper. Bash each thigh with the base of a saucepan until about 5mm (1/4in) thick.
2. Combine paprika with 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil and coat the chicken thoroughly. Season.
3. Heat a frying pan or skillet on medium high heat.
4. Sear chicken for 3 – 4 minutes. Add chickpeas, tomato and almonds.
5. Turn the chicken and sear for another 3 – 4 minutes or until cooked through.

## VARIATIONS

**nut-free** – Omit almonds or replace with some finely diced red onion.

**vegetarian** – Replace the chicken with slices of halloumi cheese (no need to bash your cheese)

**vegan** – Replace chicken with tofu OR toss about 450g (1lb) button mushrooms in the flavoured oil and stir fry them until softened with the tomato.

**healthier** – Serve with a few handfuls of washed salad leaves.



DAY twenty five.

Get to know your  
butcher...

## ---DAY 25. LESSON---

Living in a country town, one of the highlights of going shopping for food is visiting our local butcher. 'The boys' at Monaro Meats are always up for a chat.

They know your name and more importantly, they know a lot about meat. They're always happy to give advice or answer any questions.

Much more than you can say for the plastic wrapped trays of meat in the supermarket!

### *Why visit your butcher?*

#### **1. Quality.**

With the popularity of supermarkets these days, butchers have to provide excellent quality to compete. Of course there could still be a few 'duds' out there so if you have a bad experience, don't give up. Try another butcher.

#### **2. Freshness.**

A busy butcher tends to sell fresher meat. Steaks sliced as you ask for them will be fresher than those sitting in plastic wrapped trays. Ditto freshly minced (ground) meat. Fresher meat tends to taste better and it will last longer so you're less likely to have waste.

#### **3. You can ask questions.**

Your local butcher can be an excellent resource. If you're not sure how much you'll need to feed a certain number of people, even which is the best cut to buy or if you're after some tips to make the most of whatever you've cooked, your butcher can help!

#### **4. You can buy only what you need.**

Which means you only pay for what you need and are less likely to have waste.

#### **5. It's fun!**

Having a little friendly banter when you're out doing the grocery shopping is one of those little things that makes life more pleasurable so why not enjoy it!

### *But I don't eat meat?*

There are similar benefits to be had from exploring specialist food purveyors that sell what you do eat as an alternative to being a slave to the supermarket.

So if you're pescatarian, checkout your local fish market. If you're vegetarian or vegan check out your local health food store AND your local veggie shop or farmers market.

Delis can be wonderful places to explore for both meat eaters and veggie lovers.

## ---DAY 25. ACTION---

Next time you're shopping for food, skip the supermarket meat section and make a trip to your local butcher.

*or*

Visit your health food store, veggie shop, fish market or deli.

## ---DAY 25. RECIPE---

### *Salt Crusted Burgers*



*salt crusted burgers*

# Salt Crusted Burgers

I know what constitutes the perfect burger is really a personal thing. So please feel free to take this recipe and customise it. I've played around with using tomato sauce (ketchup) as well as mayo and even mixing the two together to make a crazy pink hybrid sauce. But the mayo on its own was a hands down winner.

## Enough for 2...

250g (1/2lb) minced (ground) beef  
1/2 bunch chives, finely chopped  
mayonnaise, preferably homemade  
mixed salad leaves  
2 english muffins, pannini, or hamburger buns

## METHOD

1. Place 1 scant teaspoon fine sea salt in a skillet or heavy based frying pan and shake to cover the base. Heat over a medium high heat for 3 minutes or until very hot.
2. Meanwhile, combine beef and chives. Form into 2 burger patties.
3. Cook burgers for approx 3 minutes. Lift the burgers out of the pan, shake the pan to redistribute the salt to where the burgers were. Return burgers uncooked side down and sear for another 3 minutes or until cooked to your liking.
4. Spread mayo on the insides of your muffins or bun. Place beef on the bottom half. Top with leaves and finally the top of the muffin / bun.

## VARIATIONS

**different meats** - replace the chicken with ground (minced) beef.

**vegetarian** – try [chickpea burgers](#) instead.

**short on time?** – form the meat into 4 thin burger patties so they cook faster and then serve 2 patties per person.

**budget** – replace up to 1/4 of the beef with soft fresh breadcrumbs.

**egg-free** – skip the mayo and serve with ketchup or BBQ sauce.



DAY twenty six.

Learn the classic  
flavour pairings...

# ---DAY 26. LESSON---

TS. Elliott said:

*"It's not wise to violate rules until you know how to observe them."*

When it comes to combining flavours in cooking, I tend to agree with him.

For one thing, exploring the classic flavour pairings gives you a place to start. It also helps you learn from the 'giants' of cooking who have discovered what works over a lifetime of cooking.

Here are some of my favourite pairings and by no means a complete list.

You may not even agree with me on some!

