



video edition

Stress-Free Entertaining

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For YOU! Thanks so much for being a Stonesoup student.
I really appreciate the chance to help make your entertaining easier and more fun!

Jx

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Cheat's Guide to Easy Entertaining

video

I've included suggestions for lazy-cooks with each menu to give you specific examples of the 'smart' ways to cut corners.

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.

Cheat's Guide to Easy Entertaining

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. See the tips for minimising washing up.

Lets face it, this is the least favourite part of entertaining for even non-lazy cooks.

Top 5 Ways to Minimise Mess and Cleanup Time

As much as I love having people over and spending hours pottering in the kitchen, I'm not a big fan of cleaning up. Especially when you're tired and your guests have left you with a bombshell for a kitchen.

I'm always on the lookout for tips to keep the piles of dishes at bay.

1. Reuse as you go.

This is the biggest potential saver of mess. 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.

2. 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.

3. Go disposable.

If I'm cooking for a big occasion, I always invest in some foil trays to use instead of my roasting pans. At the end of the night, they go straight in the bin which is a double bonus because roasting pans tend to be difficult to clean.

4. Recycle.

Compostable or recyclable plates and cups will certainly save on washing up. These days you can get really funky disposable bamboo plates that look great, are lovely to eat off. I've been known to use them for larger dinner parties and haven't had any complaints.

Top 5 Ways to Minimise Mess and Cleanup Time

5. Make the most of any chance to clean.

I know it's a pain to 'clean as you go' but it does make a massive difference to the size of the pile of dirty dishes you need to contend with at the end of the night. Over the years I've embraced this necessary evil and am super grateful for it. These days I always take the time to stack the dishwasher and get a load on after the main course plates are cleared. Then usually by the time the guests have gone I can empty the 'dish' and fill it up again.

BONUS idea!

6. Take up any offers to help.

I used to have an automatic 'no I'm OK' response to offers to help me clean up. A few years ago I started taking people up on their offers.

If you think someone is genuinely keen to help, let them! Just remember to give specific directions so their efforts are as helpful to you as possible.

7 Tips for Kitchen Confidence

It's one thing to be happy cooking for yourself or your family, but inviting people into your home for a meal can stretch the confidence of even experienced cooks.

Here are 7 tips to help you become fearless in the kitchen.

1. Acknowledge your fear.

The first step to solving any problem is to admit that there is a problem in the first place. Same goes for fears. It's amazing how something simple as telling it like it is can make our fears seem less scary and overwhelming.

2. Feel your fear.

Take a little time to get to know your fear. Facing up to the fear can bring it back into perspective – at the very least it means you know exactly what you're dealing with.

3. Ask yourself 'what's the worst that can happen?'

What's the worst thing that can happen if you completely burn dinner? It will be a waste but you can always dial a pizza or have some cheese and crackers handy.

And if your soufflé doesn't rise? It will still taste sweet and lovely – maybe call them berry puddings to manage expectations.

4. Then cook it anyway.

Show your fear who is boss. Invite some mates over, get into the kitchen, and give it a go.

7 Tips for Kitchen Confidence

5. Prepare ahead as much as possible.

There's nothing like having things prepared ahead of time to take the pressure off the cook. Even getting things ready a few hours ahead of time give you confidence because you know you'll have time to fix any disasters that do arise.

It takes some planning but it's worth it when you're confident, relaxed and sipping champagne with your guests.

6. Take the pressure off yourself.

People are always so appreciative of being cooked for, myself included. There's something special about home cooking that fulfills needs on so many levels. Remove the pressure to produce a fancy restaurant meal.

Trust me, none of your guest are expecting restaurant food and they probably would prefer to eat your home cooking anyway.

7. Don't forget Henry's Golden Rule of Stress Free Entertaining.

Don't be a jack of all trades and master of none.

Focus on doing one thing really well and keep everything else as simple as possible.

Easy Quantity Calculator

When I'm entertaining, I focus on getting the right amount of food for the 'main event' and let the rest fall into place. If you know there's enough of the main course to satisfy everyone, you won't have to worry about your guests leaving hungry.

The main protein tends to be the most expensive part of the meal, so getting this amount 'just right', also helps in the budgeting department.

For each person you'll need ONE of the following:

- 200-250g (7-9oz) meat, fish, poultry, tofu etc
- 1 medium eggplant or 2 field or portabello mushrooms
- 3 eggs
- 125-150g (4-5oz) cooked lentils, beans, chickpeas, quinoa etc (about 1/2-3/4 can)
- 100g-125g (3-4oz) dry pasta or noodles

Take this as a starting point, you're feeding a rugby team, you might like to increase the quantities. But most people will be satisfied within this range.

Then make sure you have 1-2 sides and you're all good.

I see starters or appetisers and dessert as 'bonus' so don't stress about them.

And if you're still nervous...

Try my 'insurance policy'..

Have plenty of great sourdough bread on hand. That way you know that no one will leave hungry, and if there are heaps of leftovers you can slice and freeze for later so it won't go to waste.

The Menu



Parisian
Bistrot

Parisian Bistro Menu

bistro pate with crusty baguette
the perfect steak **OR** quick roast chicken
cheats 'frites'
bernaise sauce
classic green salad
divine chocolate mousse

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Parisian Bistro Menu Variations

vegetarian

replace chicken or steak with 'mushroom steaks' – just pan fry large field or portabello mushrooms until tender and juicy, about 8-10 minutes all up. Or try eggplant steaks.

vegan

as per the vegetarian menu but replace bernaise sauce with a commercial vegan mayonnaise spike with crushed garlic.

the lazy cook / short on time?

buy your pate and bread. Replace bernaise with a commercial hollandaise or mayonnaise. Choose the steak because it's quicker to cook. Replace the 'frites' with commercial potato 'straws' or your favourite 'crisps' (trust me no one will complain about having them with their steak or chicken but do take them out of the packet to serve). Plain flavours like sea salt will work best. And outsource dessert with your favourite commercial ice cream, preferably some 'gourmet' stuff OR buy some different chocolates for a chocolate tasting.

healthier

serve pate with sliced raw veg such as carrots, celery, radishes and fennel. Skip the bernaise and serve the steak or chicken with a lemon half per person. Replace the frites with a healthier salad like this chickpea with grilled veg. And for a healthier dessert skip the mousse in favour of a big bowl of mixed fresh berries and serve with cream or natural yoghurt.

Parisian Bistro Menu Planning Guide

Step 1. any time up to 5 days before

Make pate & refrigerate (60 minutes)

Step 2. the night before

Make brine for the chicken (10 minutes)

Butterfly the chicken and pop in the brine (30 minutes)

Step 3. 2 1/2 hours before guests arrive

Make chocolate mousse + put in a cool place (45 minutes)

Remove pate from the fridge (5 minutes)

Cut up baguette to serve with pate (5 minutes)

Step 4. 1 1/2 hours before guests arrive.

Make Bernaise sauce, keep somewhere warm and cover the surface with cling wrap (30 minutes)

Step 5. 1 hour before guests arrive

Remove steak or chicken from the fridge (and brine, if using). (1 minute)

Cut the spuds for the frites and place in the oven (10 minutes)

Set the table (10 minutes)

Put plates somewhere to warm (1 minutes)

Wash & dry salad leaves (5 minutes)

Make salad dressing (5 minutes)

Change into your party outfit (20 minutes)

Step 6. when guests arrive

Appoint someone to look after drinks (especially yours!) (1 minute)

If making the chicken, increase the oven to 220C and pop the chicken in the oven to roast on the top shelf (move the frites to the bottom shelf). Set the timer to check the chicken after 30 minutes. (1 minute)

If not making chicken, check on the frites (1 minute)

Serve the pate and bread and mingle.

step 7. about 30 minutes after guests arrive

Check on chicken OR put a pan on to preheat for the steak OR preheat your BBQ. (5 minutes)

If the chicken is cooked, wrap in foil (5 minutes)

If the frites are cooked, remove oil from the pan and reduce oven temp (5 minutes)

When frites are almost done, cook steak (10 minutes)

Allow steak to rest while you toss the salad and get everyone to the table. (5 minutes)

Divide frites between plates and carve chicken or divide steaks between plates. (5 minutes)

Step 8. about 1 hour after guests arrive

Toss salad in the dressing (2 minutes)

Serve main course, salad and bernaise and enjoy some wine!

Step 9. when you're ready

Delegate someone to clear the table (5 minutes)

Make tea or coffee (10 minutes)

Serve the chocolate mousse. (5 minutes)

Stack the dishwasher. (10 minutes)

Step 10. when the guests leave

Finish cleaning up + congratulate yourself!

Parisian Bistro Menu Problem Solving Guide

Note: for problems with individual recipes see the problem solving guide for each recipe.

guests running late

Put the chicken on to cook anyway. Once the chicken is cooked and resting, remove the excess oil from the frites and reduce the temperature to either cook slowly or keep warm.

Preheat the BBQ or pan for the steak then remove from the heat. Best to wait until all guests are there before

frites cooking too quickly

Either reduce oven temperature, or if you can't do that because you're also roasting the chicken, remove the frites from the oven and return to the oven once the chicken is done.

frites taking too long

Increase the oven temperature (crank it to the max setting) and make sure your fan is on if you have one.

guests early

I hate when this happens! Get them to fix themselves a drink while you finish whatever you were doing then return to the plan.

chicken not cooked when carving

It's important to check your chicken thoroughly when you take it out of the oven before resting to avoid this problem. But if you are carving and the chicken is pink, quickly turn the oven back on. Carve the chicken into quarters and cook for another 5-10 minutes – cut into one piece to make double sure it's OK before serving. Better to have slightly over cooked chicken than have sick guests! Pop the frites in to rewarm for the last 5 minutes.

bistro pâté



Pâté is one of those dishes that seems quite exotic and costly but is in fact super easy and inexpensive to make. Of course there's no need to tell your guests that, it can be our little secret.

Bistro Pâté

serves 6-8

250g (9oz) butter

2 medium onions, peeled & diced

500g (1lb) chicken livers

1-2 tablespoons sherry vinegar

1. Melt butter in a small saucepan.
2. Transfer a few tablespoon of the butter to a frying pan and cook onion over a low heat for about 8 minutes or until onion is soft but not browned.
3. Increase heat to medium, add livers and cook, stirring frequently for 5-6 minutes or until livers are no longer pink in the middle.
4. Remove 100g (3.5oz) melted butter from the saucepan and reserve for topping the pâté.
5. Place livers and onion in a food processor with the melted butter left in the saucepan. Add sherry vinegar and whizz for a few minutes until pâté is very smooth. Taste and season with salt and a little more vinegar if needed.
6. Pass pate mixture through a fine sieve. Divide between serving bowls.
7. Top with remaining melted butter and refrigerate until butter is set.

video



Bistro Pâté

leftover potential?