## Vegetable Pairings

- :: tomato & basil
- :: beetroot & goats cheese
- :: carrot & cumin
- :: cauliflower & spices
- :: cauliflower & cheese
- :: broccoli & lemon
- :: peas & mint
- :: potato & rosemary
- :: potato & garlic
- :: potato & parsley

- :: cabbage & bacon
- :: cabbage & cheese
- :: avocado & chilli
- :: avocado & bacon – think BLT with more!
- :: wilted greens & garlic
- :: mushroom & garlic
- :: mushrooms & thyme
- :: eggplant & tomato
- :: eggplant & olive oil
- :: asparagus & egg
- :: parsley & mint
- :: lime & chilli

## Fish Pairings

- :: fish / shellfish & lemon
- :: fish / shellfish & lime
- :: fish & fennel
- :: fish & dill
- :: fish, chilli, soy & ginger
- :: fish & chips & vinegar
- :: salmon & beetroot
- :: fish & capers
- :: fish & saffron – think paella or bouillabaisse
- :: fish & white wine

## Meaty Pairings

- :: meat & potatoes
- :: beef & horseradish
- :: beef & mustard
- :: beef & coffee – as in this coffee rub
- :: beef & blue cheese
- :: chicken & peanut – think satay
- :: chicken & red capsicum (bell pepper)
- :: chicken & apricot
- :: chicken & garlic – chicken 'kiev' anyone?
- :: pork & fennel – fennel seeds or the bulbs
- :: pork & apple
- :: lamb & rosemary
- :: lamb & artichoke – the Roman classic
- :: lamb & mint
- :: meat pie & 'sauce' (ketchup) – the Aussie icon
- :: bacon & eggs
- :: duck & orange
- :: ham & cheese
- :: ham & chutney & cheese

## ---DAY 26. LESSON--- (CONTINUED)

### Cheesey Pairings

- :: blue cheese & pear
- :: cheese & onion
- :: cheese & potato
- :: cheese & quince paste
- :: cheese & chives
- :: goats cheese & basil – one of my favourite omelettes
- :: sour cream & chives
- :: ricotta & salami – a favourite pizza combo
- :: cheese & mushrooms

### Sweet Pairings

- :: apple & cinnamon
- :: chocolate & hazelnut – or pretty much any other nut
- :: chocolate & chilli
- :: chocolate & coffee
- :: honey & almond
- :: vanilla & eggs – yum, custard
- :: vanilla & cream
- :: strawberries & cream
- :: orange & almond
- :: chocolate & zucchini – don't knock it until you've tried it in a cake
- :: pineapple & mint
- :: blackberry & apple

## ---DAY 26. ACTION---

Read through all the suggested pairings. Mark at least one or two pairings that you'd like to try.

Make a plan to cook something based on those two ingredients during the next week.

## ----LEARN MORE----

I recently stumbled upon a brilliant book, 'The Flavour Thesaurus – Pairings, Recipes and Ideas for the Creative Cook' by Niki Segnit. Well worth picking up a copy if you'd like to take flavour pairings further.

Segnit includes some weird and wonderful matches along with the classics. Love her descriptions as to why different matches work, complete with popular culture references.

The other book I'd recommend investigating is 'The Cook's Companion' by Australian chef Stephanie Alexander. A complete A-Z of ingredients, she includes a list of what each ingredient goes well with along with tips for preparation, choosing, storing and of course recipes.

We also have a whole bonus module dedicated to combining flavours in the Master Your Meal Plan class at the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School. [Click HERE](#) to learn more about the program.

## ---DAY 26. RECIPE---

### Simple Fish Stew

*simple fish stew*



# Simple Fish Stew

I like to serve this stew in deep bowls with a fresh green salad on the side. But feel free to serve with crusty bread if you prefer. I've written the method for those that want to make this in advance and reheat. Of course if you're ready to eat it straight away just simmer until the fish is just cooked. Then serve.

## Enough for 3-4...

2 onions, peeled & chopped  
1 large bulb fennel, trimmed & finely sliced  
1 1/2 cups tomato pasta sauce or tomato puree  
large pinch saffron threads  
500g (1lb) white fish fillets, chopped

## METHOD

1. Heat a generous glug of oil in a large pot. Add onions and cook over a medium low heat, covered for about 5 minutes.
2. Add the fennel and continue to cook, covered and stirring occasionally for 10-15 minutes or until the onion and fennel are soft but not browned.
3. Add the tomato puree, 1 1/2 cups water and saffron. Bring to a simmer.
4. Add fish and cook for about 1 minute, or until until fish is cooked through. Taste & season. Top with reserved fennel fronds if you have them.

## VARIATIONS

**short on time?** – skip the veg and just simmer the fish in the tomato / water / saffron mixture.

**vegetarian / vegan** – replace the fish with firm tofu. It will just need to simmer until hot.

**keeping the Irish happy** – add steamed, sliced potatoes in with the fish.

**mixed seafood** – feel free to add in some prawns (shrimp), clams or mussels. Adjust the cooking time accordingly.



DAY twenty seven.

Master the art of  
substitution...

## ---DAY 27. LESSON---

These days I hardly think twice about swapping different ingredients when I'm cooking but I wasn't always this confident.

I remember how frustrating and limiting it used to feel not knowing what would work.

The good news is that you too can develop your substitution confidence.

**Here are 7 tips to make your journey as easy and pain-free as possible.**

### **1. There are no rules.**

The only result we're after is something that tastes delicious, it doesn't matter how you get there.

### **2. Look for similar ingredients.**

The easiest place to start. The more similar ingredients are the more likely your substitution will be successful.

### **3. Look for similar functions.**

For example, say you're making a salad that calls for roasted almonds and you need to avoid nuts. What function are the almonds playing in the salad? If they're there to make the salad more filling and substantial, maybe you could try some avocado chunks or goats cheese.

If they're there for textural interest maybe some crispy bacon pieces would work or some finely diced red capsicum (bell pepper).

### **4. Trust your instincts.**

You've got all those years of eating behind you so even if you aren't experienced in substitution you know what tastes good to you.

### **5. Remember Clancy's 'Law of Cooking'.**

"If you think it's going to taste delicious it probably will!"

### **6. Everyone makes mistakes.**

We all have failures. Take it as a learning experience or an inexpensive 'cooking lesson' and keep trying.

### **7. Practice makes perfect.**

Seriously, the more you experiment, the better you'll get!

### **8. Don't forget that 'just skipping it' is an option too.**

I find, especially in more complicated recipes, that often you can skip at least one or two ingredients without really noticing them.

Of course, it's best to make sure the ingredient isn't listed isn't essential. Having 5-Spice Chicken salad without the chicken would be problematic. Although a name change can easily fix this.

## ---DAY 27. ACTION---

Next time you are thinking of cooking a particular recipe but find you're missing an ingredient, forget about running to the store.

Instead, read through these rules and consult the 'cheat sheet' in the bonus section and figure out your own substitute ingredient.

## ----LEARN MORE----

See the 'ingredient substitute cheat sheet' in the bonus section of this eWorkbook.

We cover ingredient substitution and how to master the art of adaptation in the [Solve Your Dinner Dilemma](#) program at the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School.

## ----DAY 27. RECIPE----

### **5-Spice Chicken Salad**

## *5-Spice Chicken Salad*



# 5-Spice Chicken Salad

This is the type of thing I love to have for mid-week meals. It's quick and warming enough to feel like a real dinner but not heavy at all. Chinese 5-spice isn't something I cook with very often, but whenever I do I really love it. In Australia it's available in supermarkets. In other parts of the world you might need to track down a specialist spice merchant or an Asian grocery store. It keeps for ages so it's worth any hassle.

## Enough for 2...

2 teaspoons Chinese 5-spice  
1-2 small red chillies, chopped  
450g (1lb) chicken thighs fillets or breasts, sliced into thumb sized pieces  
1-2 limes  
4 handfuls washed salad leaves

## METHOD

1. Pop a frying pan or wok on a medium-high heat. Combine 5-spice, chilli with 2 tablespoons of oil (I used macadamia but any neutral flavoured oil is good) and a little salt. Toss chicken to coat in the oil.
2. Cook chicken for about 2 minutes on the first side.
3. Turn and cook, covered for another 2 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through.
4. Remove from the heat and squeeze over some lime juice.
5. Divide salad between 2 plates. Top with hot chicken and serve with lime on the side.

## VARIATIONS

**vegetarian** – replace chicken with slices of halloumi.

**vegan** – try Chinese 5 spice tofu.

**different meat** – pork fillets or firm white fish will also be great. Adjust cooking time accordingly.

**can't find Chinese 5-spice?** - make your own. Combine 3 teaspoons ground cinnamon, 2 teaspoons ground star anise, 2 teaspoons ground cloves, 1.5 teaspoons ground fennel seeds, and 0.5 teaspoons ground black pepper. Keep leftovers in a glass jar or ziplock bag.

**different greens** - play around with the salad leaves, St Nigel used snow pea sprouts as well as the salad leaves. Steamed bok choy would also be lovely.

**more saucy** – make a lime 'aioli' by stirring the zest of a lime and a crushed clove of garlic into some good quality mayo.



DAY twenty eight.

Host a  
'dinner party' ...

## ---DAY 28. LESSON---

Cooking for your friends and family can be a daunting experience. But it can be one of the most rewarding cooking experiences as well.

I love all the praise that usually goes with cooking for other people. It's a great way to stay motivated and excited about spending time in the kitchen.

To help make life as easy as possible for you here's the...

### *Cheat's Guide to Easy Entertaining*

**1. Use your shopping skills and out source where possible.** This is huge! Easily the biggest opportunity for making your entertaining easy.

The French know a thing or two about out sourcing. A Parisian hostess wouldn't dream of preparing three whole courses from scratch herself. She'd put her shopping skills to good use.

For example she'd get a good quality pate and a baguette for an almost instant starter. Likewise for dessert, she would make the most of her favourite patisserie or bakery. Or load up on fresh berries from the market with lashings of double cream.

**2. Delegate.** I used to feel compelled to do everything myself but these days I've discovered the joys of delegating. While the obvious benefit is having less to do, I've found that it also brings everyone together. Much more inclusive and collaborative when everyone is contributing.

If you're struggling to let go, try little steps at a time. Trust someone with the wine or dessert or get someone to do an appetiser. I've also found that the non-cooks generally love to be given the option to make a financial contribution – a massive help if you're like me and spend a disproportionate amount of your income on food.

**3. Simplify the menu.** It's easy to get carried away with multiple different courses and sides when you have a lot of mouths to feed. But here's where you can really save on time. For example one larger serving of a great salad is far easier to make and looks more beautiful than 3 or 4 smaller fiddly offerings.

**4. Serve family style.** Large platters in the middle of the table not only take the pressure off having to find enough space in the kitchen to line up 10 individual plates, it's interactive and fun to share. It also means that everyone can load up on things they love and skip out on anything not to their taste without having a guilty pile on their plate at the end of the evening.

**5. Minimize washing up.** Lets face it, this is the least favourite part of entertaining for even non-lazy cooks. Disposable plates and cups can really make a difference.