Wonderful. Will keep in the fridge under the butter for 1-2 weeks. Once the butter seal is broken best to eat within a few days. Freezes really well. Just pop the containers with the pate in plastic bags and keep in the freezer. Just defrost and it's ready to serve.

variations for serving sizes

You could easily double or triple the recipe. And you could halve or quarter it but with chicken livers so cheap, I think it's best to make extra and freeze for another day.

variations for fun

different livers – feel free to use other livers such as duck or pig.

creamy – replace 50g (2oz) of the butter with heavy or double cream – just add cream to the food processor stage.

vegetarian – try a mushroom pate – replace livers with sliced mushrooms – cook until well browned and tender. Skip the sieving unless you're super keen for

dairy-free – I really think that pate needs the butter. But you could cook the onions and livers in olive oil and then use about 1/2 cup olive oil to whizz into the pate. And skip the butter to 'seal' the top and make sure you use your pate within a few days.

problem solving guide

no sherry vinegar? – replace with rice or other wine vinegar.

no chicken livers – you may need to get your butcher to order them in for you or try a specialist poultry butcher. They won't be expensive and are well worth the effort.

bland – add a little more salt and a splash of vinegar.

grainy texture – if you didn't sieve the pate, then that's the problem. But if you did sieve and the texture is still coarse it means your chicken livers have been over cooked. Whizzing with a little cold cream may help the situation. But next time check the livers earlier or use a lower temperature.

serving suggestions

Pate loves toast or crusty bread. Or crackers. If you're in a healthy mood, celery sticks are good.

the perfect steak



It's hard to go past a good steak dinner. One of the most satisfying meals I had on a recent trip to Paris was a very rare steak with bernaise sauce. It's good to remember that the classic dishes are classics for a reason - they usually taste great.

The Perfect Steak

per person

1 steak, about 2cm (3/4in) thick

1/2 lemon, optional

small handful thyme leaves, optional

1. Remove your steaks from the fridge at least an hour before you want to cook them.
2. Heat a frying pan (skillet) just large enough to hold the steaks on a very high heat. For at least 5 minutes.
3. Scatter a very fine layer of salt over the bottom of the pan and add the steaks.
4. Cook for 2 minutes each side for medium rare (or 3 minutes for medium) or until cooked to your liking. Add the lemon halves, cut side down after you turn the steaks.
5. Remove steaks and place on 2 warm plates. Drizzle over a little hot lemon juice, if using and a generous glug of olive oil. Rest for at least 5 minutes, preferably 10.
6. Scatter with thyme, if using and season with pepper.



The Perfect Steak

leftover potential?

I tend to only cook steak on the stove top for a maximum of 4 people. Any more than that and it's up to the BBQ king.

leftover potential

OK. But steak tends to dry out when reheated. I'd slice and use the steak cold in a salad or on a sandwich.

variations for fun

vegetarian / vegan – Try cooking large field mushrooms on a salt crust using this method. You'll need to be very generous with the olive oil at the end.

fun - try different cuts of steak to see which is your favourite. I love a good scotch fillet (also known as rib eye without the bone). It's also great to explore differences such as trying a grass fed vs a grain fed steak of the same cut.

BBQ – forget the salt crust method. Just rub the steak with a little oil and season before cooking on a very hot BBQ. Times will be similar to the recipe.

rosemary steaks – sometimes rosemary makes a nice alternative to the thyme. But a little goes a long way.

problem solving guide

too bland – Season with extra salt & pepper. Next time try a different butcher or a different cut.

too salty – cooking on a salt crust like this only needs a very fine amount of salt to give you the lovely salty crust and stop your steak from sticking to the pan. Next time use less salt but for now, try rubbing off any excess salt.

steak burning – If your pan is too large, fat and juices that drip into the pan can easily burn (see smoke alarm below). Next time use a smaller pan. The other problem is if you're trying to cook the steak to well done it can start to get very charred on the outside. I'd really encourage you to try learning to love a medium steak. But if you're like my Dad and get freaked out at the thought of pink meat, cook the steak on a very high heat at first and then turn the heat down to medium after the first few minutes.

smoke alarm problems – If your pan isn't super clean before you start or the pan is too large for your steaks, the parts that aren't being covered by the steak can smoke. Next time clean your pan first and use a smaller pan (or cook more steaks). For now, get someone to wave a tea towel in front of your smoke detector, or do as my Dad does and set a fan up pointing at the smoke detector while you're cooking. Remember to turn it off after.

The Perfect Steak

continued...

steak too rare – just pop it back in the pan for a minute or so each side. When you're learning it's a good idea to cut into one of the steaks to check for doneness before you rest them. Also it's really important to make sure your steak is at room temperature before you start cooking, otherwise it will take much longer.

steak overdone – If your steak isn't as thick as the recipe (2cm / 3/4in) it won't take as long to cook. Not much you can do now apart from being generous with the lemon and olive oil.

steak too tough / chewy – If your steak is lovely and pink but tough and chewy it's time to blame the steak! Next time try a different producer or a different cut. Generally the more expensive cuts tend to be the most tender.

too lemony – Cooking the lemons like this makes them really lovely and juicy. It can be easy to overdo the lemon and overpower your steak so don't be too generous. You can always add more lemon later.

serving suggestions

Great with a green salad or some steamed green veg. For a more decadent option serve with potato chips or cheats 'frites'. The lemon and olive oil make a wonderful sauce but experiment with other sauces such as bernaise. Mustard is also a winner.

roast chicken



Brining the chicken takes it to a whole new level of tenderness and juiciness. So even though it's a bit of a hassle, I tend to make the effort if I have time.

Roast or BBQ Chicken

serves 4

80g (2.5oz) salt

1 medium chicken

1. Combine salt with 4 cups cold water (1L). Stir until dissolved.
2. Butterfly chicken by chopping down the backbone to open the bird out like a book.
3. Place chicken and salty water in a large ziplock bag and pop in the fridge for 6-12 hours.
4. Remove the chicken from the fridge an hour before you're ready to cook.
5. Preheat your BBQ or oven to 220C (450F). Remove chicken from the brine. Pat dry and rub with a little oil. Don't season.
6. Cook chicken on a preheated BBQ plate for about 15 minutes each side, or until cooked through. OR roast breast side up for about 30-40 minutes or until cooked through. Rest before serving.

video



Roast or BBQ Chicken

leftover potential?

Brilliant! Use in salads, sandwiches.

variations for serving sizes

I love leftover chicken so I'm happy to roast a whole bird even if there's only 2 of us. If you wanted to do less, you could use 1 chicken maryland (leg with thigh attached) per person. And it's no problem to roast more birds if you need to feed more.

variations for fun

no brine – if you're short on time just skip the brining process.

not up for 'butterflying' – Cook the chicken whole, If roasting I usually preheat a cast iron pan in the oven so it's super hot then add the whole chicken breast side up and just leaves it for 50 minutes to an hour. On the BBQ, it's a similar approach, leave the chicken breast side up for the whole time and keep the lid of the BBQ closed as much as possible. Expect it to take around an hour.

flavoured brine – Slices of lime or lemon are good. As are dried or fresh chilli, kaffir lime leaves, thyme leaves, sage leaves, garlic. Pretty much anything that works with roast chicken.

short on time? – either cut the chicken into quarters or use drumsticks instead of the whole chicken. Should take the cooking time down to about 20 minutes. And if you're brining pieces, they'll only need about 3 hours.

vegetarian / vegan – roast or BBQ a couple of portabello or field mushrooms along with the chicken. Using a separate pan. Roast or BBQ mushies will be delicious with any accompaniments you'd normally serve with chicken.

problem solving guide

too bland – Next time buy a better quality chicken I've found it really makes a huge difference in terms of flavour. For now, just season with more salt and pepper.

chicken not browning – If you don't dry thoroughly enough the chicken will steam rather than brown. Next time make sure you dry carefully. The other problem may be your BBQ / oven isn't hot enough. Use the fan assisted setting or if your oven doesn't have a fan, increase the temperatures in the recipe by 20C (50F).

chicken too pink inside – Either it wasn't cooked for long enough or the chicken was too cold before you started cooking, Next time make sure you allow the chicken to come to room temperature before you start cooking.

too dry – Some chickens are naturally less moist. Next time try another supplier. It could also mean your chicken is over cooked.

not sure if the chicken is cooked? – don't stress. When the chicken looks cooked and the the legs wiggle freely, just chop in half lengthwise and make sure there are no pink bits. If it looks fine, rest before finishing your carving. If the flesh is still pink, return to the oven for another 10 minutes or so. If there is a little red in the actual bone that's fine, it's the flesh that needs to be well cooked.

serving suggestions

Great on its own with a salad on the side. Also good with bernaise sauce, mayo or a roast chilli sauce. To carve, I usually just chop the bird into quarters – 2 breasts and 2 legs



bernaise sauce

Traditional bernaise has you simmering onions or golden shallots in vinegar before making the sauce. I've found this extra step really isn't necessary. My cheat's version gives you all the buttery goodness of bernaise sauce with minimum effort.

Bernaise Sauce

serves 4

2 tablespoons sherry vinegar

3 egg yolks

250g unsalted butter, chopped into cubes

1. Place a little water in the base of a medium saucepan and bring to a simmer.
2. Mix vinegar and egg yolks in a heat proof bowl and place on top of the saucepan, making sure the bottom of the bowl isn't touching the water.
3. Add butter a few cubes at a time whisking almost constantly. Wait until the cubes have almost melted before adding the next.
4. Turn the heat off when you've added about 3/4 of the butter and continue to add and whisk.
5. When all the butter is added, taste & season and leave on the saucepan, stirring every now and then to keep warm until you're ready to serve.



Bernaise Sauce

leftover potential?

OK. It will keep in the fridge for a week or so. It will solidify in the fridge so you can either use it as a flavoured butter or to return it to 'sauce' consistency, gently reheat in a bowl over a saucepan of boiling water.

variations for serving sizes

I tend to make a batch this size as a minimum but you could easily halve, double or triple the recipe.

variations for fun

vegan – use a vegan mayonnaise as a sauce instead of the bernaise.

more traditional – increase the vinegar to 6 tablespoons and simmer 1/4 small red onion finely chopped in the vinegar until the vinegar has reduced to about 2 tablespoons. Discard the onion and carry on as per the recipe.

less rich - replace half the butter with a neutral flavoured oil. Whisk the oil into the bernaise mixture a little at a time after the butter is added.

dairy-free – replace butter with neutral flavoured oil and change the name to mayonnaise.

short on time? – skip all the stirring and try my '[cheats hollandaise](#)' recipe instead.

problem solving guide

too bland? Add a little more salt and possibly some more vinegar.

can't find sherry vinegar? – rice vinegar (also sold as rice wine vinegar) would be my next port of call or white wine vinegar or champagne vinegar. Last resort would be red wine vinegar.

too sharp – If you're finding it too much add in a little more oil or butter.

mixture separating or splitting – the trick to making egg based sauces like this is to add the butter very gradually in the beginning. The other cause of splitting with bernaise is if the mixture gets too hot. That's why we make it in a water bath and remember to take the mixture off the heat when you've added 3/4 of the butter. If you do find the mixture starting to split, remove from the heat and plunge the bowl into a sink filled with cold water, add some more cold butter and whisk furiously – sometimes quick action can save the day. If it still curdles, start again with another egg in a clean bowl off the heat and gradually add the split mixture in one little spoon at a time.

serving suggestions

I love to serve it on the side with a steak so everyone can help themselves to as little or as much as they like. I also love it with chips or frites. Can be used pretty much anywhere you'd use mayonnaise.



cheat's frites

When I'm entertaining the last thing I was is to be frying large pots of oil on the stove while I try and get my steak timed perfectly. So I came up with method for cooking chips. It does take longer but is much more low maintenance and low stress. It's also great because you can speed up or slow down the cooking depending on how your timing is going for the rest of the evening.

Cheat's Frites

per person as a side
1 large floury potato
olive or other oil

1. Scrub spuds and chop into chips, leaving the skins on for extra potato flavour.
2. Drizzle the base of a baking tray to cover with oil. Add the potatoes and sprinkle with more oil.
3. Place in a cold oven on the middle shelf and turn on the oven to 200C (400F).
4. Cook the chips for at least an hour then check on them every 15 minutes. They will take about 1.5 hours or a little longer.
5. Drain off any excess oil or pat with paper towel to remove. Season generously with sea salt flakes.
6. If you're not ready to serve, reduce the oven temp to 100C (200F) to keep warm.

video



Cheat's Frites

leftover potential?