## ---DAY 28. ACTION---

Plan a dinner party in the next month. It can be as small as inviting one friend over for a meal or a larger affair. Better to start with fewer guests and work up to larger parties as you gain confidence.

## ----LEARN MORE----

On Stonesoup read all about Henry's [Gold-en Rule of Entertaining](#). Or you might be interested in the Stress-Free Entertaining class at the [Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School](#).

## ----DAY 28. RECIPE----

### *AN ARABIAN NIGHT MENU*

*dukkah + bread + olio*

*kofta kebabs*

*home made hummus*

*brown rice tabbouleh*

*ginger bread ice cream*



# An Arabian Night

A close-up photograph of a clear glass jar filled with a brown, granular spice mixture. The jar is positioned in the foreground, showing its textured contents. In the background, a large, round, flat piece of pita bread is visible, partially obscured by a light-colored ceramic bowl. The lighting highlights the textures of the spice mix and the bread.

*dukkah*

# Dukkah

Dukkah is originally an Egyptian blend of spices and nuts that is served with olive oil and bread for dipping. It's an excellent starter because it can be easily made well in advance. A small bottle makes a lovely gift.

**Makes about 2 cups...**

300g (10oz) roasted & peeled hazelnuts  
100g (3oz) sesame seeds  
60g (2oz) ground coriander  
60g (2oz) ground cumin  
1 teaspoon sea salt flakes

## METHOD

1. In a food processor, blend nuts until you have a chunky meal.
2. Stir in sesame seeds, coriander, cumin & salt. Taste and season with extra salt if needed.

## VARIATIONS

**carnivore** – serve with finely sliced prosciutto or salami.

**nut free** – consider serving a chilli oil for dipping bread instead.

**almond** – replace the hazelnuts with roasted almonds.

**budget** – replace some or all of the hazelnuts with fine bread crumbs.



*kofta kebabs*



# Kofta Kebabs

Cooking food on skewers is a brilliant way to make smaller 'bits and pieces' feel like something more substantial. Lamb is the traditional meat used for kofta but beef or chicken will be just as delicious.

## per person...

200g (7oz) minced (ground) meat  
1 teaspoons ground cumin  
3-4 tablespoons hummus  
1/2 bunch flat leaf parsley, leaves picked, optional

## METHOD

1. Heat an overhead grill (broiler) on a very high heat.
2. Combine meat and cumin. Season. Form the mixture into 2 'sausages' with your hands. Thread onto 2 skewers.
3. Cook for 3-4 minutes on the first side, until browned. Turn then cook for another 3-5 minutes or until just cooked.
4. Serve skewers on a bed of hummus with leaves on the side.

## VARIATIONS

**minced (ground) meat alternatives** – use cubes of tender cuts of meat like pork fillet, lamb fillet, pork neck, beef fillet, steak, chicken breasts or thighs. Fish fillets can also be used or tofu, seitan, chorizo, squid or prawns (shrimp).

**vegetarian** – replace meat with cubes of veg. We're looking for veg which will cook in a relatively short amount of time AND hold its shape on the skewer. Zucchini, red capsicum (bell peppers), mushrooms. Or pre-cooked veg such as sweet potato, pumpkin, potatoes, parsnips, celeriac, fennel.

**hummus alternatives** – pesto, herb & nut sauce, hoisin sauce or sriracha (chili sauce). Even ketchup or BBQ sauce.

**salad** – pretty much any washed salad leaves including baby spinach, rocket (arugula), radicchio or mixed leaves. Also try leafy herbs like parsley, mint, coriander (cilantro) and basil.





*home made hummus*

# Home Made Hummus

While it is easier to buy commercial hummus, I pretty much always make my own because it tastes so much fresher. And it's really not much bother. If you don't have a food processor you could mash everything together with a fork for a more chunky rustic version.

## Enough for 2-3 as a side...

1 can chickpeas (400g / 14oz) + liquid  
1-2 cloves garlic, peeled  
3 tablespoons lemon juice  
3 tablespoons tahini

## METHOD

1. Whizz all ingredients in a food processor with 3 tablespoons of the canning liquid. Use a high speed and keep whizzing until the hummus is creamy and smooth.
2. Taste and season, adding a little more lemon juice or tahini if needed

## VARIATIONS

**different legumes** – chickpeas are traditional but white beans are equally as good. Lentil hummus takes on a more earthy, interesting flavour. I haven't tried red or black beans but they should work just as well.

**vegetable hummus** – replace some or all of the legumes with cooked vegetables. You need about 250g (1/2 lb) cooked veg. Roast carrots or beets are really lovely. Sweet potato, pumpkin, butternut squash, cauliflower or parsnip are also great.

**can't find tahini?** – tahini is a paste made from ground sesame seeds. Replace with ground nut butters such as almond, cashew or brazil nut. Peanut butter could also be used but the flavour will be completely different.





brown rice tabbouleh

# Brown Rice Tabbouleh

I love tabbouleh to serve when entertaining because it's one of those forgiving salads that doesn't mind hanging around for an hour or so.

## Enough for 2-3 as a side...

2 tablespoons sherry vinegar  
1 cup cooked brown rice  
1 bunch flat leaf parsley  
1/2 bunch mint, leaves picked  
handful almonds

## METHOD

1. Combine vinegar with 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil in a large bowl. Season with salt & pepper.
2. Toss in rice.
3. Finely slice parsley stalks and leaves. Add to the rice with the mint.
4. Toss, taste and season if needed. Serve with almonds scattered over the top.