Best when fresh but I know people who love eating cold leftover chips. And yes these people are Irish.

variations for serving sizes

If you need to serve more than 6 divide the spuds between 2 baking trays and swap the top and bottom shelf over about half way through cooking. Otherwise you risk a crowded pan and no crisping!

variations for fun

different potato varieties – I love sebago, king edwards or yukon gold for chips and have also had success with ottoway reds. Flourey potatoes (as opposed to waxy) are best. If you're not sure which spuds are which, look for ones that are good for chips or baking.

short on time? – if you're happy to deep fry in oil, my [cold oil potato chips](#) are much quicker but more stressful!

different veg – most root vegetables can be used here but to be honest I think potatoes give the best texture. But feel free to experiment with sweet potatoes, parsnips, carrots, swedes, rutabagas or even beets.

problem solving guide

spuds sticking to the bottom of the pan – They will stick initially but it's important to resist the temptation to stir because as they cook and form a crust, they will release from the pan. So let them be and don't stress about it. Next time think about using more oil.

soggy chips – either your roasting pan was over filled or you haven't cooked them for long enough. Try cranking up the temperature to full bore and keep cooking until you're happy.

burnt chips – It's important to check every 15 minutes towards the end to avoid burning. Once it happens not much you can do apart from tell everyone that they're super crunchy and warn against tooth breakage.

oily chips – make sure you drain or remove the excess oil with paper towel before serving – no-one likes oily chips. Don't be tempted to cut back on the amount of oil because you won't get that lovely crisp on the outside texture.

bland – spuds need salt. The other problem could be the type of potatoes you're using. Next time try a different variety or buy them from a different shop.

serving suggestions

Lovely as a side to pretty much anything – just ask my Irish friend :) Also really great with bernaiese sauce or mayo.

classic green salad



The most frequent thing I cook is a simple green salad. It goes with pretty much anything and is a quick solution if you're like me and feel that a meal isn't complete without greens in some form.

A Classic Green Salad

per person

1/2 tablespoon acid

1/2 teaspoon soy sauce, optional

1-2 handfuls salad leaves, washed and dried

1. Combine acid, soy and 1 1/2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil in a medium bowl.
2. Toss leaves gently in the dressing using clean hands.
3. Taste and season.



A Classic Green Salad

leftover potential?

Not the greatest. Will go a little soggy in the fridge, although I do know people who like their salad after it has been 'marinated' for a while, I wouldn't serve 'marinated salad' for guests.

variations for serving sizes

As long as you have a bowl big enough to comfortably toss the leaves in the dressing, you can easily increase this recipe. Once you get past about 8 servings, best to make it in batches – unless you have a truly giant salad bowl.

variations

acid – Sherry vinegar, rice wine vinegar, lemon juice, lime juice, red/white wine vinegar, champagne vinegar, balsamic.

soy-free – skip the soy sauce and be more generous with the salt. Or try a dash of fish sauce instead.

leaves – pretty much anything you like. Watercress, baby spinach, all lettuce, rocket (arugula), basil, parsley, mint, lovage, baby kale, baby cavolo nero, brussels sprouts leaves.

additional flavourings – miso, mustard.

other potential additives – shaved parmesan, goats cheese, finely sliced ripe grapes, shaved pear, nuts, seeds.

problem solving guide

dressing not sticking to the leaves – Usually this is a sign the leaves weren't completely dry after they were washed. Next time spin dry in a salad spinner or pat really well with paper towel.

too oily – You've got too much dressing. Toss in some more leaves if you have them or transfer to a clean bowl and toss again so some of the excess dressing comes off onto the sides of the bowl.


too dry – Not enough dressing for the amount of leaves. Mix up a little more dressing and add to the leaves a little at a time. Keep the remainder of the dressing in the fridge.

serving suggestions

Pretty much works with anything savoury.



Divine chocolate mousse

A photograph showing two clear glass cups filled with a rich, dark chocolate mousse. Each cup has a silver spoon inserted into it. The cups are placed on a rustic, light-colored wooden surface. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the wooden texture.

This pure chocolate mousse, inspired by Heston Blumenthal is a great dessert to have up your sleeve if you ever need to serve anything egg, gluten or dairy-free. But not only that, it's absolutely delicious as well. One of those divine things that is both light and rich at the same time. And very satisfying.

Divine Chocolate Mousse

per person
50g (2oz) dark chocolate
(70% cocoa solids minimum)
40g (1.5oz) water

1. Prepare an ice bath by placing a tray of ice cubes with water to cover them in a large mixing bowl. Place a smaller bowl inside.
2. Weigh 40g (1.5oz) water into a small saucepan. Break chocolate into chunks and add to the water.
3. Place over a low heat and stir for a minute or so until the chocolate is just melted... Be careful not to let it get too hot or the chocolate will split.
4. Transfer melted chocolate to the smaller bowl and whisk until you have a light moussy texture. Divide between two pretty serving classes.



Divine Chocolate Mousse

leftover potential?

They're best within a few hours of being made. Leftovers can be kept covered in the fridge – the mixture will firm up and possibly go a little grainy but they'll still be delish.

variations for serving sizes

The recipe above can easily be multiplied for up to 6 people. If you need to make more than that, best to do it in 2 or 3 batches because you need the ice water to cool the mixture fast. Larger amounts may have problems cooling rapidly. Smaller batches also make it much quicker and easier for whisking.

variations for fun

chocolate hazelnut – serve sprinkled with finely chopped roasted hazelnuts or mix them through the mousse.

milk chocolate – don't be tempted to use milk chocolate to make the mousse – there won't be enough cocoa fat to get the mixture to whip, Instead separately whip some cream and fold the two mousses together.

chocolate swirl – as per the milk chocolate, but only partially combine the two mousses so you end up with a lovely swirled pattern.

chocolate snow – those who prefer a less bitter chocolate might appreciate a dusting of icing (powdered) sugar over the top of their mousse.

problem solving guide

too bitter – if you're more of a milk chocolate fan, you may prefer to stir through a little whipped cream.

mousse not whipping – there are two possible problems here. Not getting the mixture cold enough OR not enough cocoa solids. Don't be tempted to skip the ice bath like I did the first time I tried this. And make sure your smaller bowl has ice water touching the base and sides. With the fat levels it's important to make sure you use a chocolate with at least 70% cocoa solids and be accurate in weighing out your measurements. Too much water and the mixture won't whip.. a bit like the difference between whipping cream and light cream.

mousse grainy – like whipped cream, if you over whip the mousse you'll end up with a grainy texture.

serving suggestions

It's very rich yet light at the same time. Best served in pretty glasses or teacups with teaspoons for tiny mouthfuls.

A top-down view of a white ceramic bowl filled with a Thai-style mussel dish. The mussels are dark and glistening, topped with a generous amount of fresh green cilantro leaves and small, golden-brown fried shallots. A silver spoon is visible in the upper left corner, partially submerged in the dish. The bowl sits on a light-colored wooden surface. A semi-transparent beige banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title text in a black cursive font.

*A Thai
Banquet*

Thai Banquet Menu

thai fish cakes

jungle curry

pad thai

chicken & cashew stir fry

steamed rice **or** cauliflower rice

coconut & lime ice cream

Thai Banquet Menu Variations

vegetarian

Replace fish cakes with Thai 'zucchini cakes'. Make a veggie version of the jungle curry. And make a tofu and cashew stir fry.

vegan

As above but skip the fish or zucchini cakes as they need the eggs.

the lazy cook / short on time?

Skip the fish cakes and the ice cream. If you must have dessert serve fresh tropical fruit or a commercial coconut ice cream or sorbet.

different dishes

Explore the other dishes in our ['Healthy Thai Cooking'](#) class.

Thai Banquet Menu Planning Guide

menu total active time: 3.7 hours

Step 1. any time up to 5 days before or the night before

Make the jungle curry paste and cook the jungle curry, refrigerate without the coriander (cilantro) (20 minutes)

Prepare and freeze the coconut milk for the coconut sorbet (10 minutes)

Step 2. 2 hours before guests arrive

Prepare fish cakes and form into shapes. Refrigerate (15 minutes)

Prepare cauliflower rice or steamed rice (5 minutes or 30 minutes)

Get all the ingredients ready for the stir fry and the pad thai (10 minutes)

Make the chicken and cashew stir fry and keep warm (15 minutes)

Step 3. 1 hour before guests arrive

Soak the noodles for the pad thai. Drain (5 minutes)

Reheat the jungle curry (10 minutes)

Whizz the coconut ice cream and return to the freezer (10 minutes)

Set the table (10 minutes)

Put plates somewhere to warm (1 minutes)

Change into your party outfit (20 minutes)

Step 4. when guests arrive

Appoint someone to look after drinks (especially yours!) (1 minute)

Fry the fish cakes and serve as a canape (10 minutes)

Step 5. about 30 minutes after guests arrive

Transfer jungle curry, chicken stir fry and cauliflower rice or steamed rice to serving plates. Top with herbs (10 minutes)

Cook Pad Thai (10 minutes)

Call your guests to the table, get someone to put the warm plates around the table and serve everything in the middle (10 minutes)

Step 6. when you're ready

Delegate someone to clear the table (5 minutes)

Serve ice cream (1 minute)

Make tea or coffee (10 minutes)

If you feel like it stack the dishwasher and put a load on – or delegate this step too. (10 minutes)

Step 7. when the guests leave

Finish cleaning up + congratulate yourself!

Thai Banquet Menu Problem Solving Guide

Note: for problems with individual recipes see the problem solving guide for each recipe.

guests running late

If some guests are there and are hungry you might like to serve the fish cakes. Otherwise wait until everyone arrives and continue as per the plan.

space on the table

Remember you're going to be serving 'family or Thai style' with everything in the middle so keep the table decorations to a minimum.

guests early

I hate when this happens! Get them to fix themselves a drink while you finish whatever you were doing then return to the plan.

thai fish cakes



Thai fish cakes are often served as a starter or appetizer in Thai restaurants. I love them so much I prefer to make a whole meal out of them. Any white fish fillets are good here, although my all-time favourite is flathead.

Thai Fish Cakes

per person as a starter

100g (3.5oz) white fish fillets

1 teaspoon red curry paste

1/2 kaffir lime leaves, finely sliced, or lime zest
lime wedges, to serve

1. Finely chop the fish and stir in the curry paste and lime leaves / zest.
2. Using a tablespoon, form into balls about the size of a golf ball. Pat down to form more of a burger shape so the fish cakes cook more quickly.
3. Heat a thin layer of oil in a large frying pan over a medium high heat.
4. Fry for about 2 minutes on the first side or until you can see the fish around the sides starting to look 'cooked'.
5. Carefully turn and cook for another minute, or until the fishcakes are just cooked through. Serve with lime wedges.



Thai Fish Cakes

leftover potential?

OK. Will keep in the fridge for a few days. Can be lovely cold. Be careful when reheating as it's easy to over cook the fish.

variations for serving sizes

If increasing to more than 4 serves you may need to cook the fish cakes in batches, depending on how large your frying pan is. Just keep the cooked ones warm in a low oven (100C / 200F).

variations for fun

budget – replace half the fish with soft bread crumbs of a drained mashed can of cannellini beans or chickpeas.

vegetarian – make 'Thai' zucchini burgers by adding 1-2 tablespoons curry paste to this recipe and serving with lime wedges instead of the yoghurt.

vegan – you could try replacing the fish with drained mashed cannellini beans or butter beans but they may fall apart.

chicken cakes – replace the fish with ground or minced chicken.

problem solving guide

burning – reduce the heat or cook for less time.

sticking to the pan – use more oil and try a slightly higher heat. Make sure the oil is hot before adding the fish cakes.

fish cakes falling apart – 3 things to watch out for:

1. Make sure you chop the fish finely so that it will bind together. Larger chunks will have difficulty.
2. Be firm when forming the fishcakes – we're relying on the pressure to keep them together.
3. Don't turn too early. We need the protein to cook and set to help bind the fishcakes together. Turning before this happens will allow them to crumble.

bland - season fish cakes or serve with a sauce like a sweet chilli sauce. Next time try more curry paste or a different brand.

serving suggestions

Serve as a starter either with the lime or with some sweet chilli sauce for dipping. Also good with lime mayo (just stir lime zest and a little lime juice into your favourite mayonnaise).

jungle curry



The thing that makes a jungle curry different is that it's not based on coconut milk and traditionally they relied only on peppercorns to give their legendary heat.

Jungle Curry

serves 3-4 as part of a banquet
for the curry paste:

1 tablespoon ground black pepper
1 red onion, peeled & chopped
5 cloves garlic, peeled
5 large green chillies
1 tablespoon ground cumin
zest of 1 lemon

for the curry:

400g (14oz) minced (ground) chicken, pork or beef
3 long baby eggplant, sliced into bit sized pieces
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 bunch coriander, leaves picked

1. Whizz pepper, onion, garlic, chilli, cumin and lemon zest in a food processor with a few tablespoons water until you have a thick paste.
2. Heat a little oil in a large pot. Cook chicken, stirring often until browned and no longer pink.
3. Add the curry paste and stir fry for 2-3 minutes or until everything smells amazing.
4. Add the eggplant, 1 1/2 cups water and the fish sauce. Bring to a simmer.
5. Cook, covered for about 5 minutes or until eggplant is very tender. Taste season and serve with coriander leaves on top.



Jungle Curry

leftover potential?

Excellent! Will keep in the fridge for a week or so. OK to freeze.

variations for serving sizes

Easily increases. You may want to cook the chicken in batches so it browns properly for large crowds.

variations for fun

vegetarian / vegan – replace the fish sauce with soy sauce. Try doubling the eggplant or adding in other veg such as sweet potato, frozen peas or mushrooms and simmer until tender.

can't find baby eggplant? – replace with a small regular eggplant diced into chunks. Or try different veg such as green beans, bamboo shoots, frozen peas, sweet potato or mushrooms.

red or green curry – skip the jungle curry paste and replace with 3-4 tablespoons home made or commercial curry paste.

fish-free – replace the fish sauce with soy sauce.

problem solving guide

no food processor? – just finely chop the curry paste ingredients by hand. Allow a little longer for the paste to soften and cook.

bland – more black pepper and fish sauce please!

ground meat sticking to the pan – adding more oil can help but don't worry about it too much as it will add lovely depth of flavour to the sauce when you add the water.

icky eggplant – make sure the eggplant is nice and tender and cooked through as there are few things worse than undercooked eggplant!

serving suggestions

Lovely with steamed rice or cauliflower rice.

pad thai



After I ran our Healthy Thai Cooking class earlier in the year, Hannah requested a good Pad Thai recipe. I couldn't believe I didn't think to include one in the class. So here it is better late than never. Pad Thai is one of those dishes most people order as a benchmark of how good a Thai restaurant is.

Pad Thai

serves 4 as part of a Thai banquet
150g (5oz) rice sticks or dry rice noodles

2 eggs

2 large handfuls beansprouts

large handful chopped roasted peanuts or cashews
for the sauce:

3 tablespoons lime juice + extra limes to serve

3 tablespoons tomato ketchup

3 tablespoons fish sauce

1-2 small red chillies, finely chopped

1. Place noodles in a heat proof bowl and cover with boiling water. Stand for 5 minutes.
2. Meanwhile combine the sauce ingredients and whisk the eggs lightly in a small bowl.
3. After 5 minutes, drain the noodles.
4. Heat a wok on a very high heat.
5. Add a little oil and the eggs. Cook for about 20 seconds before stirring and adding the drained noodles.
6. Stir fry for a few seconds then add the sauce mixture and the bean sprouts.
7. Continue to stir fry until everything is hot. Serve with nuts on top with lime halves.



Pad Thai

leftover potential?

The noodles go a bit gluggy so I like it best when hot from the wok. Will keep in the fridge for 1-2 weeks.

variations for serving sizes

If you need to increase the recipe, best to cook in batches so you don't over crowd the wok.

variations for fun

main course – brown some chopped chicken or prawns in the wok. Set aside and add to the pad thai just before serving.

herby - toss in a few handfuls of coriander leaves (cilantro) or mint. Basil is nice too.

vegetarian / vegan – replace fish sauce with soy sauce.

egg-free – just skip the eggs and increase the nuts to make it more substantial.

problem solving guide

noodles falling apart – this means they have been over-cooked. It's important to only soak them for 5 minutes. And make sure your noodles aren't too thin. Rice noodles that look more like fettucini are best. Next time use thicker noodles or soak for less. Also they don't need loads of time in the wok so be mindful of that as well.

bland – add a little more fish or soy sauce and possible more lime juice.

too dry – toss in a little more of all 3 sauces or drizzle with a little oil.

sticking to the wok – either your wok isn't seasoned enough or it wasn't hot enough or you didn't use enough oil.

noodles too crunchy – I like them to be on the 'al dente' side because otherwise they tend to tip on to the overcooked and falling apart edge too quickly. But if you find them too hard, keep cooking in the wok until softened to your liking. And next time consider soaking the noodles slightly longer.

serving suggestions

In a bowl as part of a Thai banquet with nuts on top and lime wedges on the side.

chicken & cashew stir fry



I ordered this the first ever time I went to a Thai restaurant. I can still remember how it blew me away with the tenderness of the chicken, the nutty crunch of the cashews and the exotic, pungent sauce. So it was only natural that it was one of the first Thai dishes I learned to cook.

Chicken & Cashew Stir Fry

serves 2 as part of a Thai banquet

100g (3.5oz) cashew nuts

1 chicken breast, finely sliced

3 tablespoons oyster sauce

1 tablespoon fish sauce

3 green onions (scallions), finely sliced

1. Heat a few tablespoons olive or peanut oil in a large wok or frying pan (skillet) over a high heat.
2. Stir fry chicken and cashew nuts for a few minutes or until chicken is just cooked through.
3. Quickly add the sauces and stir to heat through.
4. Taste and season with a little sugar if you like.
5. Remove from the heat and toss in green onions (scallions).



Chicken & Cashew Stir Fry

leftover potential?

OK. You can reheat but I tend not to enjoy reheated chicken that much.

variations for serving sizes

If you need to more than double this, best to cook in batches so you don't over crowd your wok.

variations for fun

vegetarian / vegan – Replace the chicken with about 200g (7oz) firm tofu cut into small chunks and replace the oyster and fish sauce with hoisin sauce.

nut free – Replace cashews with another chicken breast and toss in a large handful of fresh basil at the end.

problem solving guide

too salty – Fish and oyster sauces vary in their level of saltiness. Next time try using less sauce but for now, sweeten with a little brown sugar to temper the salt.

too dry – Sounds like you need a little more sauce. Add more of both the oyster and fish sauces in the ratio 3:1. A little water can help as well.

chicken too dry or tough - Its really critical not to overcook the chicken when stir frying. Next time make sure your chicken is chopped really finely, that you use a high heat and only cook the chicken until it is no longer pink.

chicken still pink – lck, no one likes undercooked chicken. Best to pop it back in the pan for a few minutes. Next time chop the chicken into smaller pieces so it cooks quickly. Also make sure that all your chicken pieces are about the same size

serving suggestions

Great as part of a Thai banquet.



steamed rice

Ignore the label on the jar in the photo, Basmati rice is used in India. For authentic Thai rice you need to get yourself some Jasmine rice. Of course any long grain rice will do if that's too hard.

Steamed Jasmine Rice

serves 2-3

250g (9oz) jasmine or long grain rice

1. Bring a medium saucepan of water to the boil.
2. Add rice and boil for exactly 10 minutes (set your timer).
3. Drain rice well then keep the colander or strainer for the excess steam to evaporate until you're ready to serve. Too easy.



Steamed Jasmine Rice

leftover potential?

I find rice is best when it's first cooked. Although if you must reheat either use the microwave or pan fry the rice in a tiny amount of peanut oil.

variations for fun

for fried rice to serve with curry – cook rice as above then allow to cool on a tray. Heat a few tablespoons peanut oil in a frying pan and cook a couple of beaten eggs for 15 seconds or so. Add cooled rice and keep stir-frying until the rice is hot and the egg is cooked. Season with one or two tablespoons soy sauce.

problem solving guide

replace wit

serving suggestions

Pate loves toast or crusty bread. Or crackers. If you're in a healthy mood, celery sticks are good.



cauliflower rice

Rice can be a hassle to cook without it going 'gluggy'. Finely grated raw veg only take a fraction of the time and end up lovely and fluffy every time. Plus it's a really easy way to get more veg into your diet.

Cauliflower 'Rice'

per person as a side
150-200g (5-7oz) cauliflower

1. Grate cauli finely using your food processor. Or a coarse microplane grater. That's it.



Cauliflower Rice

leftover potential?

OK. Will keep in the fridge for a week or so. I usually stir in a tablespoon of olive oil to help prevent oxidation and browning.

variations for serving sizes

Easily increases.

variations

different veg – cauliflower is best here because of the more neutral flavour and rice-like colour. Broccoli, carrot or zucchini can also be used.

problem solving guide

hard to eat – it's important to grate the veg finely, so you end up with tiny pieces about the size of a grain of rice.

bland – it's meant to be used as an accompaniment to more fully flavoured dishes.

don't have a food processor with a grater blade? – you can grate by hand but it can be hard work! The alternative is to super finely chop the veg using a sharp knife.

serving suggestions

Use anywhere you'd normally serve steamed rice. With curries or stir fries.

A close-up photograph of two white ceramic cups filled with a thick, creamy white ice cream. The ice cream is topped with a swirl of whipped cream. The cups are placed on a dark wooden surface. In the background, a silver spoon is visible, and the scene is softly lit, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere.

coconut & lime ice cream

I'm not a huge fan of Thai desserts such as sticky rice. Coconut ice cream on the other hand is one of my all time favourite sweet treats. It reminds me of 'Splice' ice blocks from my childhood. The best news is that you don't need an ice cream maker for this recipe.

Coconut & Lime Ice cream

serves 3-4

1 can coconut milk or cream (400mL 1 1/2 cups)
3-4 tablespoons icing sugar (powdered sugar)
2-3 tablespoons lime juice

1. The night before, whisk together coconut milk or cream and sugar. Pour the mixture into an ice cube tray and pop in the freezer overnight or for at least 8 hours.
2. The next day, remove the frozen cubes and pop in a food processor with the lime juice and a few tablespoons water.
3. Whizz for about 5 minutes or until you have a smooth creamy soft serve like mixture.
4. Divide the mixture between 3-4 small glasses or chinese tea cups and return to the freezer to firm up. Serve within 3 hours.



Coconut & Lime Ice Cream

leftover potential?