## VARIATIONS

**main ingredient** – fried shallots or onion from an asian grocery store OR add in a few tablespoons finely chopped red onion.

**grain-free / slow carb** – replace the rice with a cup full of cooked or canned lentils or canned white beans.

**lemon tabbouleh** – replace vinegar with lemon juice and toss in the grated zest of a lemon. Brilliant as a side to serve with fish.

**quinoa tabbouleh** – replace rice with cooked quinoa.

**traditional tabbouleh** – soak 2/3 cup cracked wheat in water until soft (about 15 minutes) then drain and add to the salad in place of the rice. Also add a couple of chopped de-seeded tomatoes and a few tablespoons finely chopped red onion.





*gingerbread ice cream*

# Ginger Bread Ice Cream

The older I get the more I seem to love ginger. I'm not sure why but I don't try to fight it! Of course you don't have to use ginger cookies here - any cookies that you think will work well with ice cream will be a goer.

**per person...**

1-2 ginger cookies

1-2 scoops vanilla ice cream

## METHOD

1. Place cookies in a plastic bag and bash with a rolling pin or something heavy until they are coarsely crumbled.
2. Place crumbs in a shallow bowl and roll ice cream scoops in to coat.
3. Serve immediately or pop back in the freezer until needed.

## VARIATIONS

**gluten-free** – replace the cookies with your favourite GF cookie or sweet biscuit. Alternatively, some smashed praline or chopped roasted nuts would make a wonderful change from the ginger.

**dairy-free / vegan** – make banana ice cream by freezing chopped banana pieces and then whizzing them in the food processor until creamy. You may need to let it freeze and firm up a little before making your scoops.

**chocolate chip** – replace ginger cookies with your favourite chocolate chips ones.



DAY twenty nine.

Play the 'what's in the  
fridge' game...

## ---DAY 29. LESSON---

The art of adaptation is a skill I believe that anyone can learn.

It's something that with a little practice, and a willingness to risk the odd failure, all cooks can master. And the good news is that you can take baby steps.

One of the things that really helped me move from being a 'follow-the-recipe' cook to being more 'free-style' in the kitchen is a game I like to play.

I call it the 'what's-in-the-fridge game' and you've probably guessed what it involves. Yes, it's all about just cooking with what you have in the house.

### *The rules of the game*

**1. You can't duck out to the shops to pick up an ingredient.** It all has to be things you already have in the house and garden.

**2. There is no need to eat a failure.** If it doesn't work out, be nice to yourself, order in some Thai food, or make something else to eat.

### *Begin with the end in mind*

For me this is the most important step in inventing a new dish. I always take the time to survey the ingredients on hand and then imagine what I'm going to cook. Until I have a picture in my mind, I don't start cooking.

Sure the picture can change, but it's really important to know where you're heading before you start.

### *Learn the classic flavour combinations*

I recently saw a demonstration by the pastry chef from cutting edge New York restaurant, wd~50. And one of the things that surprised me the most was his comments that he tends to avoid 'out-there' flavour combinations.

His logic was that you didn't need to reinvent the wheel and that there's a reason that the classics are classic. Wise words.

Here are a few of my favourite combos to get you thinking:

- § tomato & basil
- § bread & cheese
- § beans & dill
- § lamb & mint
- § peanut butter & jelly (or honey!)
- § lime & chilli & coriander
- § fennel & fish
- § zucchini & mint
- § chicken & tarragon
- § salmon & dill
- § fish & lemon
- § apple & cinnamon
- § strawberries & balsamic vinegar
- § chocolate & mint
- § chocolate & orange.

For more ideas [see Day 26](#).

### *Remember to keep it simple*

Apart from burning things, I find my biggest kitchen failures occur when I get carried away and add too many elements to a dish. Since I started cooking with 5 ingredients, this isn't such a big problem for me but it's where I see beginners making mistakes. So keep reminding yourself that 'less is more'.

## ---DAY 29. ACTION---

Plan one day in the next week to have a round of the 'What's in the Fridge Game'. I find it's easiest when you're just cooking for yourself. I tend to take more risks when I know no one else has to eat my 'creations'.

## ----LEARN MORE----

In the [Solve Your Dinner Dilemma](#) class we go into greater depth on the finer points of the 'What's in the Fridge Game'.

## ----DAY 29. RECIPE----

### *Warm Potato Salad with Ham*



warm potato salad with ham

# Warm Potato Salad with Ham

Potato salad for dinner? I know what you're thinking but trust me, when you are engaged to an Irishman crazy ideas like this start to make perfect sense. And when you think about it, it's not that different to chowing down on a plate of pasta. Plus, potatoes are gluten free.

## per person...

450g (1lb) small salad potatoes, like kipfler, chats or fingerling  
1 tablespoon whole grain mustard  
1 tablespoon sherry or wine vinegar  
2 handfuls flat leaf parsley  
2 handfuls sliced ham

## METHOD

1. Scrub potatoes and bring to the boil in a saucepan of salted water. Simmer for about 20 minutes or until potatoes are tender.
2. Meanwhile for the dressing, combine mustard, vinegar and 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil in a bowl. Season.
3. Drain potatoes and allow to cool a little. Slice potatoes crosswise into rounds and toss into the dressing.
4. Toss in parsley and ham.

## VARIATIONS

**vegetarian** – replace the ham with 3 halved hard boiled eggs.

**vegan** - replace ham with an avocado chopped into chunks.

**side salad** - skip the ham and serve as a side.



DAY *thirty*.