Ok. Will keep in the freezer for a few weeks but the longer you keep it the icier it will become so you may want to let it soften in the fridge for 20 minutes or so before eating.

variations for serving sizes

Can easily halve, double or triple – just make sure you have enough ice cube trays. If you triple the mixture you may need to process it in the food processor in 2 batches to make sure you don't burn out your motor.

variations for fun

sugar-free – skip the sugar and sweeten the coconut milk to taste with stevia or another natural sweetener.

more substantial – serve scoops of the ice cream with mango cheeks or other tropical fruit.

no limes? – replace with lemon juice or water.

can't find coconut milk or cream? - replace with regular whipping cream.

problem solving guide

too icy – Add a little water or cream to get things moving in the food processor.

too soft – There's a fine line between ice cream perfection and melted slush. Next time process less and eat more quickly. Freezing your serving containers for an hour or two before hand can also help.

coconut ice cubes won't come out of the tray – keep running hot water over the back of the tray until those suckers budge. Twisting can help loosen as well.

colour slightly blue – I've had this problem with some brands of coconut milk – generally the cheaper ones which don't contain as much fat! I'm not sure what causes the colour but the best solution is to try another brand next time.

serving suggestions

Lovely in little teacups with small spoons. Or serve with tropical fresh fruit.

A close-up photograph of a white plate with a scalloped edge. The plate contains a skewer of meat, likely lamb or beef, which is cooked and has a dark, charred exterior. The meat is resting on a bed of fluffy white rice. Fresh green herbs, possibly parsley or cilantro, are scattered around the dish. The plate is set on a dark wooden surface. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the center of the image.

*An Arabian
Night*

An Arabian Night Menu

dukkah + bread + olio
kofta kebabs **or** chicken kebabs
home made hummus
brown rice tabbouleh
ginger bread ice cream

An Arabian Night Menu Variations

vegetarian

try tofu and veggie kebabs instead of the meat.

vegan

as per the vegetarian suggestion above plus replace the ice cream in the dessert with coconut ice cream (without the lime).

the lazy cook / short on time?

use a commercial dukkah or just serve bread with olive oil for dipping and a big bowl of olives as a starter. Use commercial hummus and pre-cooked brown rice from the supermarket. Forget about fiddling around with the ice cream and just serve cookies and ice cream in the middle of the table for everyone to help themselves.

healthier

This is pretty healthy as is. Possibly serving raw veg to dip into the oil and dukkah and a salad of sliced oranges with roast almonds instead of the ice cream.

An Arabian Night Menu Planning Guide

menu total active time: 2.5 hours

Step 1. any time up to 5 days before

Make the dukkah (15 minutes or 30 minutes if you need to roast and peel the nuts) – This can be made on the day if that suits you better.

Step 2. 1 1/2 hours before guests arrive

Make the hummus (10 minutes)
Make the gingerbread ice cream (15 minutes)
Put plates somewhere to warm (1 minute)
Soak skewers for the kebabs (1 minute)

Step 3. 1 hour before guests arrive

Prepare the kebabs and thread onto skewers (10 minutes)
Make the tabbouleh (10 minutes)
Serve dukkah with bread and olive oil (5 minutes)
Set the table (10 minutes)
Change into your party outfit (20 minutes)

Step 4. when guests arrive

Appoint someone to look after drinks (especially yours!) (1 minute)
Offer the dukkah, bread and olive oil (1 minute)

Step 5. about 30 minutes after guests arrive

Cook the kebabs and serve on warm plates (10 minutes)
Move tabbouleh and hummus to the table (1 minute)
Get your guests to the table and dig in!

Step 6. when you're ready

Delegate someone to clear the table (5 minutes)
Make tea or coffee (10 minutes)
If you feel like it stack the dishwasher and put a load on – or delegate this step too. (10 minutes)
Serve ice cream (5 minutes)

Step 7. when the guests leave

Finish cleaning up + congratulate yourself!

An Arabian Night Problem Solving Guide

Note: for problems with individual recipes see the problem solving guide for each recipe.

guests running late

No problems, just wait until they arrive to cook the kebabs as per the plan – everything else can wait for them.

kebabs not cooked

Make sure you test one before serving. If somehow quality control messes up, just take everyone's plate back and cook the kebabs until really done.

guests early

Get them to fix themselves a drink while you finish whatever you were doing then return to the plan. You're the host so it's up to you to set the pace for the evening.



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.

Dukkah

makes 2 cups

300g (10oz) roasted & peeled hazelnuts
100g (3oz) sesame seeds
60g (2oz) ground coriander
60g (2oz) ground cumin
1 teaspoon sea salt flakes

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.



Dukkah

leftover potential?

The dukkah will keep for a few months in an airtight container.

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.

problem solving guide

bland – make sure your spices are fresh and your nuts are roasted. For now just be more generous with the seasoning.

too salty – Next time season more gradually. For now, you could dilute with more of everything.

short on time – either just serve the bread and olive oil.

serving suggestions

as a dip – serve with bread and a little bowl of olive oil. Dip bread into oil and then into the dukkah.

salads – sprinkle over salads for a bit of crunch & spice.

dukkah eggs – sprinkle dukkah over your favourite eggs. Particularly great on poached or fried eggs.

on roast veg – sprinkle over roast pumpkin or sweet potato either before or after roasting.

with hummus – sprinkle over hummus for a more spiced / nutty vibe.



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.

Kofta Kebabs

per person:

200g (7oz) minced (ground) meat

1 teaspoons ground cumin

3-4 tablespoons hummus

1/2 bunch flat leaf parsley, leaves picked, optional

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.



Kofta Kebabs

leftover potential?

OK. Most kebabs work best when fresh but can be served cold wrapped in fresh flat bread with the sauce. Will keep in the fridge for a week or so.

variations for serving sizes

Easy to increase as needed.

variations for fun

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. Tofu. Seitan. Chorizo, squid, 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 (chilli 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.

problem solving guide

kebabs dry – it's important not to overcook the protein as it easily dries out. Best to err on the side of slightly undercooked.

bland – be generous with the seasoning. Next time try a different sauce.

short on time? – skip the threading onto the skewers and just stir fry the cubes of meat until just cooked and serve drizzled with the sauce.

skewers burning – bamboo skewers will burn unless soaked in water first. I tend not to worry about it. You could remove the skewers before serving or invest in a set of metal skewers.

serving suggestions

Serve the skewers and sauce with the salad on the side. For a more substantial meal, serve with fresh pita bread.



chicken kebabs

Chicken tends to be a crowd pleaser, whatever form it takes. These kebabs are no exception.

Chicken Kebabs

per person

1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
200g (7oz) diced chicken breast
4 - 6 tablespoons natural yoghurt

1. Combine cumin, paprika, most of the garlic and 1.5 tablespoons olive oil in bowl. Toss in the chicken to coat each piece and leave to marinate for as long as you've got. Preferably about an hour.
2. Place 2 wooden skewers in water to soak.
3. Preheat an overhead grill (broiler) on the highest heat. Thread chicken onto the skewers.
4. Cook chicken under the grill for about 3 minutes each side, or until cooked to your liking.
5. While the chicken is cooking, mix yoghurt with remaining garlic and season well.



Chicken Kebabs

leftover potential?

OK. Will keep in the fridge for a week or so. But not as great reheated as when it is hot.

variations for serving sizes

This easily decreases or increases without any problems.

variations for fun

vegan / vegetarian – Replace the chicken with firm tofu and possibly some vegetable chunks such as broccoli, zucchini or red peppers (capsicum).

fun – explore different vegetables or meat. Beef or pork would be equally as good – just make sure you use a tender cut such as eye fillet or steak.

problem solving guide

too bland – Season with salt & pepper. Next time increase the amount of marinade. Also think about getting better quality chicken, if available.

too dry – Add a little more yoghurt sauce.

chicken not cooked through – return to the grill immediately! Best to test the chicken by cutting into a piece before serving.

chicken tough or dry – a sign of overcooked chicken. Next time check it earlier or chop chicken into larger pieces.

serving suggestions

Great on its own. Or serve as part of an Asian meal with a curry on the side. Die-hard rice fans will enjoy this with a side of steamed rice. Or for Slow Carb fans try serving with breakfast lentils.



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.

Homemade Hummus

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

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.



Homemade Hummus

leftover potential?

Great! Will keep in the fridge for a couple of weeks.

variations for different serving sizes

I usually make a minimum of this batch size. You could triple the recipe no problems but any larger you may need to make it in batches to make sure your food processor can cope.

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.

problem solving guide

lumpy hummus – keep whizzing until the hummus is super smooth.

bland – be generous with the seasoning. And add a little more tahini and lemon juice if you think it will help.

don't have a food processor? – make a more chunky style hummus by just mashing everything together with a fork. Make sure you chop the garlic nice and fine.

serving suggestions

Great as a dip or sauce to serve with roast or grilled vegetables or meat. Also lovely as a spread on sandwiches or hot buttered toast.



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.

Brown Rice Tabbouleh

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

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.



Brown Rice Tabbouleh

leftover potential?

Will keep in the fridge for up to a week, the almonds will go a little soggy but it won't be the end of the world.

variations for serving sizes

Easily increases as long as your salad bowl is large enough. If not, consider making and tossing in 2 batches or more.

variations for fun

nut-free - replace the almonds with 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) 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.

problem solving guide

difficult to eat – sometimes herbs can be coarse and tough to chew. If this is the case, chop the parsley more finely and either tear or chop the mint.

bland – make sure you're generous with the salt and it may need a little more lemon juice if you like it sharp.

too dry – the rice can soak up quite a bit of dressing. Add a little more oil and a splash of vinegar if it is too dry.

no sherry vinegar? – lemon juice would be my first choice for a substitute, followed by white wine or champagne vinegar.

serving suggestions

Great as a refreshing side salad to most meat, fish and poultry dishes. Or try it with grilled halloumi cheese. Especially good with hummus and falafels.

To turn into more of a main course salad, increase the amount of nuts or add in chunks of avocado, some shredded cooked chicken or some halved hard boiled eggs.



gingerbread 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.

Gingerbread Ice Cream

per person
1-2 ginger cookies
1-2 scoops vanilla ice cream

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.



Ginger Bread Ice Cream

leftover potential?

Great! Keeps for a few weeks. The cookie coating will soften over time but that isn't necessarily a bad thing!

variations for serving sizes

Super easy to increase. The big question is whether to serve 1 scoop per person or 2!

variations for fun

gluten-free – replace the cookies with your favourite GF cookie or sweet biscuit. Alternatively, some smashed praline would make a wonderful change from the

dairy-free – 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.

problem solving guide

ice cream difficult to scoop – you may need to let it soften out of the fridge for a few minutes before scooping. Another trick is to pop your spoon in warm water to help form smooth scoops.

not enough cookie crumbs – depending on the size of your scoops and your cookies, you may need more or less crumbs. So good idea to have a few extra cookies on hand.

serving suggestions

I love these on their own. They'd also be lovely with roasted rhubarb, or pot roasted pears. Or you could get ultra indulgent and melt some dark chocolate to pour over the top as a sauce.



*Friday Night
Pizza*



Friday Night Pizza Menu

pizza dough
kale & sausage pizza
roast beet & cheddar pizza
cheese & onion pizza
bluey special pizza
rocket pear & parmesan salad
berry sorbetto

Friday Night Pizza Menu Variations

vegetarian

follow the vegetarian suggestions for each recipe.

vegan

surprisingly pizza can be delicious without any cheese. I've included vegan suggestions for each recipe. MY favourite vegan pizza is potato and rosemary. Shave a large potato into slices using a mandoline or sharp knife. Toss in olive oil with the leaves from one sprig of rosemary. Spread potato and rosemary mixture on the surface of your dough and bake until golden and the potato is cooked through. Be generous with the seasoning. And chunks of avocado scattered over a hot tomato pizza would be another great vegan option.

the lazy cook / short on time?

You could get delivery from your favourite pizza joint and serve with the salad and your 'home made' sorbet for dessert. The other option is to use commercial pizza bases or pita bread instead of making your own dough – but the texture won't be any where near as good. And use pre-cooked beets or skip the beet pizza instead of spending an hour roasting them.

healthier

Decrease the number of pizzas and serve a more substantial salad instead. Something like this [chickpea & vegetable salad](#).

adding a starter

You could either make 'garlic bread' – scatter a rolled out dough with finely sliced garlic and drizzle well with olive oil. Bake until just golden. OR serve some antipasto – a selection of cheeses, salamis and pickled veg all from your favourite deli.

Friday Night Pizza Menu Planning Guide

menu total active time: 4.5 hours

step 1. any time up to 5 days before

Roast the beets (1 hour)

step 2. 2 hours before your guests arrive

Make and knead your pizza dough. Cover. (15 minutes)

Make tomato sauce for the tomato pizzas (10 minutes)

Cook onion for the cheese & onion + kale pizza (10 minutes)

Cook add kale to the onion for the kale pizza (10 minutes)

Remove sausage, prosciutto, thyme and cheeses from the fridge (5 minutes)

Shave parmesan for the salad and chop cheddar for the pizza (10 minutes)

step 3. 1 hour before guests arrive

Pop your pizza stone(s) into the oven and preheat on the hottest setting (2 mins)

Set the table (10 minutes)

Put plates somewhere to warm (1 minutes)

Make salad dressing. Slice pear and toss in the dressing. Wash your rocket leaves and keep in the fridge (15 minutes)

Change into your party outfit (20 minutes)

step 4. when guests arrive

Appoint someone to look after drinks (especially yours!) (1 minute)

Mingle

step 5. about 30 minutes after guests arrive

Roll out your first pizza. Top and pop in the oven to cook (15 minutes).

Get someone to call the guests to the table.

While the first pizza is in the oven roll out and prepare the 2nd pizza (10 minutes)

Serve the first pizza and pop the second pizza in the oven. Set the timer for 5 minutes.

Sit with your guests and enjoy the first pizza

When the timer goes, check the second pizza.

When it's cooked serve the second pizza (10 minutes)

step 6. about 1 hour after guests arrive

Add the rocket (leaving some for the Bluey special) and parmesan to the salad. Toss. Serve the salad as a break from pizza and enjoy some wine (10 minutes)

Roll out the 3rd pizza and cook. While the 3rd pizza is cooking prepare the 4th pizza. (15 minutes)

When the 3rd pizza is cooked, pop the 4th into the oven. Set the alarm for 5 minutes. (10 minutes)

Take the 3rd to the table.

When the buzzer goes, check on the 4th pizza and serve when ready.

step 7. when you're ready

Delegate someone to clear the table (5 minutes)

Make tea or coffee (10 minutes)

If you feel like it stack the dishwasher and put a load on – or delegate this step. (10 minutes)

Whizz the sorbet in the food processor and serve (15 minutes)

step 8. when guests leave

Finish cleaning up + congratulate yourself!

Friday Night Pizza Problem Solving Guide

video

Note: for problems with individual recipes see the problem solving guide for each recipe.

guests running late

Depending on how everyone feels, either wait until they arrive, or get the first pizza on so the rest of you don't starve.

no pizza stone?

Preheat and oven tray in the middle of the oven and transfer your dough onto the hot tray. I have also used those 'pizza' trays with holes in the bottom which are OK but don't give as lovely a crust as you get with a pizza stone.

pizza stone cracks

leave it in place and pop and oven tray on top and keep cooking on the oven tray. If you had a pizza cooking when the stone cracked, carefully remove and inspect for any stone shards, if it looks safe then serve anyway but if you're at all worried about it, throw that pizza away.

oven smoking


This can be a real downer to the party so take precautions. It's important to remove any leftover semolina or flour from the pizza stone after you bake each pizza. I find the best way to do this is to just scrape it to the back with my pizza peel. If you don't have a pizza peel, you can use your hand inside a thick oven mitt to wipe the pizza stone down or even a very large wad of scrunched up news paper. Best to have some windows open while you're cooking the pizza to make sure you get fresh air in.

guests early

I hate when this happens! Get them to fix themselves a drink while you finish whatever you were doing then return to the plan.

pizza dough





Working with yeast and making your own pizza dough is much scarier than it actually is. Just give it a go and you might surprise yourself. I like to use a good quality unbleached, organic spelt flour for my pizza but any bread flour (with high protein) will give good results. Unbleached tends to look better and the organic thing is just a personal preference. At the very worst, all purpose or 'plain' flour will be better than no pizza at all.

Pizza Dough

enough for 4 medium pizzas

500g (17oz) bread flour

2 teaspoons fine salt

2 teaspoons yeast

320g (11oz) water

semolina for rolling out your pizza

1. Melt butter in a small saucepan. 1. Combine flour, yeast and salt in a large bowl. Make a hole in the middle and pour your water into the hole.
2. Stir from the middle, gradually working the flour from the sides into the dough. If it gets too difficult to stir, skip the spoon and use your hands.
3. Turn the dough out onto a clean workspace. Set your timer and knead for 10 minutes. It will be sticky at first but as you work the dough it will stop sticking and become smooth and lovely. If you get bored you can stop earlier but be warned your pizza crust won't be as light and springy. Resist the urge to add more flour or more water but if the dough is either super sticky or super dry these are options.
4. Lightly flour your bowl and pop the dough back in to rest. Cover with cling wrap or a tea towel.
5. Let the dough rise in a warm place for as long as you can. 2 hours is ideal but if you've only got 10 minutes that will have to do. If you need to leave it for more than 4 hours, pop it in the fridge to slow down the yeast so your dough won't turn to mush.

video

Pizza Dough

leftover potential?

You can freeze leftover dough. I tend to freeze in one pizza size balls but you could pop the whole lot in. Sometimes I roll out the dough into pizza shapes and freeze so all I need to do is defrost, top and go.

variations for serving sizes

You can easily halve, double or triple this recipe. I usually only use 1/2 the quantity when I'm making pizza for just the two of us.

variations for fun

different flours – most flour will be fine for pizza making especially 'bread' flour. Play around with bleached vs unbleached, organic vs conventional, spelt vs wheat. Will keep you going for years!

flavoured dough – to be honest I prefer to keep my dough more neutral and let the flavours come from the topping, but there's no reason you couldn't experiment with chilli or other flavourings in your dough.

gluten-free – I'm afraid I'm yet to come across a good gluten-free pizza dough recipe. I'd recommend trying one of the other menus instead.

serving suggestions

Use dough to make pizza as per your favourite recipe.

problem solving guide

dough too sticky – this is meant to be a sticky dough – try and embrace the stickiness, it will naturally get less sticky as you knead the dough. If it gets too much use a little flour.

dough too dry – if you're having problems getting the dough to come together, again try and persevere because it can take a while to work the water into the flour but if you're really struggling, sprinkle a little water over and keep kneading.

can't find dried yeast? – fresh yeast will do – use twice as much as dried. In Australia dried yeast is available in the supermarket in the flour section. Online bread making supply sites can also help. It lasts for years.

short on time? – double the yeast so it starts working ASAP. Using lukewarm water rather than room temp will also help speed things up. Just don't make it too hot (see note below) And leave the dough to rise for as long as you can – even 10 minutes will make a difference.

dough not rising – if the yeast is old it may not come back to life (or may take a while). Check the use by date. A way to check your yeast is to sprinkle some on top of a bowl of lukewarm water and leave for 10 minutes. If the yeast is alive it will start to foam and bubble and look lively. If it's dead you won't see much action. Yeast is also sensitive to temperature so if it's too cold it will take much longer to rise. Make sure you use water at room temperature not straight from the fridge and find a warm place to stand your dough. Excess heat is also a problem but it needs to be over 45C (113F) or higher to cause problems. Make sure you don't use boiling water and it should be fine. I've had dough that hasn't risen and have still make OK pizza from it so don't stress if you have this problem.

no rolling pin? - either roll the dough using your hands as in the 'rustic' method or use a clean bottle – I find wine bottles work well.

kale & sausage pizza



The first time I suggested we have kale on pizza my Irishman was very skeptical. We were both super surprised when he turned out to be a huge fan, so much so that it even got the accolade of 'best pizza ever' one night. And we take such matters very seriously. I love this sausage version, but to be honest I like the veggie kale pizza listed in the variations even more.

Kale & Sausage Pizza

enough for 1 medium pizza

1/4 quantity of pizza dough

1 small onion, peeled, halved and finely sliced

4 leaves kale, finely sliced

1 rustic pork sausage

small handful bocconcini or fresh mozzarella

1. Preheat oven with your pizza stone on the very bottom on the highest setting.
2. Cook onion in a little oil until soft but not browned. About 8 minutes. Add kale and continue to cook on a medium heat until kale is wilted and bright green. Set to one side.
3. Roll out or use your hands to form dough into a circle about 25cm (9in) across.
4. Sprinkle semolina or flour onto a pizza peel and transfer the dough. Shake to make sure the dough isn't sticking. If it is add more semolina or flour.
5. Top pizza with kale and onion mixture. Squeeze sausage out of the casings and spread little chunks over the top of the pizza. Top with bocconcini pieces.
6. Bake for 5-10 minutes or until the cheese is melted and the sausages are cooked through.

video



Kale & Sausage Pizza

leftover potential?

OK. I know some people love cold pizza but I'm not so convinced.

variations for serving sizes

I often make a mini pizza about half the size of this if there are just 2 of us. If you need to serve more, I'd make 2 separate pizzas rather than trying to make on big one because a larger pizza will be difficult to cook in your home oven. Although if you happen to own a proper wood fired pizza oven, ignore this comment (and I'm very jealous)!

variations for fun

vegetarian – skip the sausage and increase the cheese a little to compensate.

vegan – skip the sausage and cheese and serve drizzled with a good quality extra virgin olive oil to make up for any dryness.

different greens – kale is a favourite but other greens such as spinach, chard, silverbeet, cavolo nero, collard greens or even baby spinach will work well.

different pork products – feel free to use sliced cooked sausages, bacon, salami or chorizo instead of the fresh sausages.

chilli – a little fresh or dried chilli in with the onion mixture can be lovely.

dairy-free – just skip the cheese. There's enough going on with this pizza that you'll hardly notice it.

problem solving guide

sausage not cooked – it's important to squash your sausage into thin pieces so it cooks on top of the pizza. If you're worried about the timing here, just use pre-cooked sausage. Check the sausage when it comes out of the oven and keep cooking if you suspect it's not done.

pizza soggy on the bottom – this means your heat from the bottom wasn't high enough. Next time preheat your oven for longer and keep cooking until you're happy with the underside of the dough. Excess or watery toppings can have an impact here too.

too charred – next time get your pizza out earlier.

pizza crust too crunchy – Sounds like you've over baked your pizza. Next time get it out a little earlier.

don't have a pizza stone? – bake on a preheated baking tray in the

Kale & Sausage Pizza

problem solving guide...

don't have a pizza peel? – Either use an upside down baking tray or roll your dough out onto al foil and bake the pizza on the foil base.

pizza sticking to the pizza peel – next time use more semolina or flour. For now, use your hands to lift up small bits of pizza and push some flour under. Work your way around until the pizza wobbles when you shake. If you're worried about his step you can roll your dough out onto al foil and use the foil to transfer to the oven but the texture won't be as good.

oven smoking – It's important to remove any leftover semolina or flour from the pizza stone after you bake each pizza. I find the best way to do this is to just scrape it to the back with my pizza peel. If you don't have a pizza peel, you can use your hand inside a thick oven mitt to wipe the pizza stone down or even a very large wad of scrunched up news paper. Best to have some windows open while you're cooking the pizza to make sure you get fresh air in.