*Treat yourself to a  
healthy dessert...*

## ---DAY 30. LESSON---

For years I've been happy to follow Michael Pollan's 'food rule' when it comes to sweets...

*"Eat all the junk food you want as long as you cook it yourself."*

But I'm always on the lookout for ideas to make my baking as healthy as possible, without sacrificing deliciousness. The good news is I've discovered easy ways to make desserts healthier AND still live up to my taste expectations!

So for our last lesson I wanted to share some tips for guilt-free baking.

### 1. Use real butter

Real butter comes from real cows fed on the food they are naturally designed to eat, real grass. Not only does it taste better, it's better for us with higher levels of omega-3 fats and vitamin E than butter from grain-fed cows.

### 2. Explore healthy wheat flour alternatives.

Even if you don't have a problem with gluten, wheat flours are best avoided. They tend to have a high glycemic index (GI), meaning they cause spikes in blood sugar and promote weight gain.

**Almond meal** or almond flour has been my go-to option for healthier baking for a while now. It's gluten free and low GI. It tastes delicious and keeps baked goods moist.

**Coconut flour** is another gluten-free, low GI alternative that is also high in fiber. It's more of a newcomer to my baking arsenal but I've been really happy with my experiments so far. The thing to remember with coconut flour is that a little goes a long way. So even though it is way more expensive than regular flour, you'll find you're using far less. So the actual cost in use isn't as bad as you'd initially think.

### 3. Choose a quality natural sweetener.

I probably don't need to tell you how sugar impacts our blood sugar levels and the resulting health problems. The good news is there are now sweetening alternatives that are low GI and natural.

**Erythritol** is a 'sugar alcohol' which acts like sugar in baking without the calories or impact on our blood sugar. It's a naturally occurring compound found in fruit. And has about 70% of the sweetness of regular sugar. It's available to buy on its own or pre-blended with Stevia.

**Stevia** produced from a herb is hundreds of times sweeter than sugar. It can be purchased on its own, usually in liquid form. A little goes a long way for adding sweetness.

On its own it won't perform in the same way as sugar in baked goods. It's also available blended with Erythritol.

## ---DAY 30. ACTION---

After 29 days of healthy dinners, surely you deserve a sweet treat! Either try the recipe below, or if you're happy to indulge in a sugar laden treat, check out the [Sweet Treats](#) on Stonesoup.

## -----LEARN MORE-----

If you'd like to learn more about baking healthy, 'guilt-free' recipes I recommend checking out the delicious '[Guilt-Free Desserts](#)' ebook by Kelley Herring (affiliate link).

Although be warned, the photos aren't great so it's not really a book for drooling over. But the creations you make from the book will be drool-worthy!

## ---DAY 30. RECIPE---

### Paleo Brownies

paleo brownies



# Paleo Brownies

Adapted from '[Guilt-Free Desserts](#)' by Kelley Herring (affiliate link). If you're wondering what the whole paleo / primal eating thing is about, you might enjoy [this post](#) I wrote about my introduction to paleo eating. With all those eggs it can be easy to over bake these brownies so make sure you set your timer! It's better to err on the side of slightly under baked.

**makes 9-16...**

70g (2 1/2oz) coconut oil or butter

150g (5oz) dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids), chopped

90g (3 1/4oz) stevia / erythritol blend

6 eggs

50g (1 3/4oz) coconut flour

## METHOD

1. Preheat your oven to 180C (350F). Line a 20cm (8in) square tin with baking paper.

2. Melt butter or coconut oil. Remove from the heat. Add chocolate and stand for a few minutes.

3. Stir and when the chocolate has melted add the stevia and eggs, stirring well. Then add the coconut flour and stir until well mixed.

4. Pour into the prepared pan and bake for 15-20 minutes or until just cooked around the edges but still a little moist in the middle.

5. Remove from the tin and cool on a cake rack.

## VARIATIONS

**egg-free / vegan** – I'm afraid the eggs are really critical here. Best to find another recipe I'm afraid.

**no stevia?** – If you'd prefer to use regular sugar that's fine. Just increase it to 150g (5 1/4oz).

**regular flour** – I haven't fully experimented replacing coconut flour with regular plain or all-purpose flour. But I'd guess if you replace the coconut flour with double the amount of regular flour you'd be in the right ball park.

**almond meal** – again, I haven't tried this but if I didn't have coconut flour I'd use about 200g (7oz) almond meal.

**vanilla** – not essential but 2 teaspoons of vanilla extract added with the eggs can be lovely.



BONUS *lessons!*

# BONUS LESSON one.

Revamp YOUR  
Breakfast...

# ---BONUS LESSON 1---

For me breakfast is the meal I tend to 'fall into a rut' with the most often. It's so easy to find a favourite breakfast and start having it day after day. So last year I decided to try a new 'breakfast rule'...

## 'Today's breakfast must be different from yesterday's breakfast'.

Since then I've found myself trying new things for breakfast way more often than I would have in the past. Just having this focus is all I needed to mix things up.

## 12 healthy breakfast ideas

**1. green smoothies.** If you're keen to get more veggies in your diet, one of the easiest ways is to pack them into your breakfast. Once you try it, you'll be surprised just how delicious kale or broccoli can be when whizzed up with a little yoghurt and protein powder. If you're nervous about going straight to a [smoothie made entirely from greens](#), you could ease yourself into it by throwing a couple of baby spinach leaves in with your banana and blueberry smoothie.