I have an element at the bottom of my oven – if you can't put the pizza stone directly on the floor of the oven, just put it on the lowest shelf so it is close as possible to the element so it gets super hot.

can't find semolina? – fine polenta will work or just use flour instead.

serving suggestions

Hot from the oven!



roast beet & cheddar pizza

This slightly unusual combination was inspired by one of my favourite TV chefs, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall of River Cottage fame. His book River Cottage Veg Everyday has some really creative and delicious veggie pizzas including this one.

Roast Beet & Cheddar Pizza

enough for 1 medium pizza

1/4 quantity of pizza dough

3-4 tablespoons tomato paste

2-3 tablespoons butter

8 pieces of roast beet [recipe here](#)

large handful finely sliced cheddar cheese

a little finely grated parmesan, optional

1. Preheat oven with your pizza stone on the very bottom on the highest setting.
2. Combine tomato paste and butter in a small saucepan. Cook on a medium heat for a few minutes until the butter is melted. Stir and set to one side.
3. Roll out or use your hands to form dough into a circle about 25cm (9in) across.
4. Sprinkle semolina or flour onto a pizza peel and transfer the dough. Shake to make sure the dough isn't sticking. If it is add more semolina or flour.
5. Top pizza with the tomato sauce mixture. Scatter over the beets and cheddar. Sprinkle with parmesan, if using.
6. Bake for 5-10 minutes or until the cheese is melted and the dough is golden around the edges.



Roast Beet & Cheddar Pizza

leftover potential?

OK. I know some people love cold pizza but I'm not so convinced.

variations for serving sizes

I often make a mini pizza about half the size of this if there are just 2 of us. If you need to serve more, I'd make 2 separate pizzas rather than trying to make on big one because a larger pizza will be difficult to cook in your home oven.

variations for fun

different veg – I just adore roast beets but other roast veg such as sweet potato, potato, fennel or even mushrooms will work instead.

different cheese – I love the sharpness of a good cheddar but you could use any hard cheese that will melt well such as gruyere, swiss, American cheese or the stuff that get's euphemistically labelled 'pizza cheese'.

short on time? – use pre-cooked or canned beets. Just make sure they're well drained of any canning liquid which can be quite vinegary.

meat lovers – either add a little chopped salami to the pizza before cooking or serve layered with prosciutto after baking.

dairy-free / vegan – Skip the cheese and serve with lashings of finely grated brazil nuts after baking (preferably using a microplane grater so you get a lovely fine parmesan-like dusting).

problem solving guide

pizza soggy on the bottom – this means your heat from the bottom wasn't high enough. Next time preheat your oven for longer and keep cooking until you're happy with the underside of the dough. Excess or watery toppings can have an impact here too.

too charred – next time get your pizza out earlier.

pizza crust too crunchy – Sounds like you've over baked your pizza. Next time get it out a little earlier.

don't have a pizza stone? – bake on a preheated baking tray in the middle of your oven on it's highest setting. It may take a little longer to cook and won't have as lovely a texture. If you like pizza it's worthwhile investing in a pizza stone – I picked up mine for about \$15 and it's paid for itself many times over.

don't have a pizza peel? – Either use an upside down baking tray or roll your dough out onto al foil and bake the pizza on the foil base.

pizza sticking to the pizza peel – next time use more semolina or flour. For now, use your hands to lift up small bits of pizza and push some flour under. Work your way around until the pizza wobbles when you shake. If you're worried about his step you can roll your dough out onto al foil and use the foil to transfer to the oven but the texture won't be as good.

Roast Beet & Cheddar Pizza

problem solving guide

I have an element at the bottom of my oven – if you can't put the pizza stone directly on the floor of the oven, just put it on the lowest shelf so it is close as possible to the element so it gets super hot.

can't find semolina? – fine polenta will work or just use flour instead.

oven smoking – It's important to remove any leftover semolina or flour from the pizza stone after you bake each pizza. I find the best way to do this is to just scrape it to the back with my pizza peel. If you don't have a pizza peel, you can use your hand inside a thick oven mitt to wipe the pizza stone down or even a very large wad of scrunched up news paper. Best to have some windows open while you're cooking the pizza to make sure you get fresh air in.

serving suggestions

Hot from the oven!



cheese & onion pizza

Cheese and onion is a classic flavour combo for a good reason - it's delicious! Feel free to play around with different types of cheese here.

Cheese & Onion Pizza

enough for 1 medium pizza
1/4 quantity of pizza dough
1 large red onion, peeled, halved and finely sliced
4 sprigs thyme
small handful bocconcini or fresh mozzarella
parmesan for grating

1. Preheat oven with your pizza stone on the very bottom on the highest setting.
2. Cook onion in a little oil until soft but not browned. About 8 minutes. Set to one side.
3. Roll out or use your hands to form dough into a circle about 25cm (9in) across.
4. Sprinkle semolina or flour onto a pizza peel and transfer the dough. Shake to make sure the dough isn't sticking. If it is add more semolina or flour.
5. Top pizza with the onion, thyme and bocconcini. Grate over parmesan until you're happy it's well covered.
6. Bake for 5-10 minutes or until the cheese is melted and the edges are golden.



Cheese & Onion Pizza

leftover potential?

OK. I know some people love cold pizza but I'm not so convinced.

variations for serving sizes

I often make a mini pizza about half the size of this if there are just 2 of us. If you need to serve more, I'd make 2 separate pizzas rather than trying to make on big one because a larger pizza will be difficult to cook in your home oven. Although if you happen to own a proper wood fired pizza oven, ignore this comment (and I'm very jealous)!

variations for fun

meat lovers – pork sausage goes really well with the onion.

vegan / dairy-free – skip the cheese and serve drizzled with a good quality extra virgin olive oil to make up for any dryness. Grate over brazil nuts using a microplane.

different herbs – I love thyme with the onion but you could use a little rosemary or oregano instead.

irish pizza – cover the onion with a layer of super finely sliced potatoes before topping with the cheese – this may take a little longer to cook to make sure your potato is cooked through.

problem solving guide

oven smoking – It's important to remove any leftover semolina or flour from the pizza stone after you bake each pizza. I find the best way to do this is to just scrape it to the back with my pizza peel. If you don't have a pizza peel, you can use your hand inside a thick oven mitt to wipe the pizza stone down or even a very large wad of scrunched up news paper. Best to have some windows open while you're cooking the pizza to make sure you get fresh air in.

pizza soggy on the bottom – this means your heat from the bottom wasn't high enough. Next time preheat your oven for longer and keep cooking until you're happy with the underside of the dough. Excess or watery toppings can have an impact here too.

too charred – next time get your pizza out earlier.

pizza crust too crunchy – Sounds like you've over baked your pizza. Next time get it out a little earlier.

don't have a pizza stone? – bake on a preheated baking tray in the middle of your oven on it's highest setting. It may take a little longer to cook and won't have as lovely a texture. If you like pizza it's worthwhile investing in a pizza stone – I picked up mine for about \$15 and it's paid for itself many times over.

Cheese & Onion Pizza

problem solving guide

don't have a pizza peel? – Either use an upside down baking tray or roll your dough out onto al foil and bake the pizza on the foil base.

pizza sticking to the pizza peel – next time use more semolina or flour. For now, use your hands to lift up small bits of pizza and push some flour under. Work your way around until the pizza wobbles when you shake. If you're worried about his step you can roll your dough out onto al foil and use the foil to transfer to the oven but the texture won't be as good.

I have an element at the bottom of my oven – if you can't put the pizza stone directly on the floor of the oven, just put it on the lowest shelf so it is close as possible to the element so it gets super hot.

can't find semolina? – fine polenta will work or just use flour instead.

serving suggestions

Hot from the oven!



'bluey special' pizza

This pizza is named for my friend Bluey whose real name is Malin. Her nickname is a long story but her love of a tomato based pizza topped with rocket and prosciutto as soon as it comes out of the oven is legendary.

'Bluey Special' Pizza

enough for 1 medium pizza

1/4 quantity of pizza dough

3-4 tablespoons tomato paste

2-3 tablespoons butter

small handful bocconcini or fresh mozzarella

4-6 sliced prosciutto

small handful rocket (arugula) leaves

1. Preheat oven with your pizza stone on the very bottom on the highest setting.
2. Combine tomato paste and butter in a small saucepan. Cook on a medium heat for a few minutes until the butter is melted. Stir and set to one side.
3. Roll out or use your hands to form dough into a circle about 25cm (9in) across.
4. Sprinkle semolina or flour onto a pizza peel and transfer the dough. Shake to make sure the dough isn't sticking. If it is add more semolina or flour.
5. Top pizza with tomato mixture and bocconcini pieces.
6. Bake for 5-10 minutes or until the cheese is melted and the edges are browned.
7. Cut pizza then drape over the prosciutto and top with rocket leaves.



'Bluey Special' Pizza

leftover potential?

OK. I know some people love cold pizza but I'm not so convinced.

variations for serving sizes

I often make a mini pizza about half the size of this if there are just 2 of us. If you need to serve more, I'd make 2 separate pizzas rather than trying to make on big one because a larger pizza will be difficult to cook in your home oven. Although if you happen to own a proper wood fired pizza oven, ignore this comment (and I'm very jealous)!

variations for fun

vegetarian – skip the prosciutto and change the name to a tomato & rocket pizza.

vegan – replace the butter in the sauce with extra virgin olive oil. Skip the cheese and prosciutto and change the name.

different greens – rocket is a favourite here because of the fresh pepperiness but you could use other salad leaves if you like.

dairy-free – just skip the cheese. There's enough going on with this pizza that you'll hardly notice it.

problem solving guide

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'Bluey Special' Pizza

problem solving guide

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I have an element at the bottom of my oven – if you can't put the pizza stone directly on the floor of the oven, just put it on the lowest shelf so it is close as possible to the element so it gets super hot.

can't find semolina? – fine polenta will work or just use flour instead.

serving suggestions

Hot from the oven!

pear, parmesan & rocket salad



This was inspired by a recent visit to Jamie's Italian restaurant in Sydney. There were a couple of main course salads on the menu which reminded me just how delicious and satisfying a big salad can be.

Pear, Parmesan & Rocket Salad

enough for 3-4 as a side

1 tablespoon sherry, rice or other wine vinegar

1 pear, finely sliced

4 large handfuls rocket (arugula)

2 large handfuls shaved parmesan

2 small handfuls shelled pistachios

1. Whisk vinegar with 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Taste and season.

2. Toss pear and rocket in the dressing. Divide between 2 plates.

3. Serve with parmesan and pistachios sprinkled over.



Pear, Parmesan & Rocket Salad

leftover potential?