**2. yoghurt with granola & psyllium.** Try with regular or [lentil granola](#). Oat bran is a great alternative to psyllium.

**3. poached eggs + yoghurt, spinach &**

**spices.** [Poach eggs](#) and serve with yoghurt, spices (cumin, coriander and/or paprika) and baby spinach. Or serve with hollandaise.

**4. breakfast lentils with grated carrot.**

My Irishman's idea. Sometimes I cook a big batch of lentils (just boil in water until tender, like pasta) and season them with a little sherry vinegar and soy sauce and pop them in the fridge. Then for breakfast he just heats up some lentils and stirs in grated carrot.

**5. breakfast quinoa.** Similar deal to the lentils. Rinse the quinoa well and simmer until tender. Drain, season and keep in the fridge to eat from as required. Serve with a [fried egg](#) and some [chilli oil](#). OR take it in a sweet direction with some yoghurt and berries.

**6. red lentil 'porridge'.** Cook red lentils in milk and water, similar to rolled oats for making porridge. All the comfort of porridge with the extra protein from the lentils.

**7. Fried egg with baby spinach.** Just [fry two eggs](#) and serve with greens.

**8. Chia seed 'pudding'.** Soak 1/3 cup chia seeds with 2/3 cup coconut milk or milk for at least 10 minutes or overnight in the fridge.

**9. Porridge or oatmeal.** For each person simmer 1/3 cup rolled oats (oatmeal) with 1 cup water, milk or coconut milk and a few tablespoons oat bran until thick. Sweeten with honey, stevia or fresh berries.

**10. boiled eggs.** Brilliant for a high protein breakfast on-the-go. [Boil eggs](#) and keep in the fridge.

**11. 'Paleo' toast with butter.** Make a loaf of [paleo bread](#). Toast and serve with good quality butter.

**12. Breakfast 'salad'.** Make a salad of avocado, cherry tomatoes and cucumber.

## ---BONUS ACTIONS---

Try implementing my simple 'breakfast rule' for yourself for a week. If you like it, maybe you'll keep it on. If not, you can always go back to your old breakfast ways. What have you got to lose?

# BONUS LESSON two.

*Make Your Own  
Lunch...*

## ----BONUS LESSONS----

We all know that a home made lunch tends to be more nutritious, less expensive and better tasting than grabbing lunch from the work canteen or local cafe.

But sometimes I think there are a few myths we tell ourselves about taking lunch that hold us back from having a really fun and enjoyable lunch experience.

### *So what are the 2 biggest home made lunch myths?*

#### **Myth No. 1. You need to be super organised to have home made lunches.**

Repeat after me, 'I don't need to be super organised to have a home made lunch'. All you need is time to go out at lunch (or on your way to work) and buy a few ingredients to make you lunch when you get back to the office. No forward thinking required. See below for more tips on this strategy.

#### **Myth No. 2. You need loads of time in the mornings to prepare home made lunches.**

Time in the mornings is precious. There are 2 super easy solutions here. Either pack lunch the night before or make it at work.

### *3 tips for home made lunches*

#### **1. make extra at dinner.**

I know it's not a new concept but it's really a brilliant way of getting yourself into the home made lunch habit. If you're already going to the trouble of cooking, it hardly takes any extra effort or planning to double your recipe and then pack into lunch boxes as you're serving up. Then you can pop them in the fridge or freezer, ready to grab as you dash out the door.

#### **2. learn to make lunch at work.**

This is perfect for people who aren't into planning ahead. Just run out and pick up a few things from the local supermarket or deli then come back to the office and pull together your quick and tasty lunch in the work kitchenette area. See the 'learn more' section for ideas to get you started.

#### **3. try a bit of lunch customisation.**

This is a compromise step where you maybe grab some BBQ chicken or fried fish from your local takeaway, but rather than just adding a side of chips, you duck into your local supermarket and grab a lemon and some washed salad leaves to add a healthy 'customisation' to your lunch.

## ---BONUS ACTIONS---

Make the commitment to start making your own lunch more often. If you currently don't do it at all, one day a week is a good goal to start with. If you do take your lunch, see if you can increase the frequency.

### *-----LEARN MORE-----*

On Stonesoup:

\* [How to cultivate the packed lunch habit.](#)

\* [16 easy, healthy lunch ideas that don't involve sandwiches.](#)

\* [3 uber-simple lunches you can make at work.](#)

\* [The quickest, easiest way to make a hot meal without a kitchen.](#)

# BONUS LESSON three.

## How to Spring Clean Your Pantry...

## ----BONUS LESSONS----

I'm not a 'clean freak' by any stretch of the imagination. But having a clean pantry is one of those little bits of domestic 'bliss' that makes me feel like everything is right with the world.

It can seem like a massive job but it doesn't necessarily need to be.

Sometimes I take on the whole pantry at once, but mostly I just clean one shelf at a time. It's up to you to choose how much you take on and when.

### Here's how I do it....

- 1.** Remove everything from the shelf.
- 2.** Throw out anything that smells funny, is well past the 'best before' date, you have no idea what you'd use it in OR anything you don't really like.
- 3.** Wipe down the shelf.
- 4.** Put the 'keepers' back in some sort of order. I try and keep 'like' items together so I have the bottles together with things like vinegars and sauces and oils, spices live in my 'spice box', the canned goods live together and so on.

## 3 tips to keep your pantry clean

**1. Avoid the trap of deep shelves.** There's a saying 'out of sight out of mind' for a reason. If you're ever lucky enough to be designing a pantry, make sure your shelves aren't too deep so you have maximum visibility. If a complete pantry redesign isn't possible, consider investing in a few boxes so you can easily slide them out and have full view of all the contents.

**2. Develop the habit of actually looking in your pantry on a regular basis.** You know when you're deciding what to wear and it feels like you have nothing suitable. And then you look in your wardrobe and find heaps of things you'd forgotten about. It's the same with food and pantries. Don't rely on your memory. Use your eyes and you'll find possibilities opening up.

**3. Have a 'use up the pantry' project every now and then.** If you're feeling a little broke. Or you know you're going to be travelling for a while. It can be fun and economical to try eating from the pantry to have a little clear out.

## ---BONUS ACTIONS---

Schedule some time for a mini pantry Spring clean. Choose the most unorganised shelf and follow the steps I mentioned earlier.

### -----LEARN MORE-----

Getting the most out of your pantry is the first topic we cover in the [Solve Your Dinner Dilemma](#) class at the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School.

# BONUS LESSON four.

Your Ingredient  
Substitute 'Cheat  
Sheet'...

# Ingredient Substitutes Cheat Sheet

## Protein

**tender cuts** - chicken breasts = chicken thigh fillets = beef fillet = steak = pork fillet = pork chops = lamb fillet = lamb cutlets = fish fillets = whole fish

**slow cooking** - stewing steak = beef cheeks = beef ribs = lamb shanks = lamb shoulder = pork ribs = pork shoulder

**veggie mains** - eggs = tofu = seitan = legumes = mushrooms = eggplant = quinoa

**soft cheese** - ricotta = goats cheese = cottage cheese = blue cheese = brie = camembert

**hard cheese** - parmesan = cheddar = gruyere = swiss

**legumes** - chickpeas = white beans = cannellini beans = lentils = butter beans = black beans

## Accompaniments

**starchy** - pasta = polenta = potatoes = rice = bread

**low GI (healthier)** - quinoa = lentils = beans = vegetables

## Sauces

**asian** - fish sauce = soy sauce = oyster sauce = hoisin sauce

**tomato** - canned tomatoes = tomato puree (passata) = tomato paste (+water) = tomato ketchup

**hot** - tabasco = chilli based sauces = dijon mustard = hot english mustard = horseradish

**creamy** - mayonnaise = hollandaise = yoghurt = coconut milk = cream = tahini = nut based sauces = satay

**fresh** - pesto = anything herb based = tapenade

**liquids** - stock = wine = water = tomato puree = coconut milk

## Vegetables

**leavy herbs** - parsley = mint = coriander (cilantro) = basil = rocket (arugula) = sorrell

**woody herbs** - thyme = rosemary = sage = oregano = lemon grass = lemon thyme = kaffir lime leaves

**leafy veg** - spinach = chard = silverbeet = collard greens = kale = cavolo nero = beet tops = cabbage

**root veg** - potato = sweet potato = parsnip = beets = turnip = celeriac = swede = rutabaga

**brassicas** - broccoli = cauliflower = cabbage = brussels sprouts

**crunchy veg** - celery = snow peas = shaved raw veg

**green veg** - zucchini = peas = beans = broad beans = broccoli

**colourful** - tomatoes = red peppers (capsicum) = beets = radicchio = carrots = radish = eggplant (aubergine)

**aromatic veg** - onions = celery = carrots = garlic

**salad veg** - lettuce = radicchio = rocket (arugula) - leafy herbs (above) = endive = witlof = beet tops

## Seasonings

**hot** - fresh chilli = chilli powder = chilli flakes = chilli sauce = chilli oil = black pepper = spicy paprika

**salt** - sea salt flakes = soy sauce = miso paste = olives = capers = anchovies = fish sauce

**spices** cumin = coriander = smoked paprika = fennel seeds

**curry** - curry powder = curry paste = ground cumin = chilli powder

**acid or sour** - lemon juice = lime juice = sherry vinegar = rice vinegar = champagne vinegar = red wine vinegar = white wine vinegar = balsamic vinegar = natural yoghurt = tamarind

**sweet** - balsamic vinegar = fresh fruit = dried fruit = sugar = stevia = caramelised onion = vanilla = cinnamon = chocolate = caramel = honey, sweet wine (port, muscat)

# ABOUT the author



The author of this workbook / e-cookbook is Jules Clancy.

I'm first and foremost a food lover who adores her veggies. The type of girl who plans her holidays around restaurant reservations.

I'm equally happy spending 6 hours dining at the (former) best restaurant in the world as I am sitting on stools in a Brooklyn alleyway wolfinig down Texas-style BBQ brisket.

I also love cooking and simplicity. So I am constantly on the lookout for ways to make my cooking less complicated and time-consuming without sacrificing flavour or wholesomeness.

I have degrees in both food and wine science but I'm not a nerd, really. In January 2010, I packed in my day job as a chocolate biscuit designer for Australia's largest biscuit company to become a full time blogger over at Stonesoup.

When I'm not cooking, writing about food or taking photographs [of food], I can be found indulging my passions for long boozy lunches, travel, running, cookbooks, growing my own veggies, cheese and red shoes.

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