Will still be edible after a week or so in the fridge but best when the leaves are freshly dressed.

variations for fun

carnivore – replace the pistachios with finely shaved prosciutto.

nut-free – replace the pistachios with a handful of semi dried tomatoes.

vegan / dairy-free – replace parmesan with chunks of avocado.

different leaves – replace rocket (arugula) with other salad leaves. Radicchio is also lovely here for a more Autumnal vibe.

more substantial – double the parmesan and pistachios.

problem solving guide

too bland? Give the sauce a little more seasoning. And a splash more vinegar.

too oily / too much dressing – Just transfer the salad to a clean bowl, leaving behind as much of the dressing as possible, then toss in the new bowl to rub some of the dressing off onto the sides. If things are really bad a bit of judicious paper towel blotting will help.

dressing too sharp – sharpness will vary with your vinegar, so don't be afraid to balance it out with a little more olive oil.

serving suggestions

Great as a quick light dinner on its own. Also wonderful without the pistachios as a side to most Italian food.

berry sorbetto



I tend to keep a packet of frozen berries in the freezer for when I need a quick dessert. This berry sorbet is wonderfully simple - just whizz the berries with a little sugar in the food processor and there you have it - instant sorbet.

Feel free to use any frozen fruit for this recipe. If you're in the mood for more of a berry 'ice cream', replace the water with a few tablespoons of cream or even coconut cream if you would prefer something vegan.

Berry Sorbetto

enough for 2

150g (5oz) frozen mixed berries

3 tablespoons sugar

1. Place berries and sugar in a food processor with 1 tablespoon water.
2. Whizz until the sugar is dissolved and you have a nice shiny sorbet. It might take a little while for the berries to defrost enough to liquefy.
3. Serve immediately or keep in the freezer until you're ready - but no more than a few hours or it will start to go icy.



Berry Sorbetto

leftover potential?

Best if eaten straight away. Or will be OK in the freezer for a few hours or so. Longer than that and it will get icy but you could pop it back in the food processor to break it up.

variations for serving sizes

Can easily be increased or decreased. Large quantities will need to be processed in different batches. Just return the finished ones to the freezer in between.

variations for fun

sugar-free - replace sugar with a natural sweetener or just skip it all together.

creamy – add a few tablespoons of cream or yoghurt in with the fruit.

different fruit – most frozen fruit will work here such as raspberries, mangos, blueberries, strawberries, banana or pineapple.

problem solving guide

too many seeds – Sieve through a strainer.

too dry / not forming a sorbet texture – Add a little more water and keep whizzing.

too sweet – It can be easy to add too much sugar when fruit varies in sweetness all the time. A squeeze of lemon can help reduce the apparent sweetness.

serving suggestions

Best in pretty teacups or glasses with teaspoons.

A dark ceramic bowl filled with Moroccan Magric. The dish consists of a whole roasted chicken, a portion of rice, and several large, roasted onions. The bowl is placed on a light-colored wooden surface with a white cloth underneath. The text "Moroccan Magric" is written in a cursive font across the center of the bowl.

Moroccan
Magric

Moroccan Magic Menu

marinated olives
chicken & preserved lemon tajine
herby cauliflower 'couscous'
shaved zucchini salad
claudia roden's yoghurt cake

Moroccan Magic Menu Variations

vegetarian / vegan

Serve an eggplant (aubergine) and preserved lemon tajine instead of the chicken. And for dessert vegans could serve sliced chilled oranges with a coconut sorbet.

the lazy cook / short on time?

Just serve olives from the deli instead of marinating your own. Use chicken pieces on the bone such as thighs or marylands instead of messing around with cutting up a whole chicken. Replace one of the salads with some commercial pita or other flat bread. And for dessert pick up your favourite gourmet ice creams or a few different brands of chocolate and let everyone help themselves.

carnivore

Red meat lovers will love either osso buco or lamb shanks cooked instead of the chicken. You'll need to increase the cooking time to about 3-4 hours for shanks and 2-3 hours for osso buco. And increase the preserved lemon a little to

wintery

With 2 salads this is more a warmer weather menu. For cooler weather consider either warming the cauliflower couscous in a little oil in a frying pan before tossing in the herbs. Or replace the couscous with hot steamed rice or mashed potato. I'd also change dessert to these heavenly [ginger self-saucing puddings](#) and ice cream.

Mococcan Magic Menu Planning Guide

menu total active time: 4.5 hours

step 1. any time up to 5 days before or on the day
marinate the olives (15 minutes)
make the yoghurt cake (60 minutes)

step 2. 2 hours before your guests arrive
Prepare chicken tajine and get it on to cook (90 minutes)
Make the cauliflower couscous (15 minutes)

step 3. 1 hour before guests arrive
When the tajine is cooked, reduce oven temp to low (100C / 200F). Cover tajine and keep warm. (5 minutes)
Put plates in the oven to warm (1 minutes)
Make the shaved zucchini salad (15 minutes)
Set the table (10 minutes)
Change into your party outfit (20 minutes)
Serve olives (5 minutes)

step 4. when guests arrive
Appoint someone to look after drinks (especially yours!) (1 minute)
Serve the olives and relax (1 minute)

step 5. 30 to 60 minutes after guests arrive
Delegate someone to get your guests to the table (1 minute)
Serve zucchini salad + couscous on the table (5 minutes)
Serve tajine into warmed plates (5 minutes)
Enjoy some wine with the food!

step 6. when you're ready
Delegate someone to clear the table (5 minutes)
Make tea or coffee (10 minutes)
If you feel like it stack the dishwasher and put a load on – or delegate this step. (10 minutes)
Serve yoghurt cake with honey and pistachios and cream, if using (5 minutes)

step 7. when the guests leave
Finish cleaning up + congratulate yourself!

Moroccan Magic Problem Solving Guide

Note: for problems with individual recipes see the problem solving guide for each recipe.

guests running late

Not a problem. The chicken can keep warm in a low oven for a few hours. And the salads will be fine waiting as well.

guests early

I hate when this happens! Get them to fix themselves a drink while you finish whatever you were doing then return to the plan.

chicken not cooked when serving

We've allowed way more time than you'll need to get the chicken cooked but it's super important that when you stop cooking and transfer the chicken into 'warm' mode, that you are 100% certain that the chicken is cooked through. The best way to tell is to cut into a piece down to the bone with a knife and have a good look. Any pinkness and you need to keep cooking. If you do get to serving stage and you notice uncooked chicken – just quickly crank your oven and pop the chicken back in for another 10 minutes or however long it needs. Pour everyone a drink and if they're super hungry, serve the zucchini salad as a 'starter' while you all wait.

cook running late

If time gets away from you. Focus on getting the chicken in the oven and cooked. Then forget about the yoghurt cake and when it comes time for dessert serve the natural yoghurt in little teacups or glasses and drizzle with honey and pistachios. If you're still feeling pressed forget about the zucchini salad and just serve the chicken and couscous. You can also skip the olive marination if need be.

marinated olives



I love buttery green Sicilian olives for this gift, but any good quality olive or even a mixture of them will be delicious.

Marinated Olives

enough for about 2 cups

2 cups olives approx (200g / 7oz)

zest 1/2 lemon

2 cloves garlic, peeled & smashed

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

1. Place olives, lemon zest, garlic & oil in a small saucepan.
2. Gently warm over a medium heat and cook for about 10 minutes or until everything smells garlicky and olivey.
3. Remove garlic and discard and pop olives and oil in sterilised jars from the dishwasher. Top up with extra oil to cover and seal.



Marinated Olives

leftover potential?

These olives will keep in the fridge for months. If you'd like to make them to keep in the pantry, skip the garlic and be sure and use sterilised jars.

variations for fun

orange & fennel – replace lemon zest with orange zest and replace garlic with a tablespoon of fennel seeds.

hot – add in a couple of dried red chillies.

problem solving guide

too garlicky – The recipe above is quite generous with the garlic, feel free to reduce the quantity.

short on time – serve olives drizzled with oil and forget about the matinating thing..

serving suggestions

straight up – serve in a little bowl.

oil – use the oil in the jar for drizzling anywhere you'd like to add a zesty olivey flavour.

chicken & preserved lemon tajine





A tajine is just the Moroccan name for a stew. In Morocco they use really cool pots called tajines which look a bit like a witches hat. I used to have a real tajine I brought back from a trip to Morocco. I've cooked this chicken dish in both the 'tajine' and a regular cast iron pot and I didn't really notice a difference. Preserved lemons are super easy to make - you just need to allow a few weeks for them to mature before you use them.

Chicken & Preserved Lemon Tajine

enough for 4

1 chicken

3 onions, peeled & quartered

2 quarters of preserved lemon, finely sliced

2-3 pinches saffron

1-2 tablespoons freshly grated ginger.

1. Preheat your oven to 180C (350F).
2. To quarter your chicken, first chop down the backbone. Then turn over and chop down the centre of the breast to give 2 halves. Carefully cut between the breast and thigh to create your quarters.
3. Place chicken in an oven proof pot or tajine if you have one. Add onion, preserved lemon, saffron, ginger and 1 cup water.
4. Cover and bake for 30 minutes.
5. Remove the lid and continue to cook for another 30-45 minutes or until the chicken is well browned and cooked through.



Chicken & Preserved Lemon Tajine

leftover potential?

Will keep for a week or so in the fridge if you need it to.

variations for serving sizes

You can easily halve or increase this recipe. Just make sure as you increase that the chicken will fit in a single layer in your pot. A roasting tray may work better than a round pot.

variations for fun

fish tajine – preserved lemon and saffron also work beautifully with fish. Especially white fish. I'd probably skip the onions if making a fish tajine or cook the onions first for 1/2 hour before adding the fish. Fish fillets should only take about 15 minutes to cook. Longer for whole fish.

vegan / vegetarian – try an eggplant and preserved lemon tajine – replace chicken with 2 medium eggplant each chopped into 4 thick slices. Cooking time should be similar. Tofu would be another good veggie alternative.

more traditional – add a few handfuls of large green olives for the last 10 minutes of cooking and serve topped with coriander (cilantro) leaves.

no preserved lemon? – either [make your own](#) or try a good deli or 'gourmet' ingredient shop. If you're in Australia you can get them at the Essential Ingredient. IF all else fails replace with the zest and juice of 2 lemons and be generous with the salt when you season.

budget – saffron is expensive, although you're only using a little it can add up. If you'd prefer to keep cost down you could replace the saffron with the juice of 1 lemon or with about 1/4 teaspoon ground turmeric – enough to give a little yellow colour but not too much to make the flavour taste 'curryish'.

not up for some chicken butchery? - just buy chicken pieces instead. I like to use marylands (thighs with the legs attached) but any chicken pieces on the bone will work well. You may need to adjust the cooking time accordingly.

problem solving guide

bland – next time consider increasing your preserved lemon and/or saffron. For now be generous with the seasoning and possibly try a little lemon juice to bring it all to life.

chicken pink / undercooked – if you're unsure, chop into a piece down to the bone and inspect for pinkness. Pop it back in the oven if it's not cooked through. You definitely don't want to serve your guests raw chicken.

chicken tough or dry – it could be the type of chicken you used. Some chickens are less tender than others so consider trying a different poultry supplier next time. The other cause is over cooking. If you think it's really a problem, you could try serving with an extra sauce to liven things up. A little mayo or natural yoghurt combined with some chopped preserved lemon should disguise things. Or if that's not an option, drizzle over a really generous glug of your best extra virgin olive oil as you serve.

too salty – the thing with preserved lemons is that they are super salty so be very careful with the seasoning. You may find you don't need any extra salt at all. Remember too that when you eat the sauce with the chicken and the salad, it won't be as intense as when you're tasting straight from the pot.

serving suggestions

Serve one quarter per person in bowls with the onions and sauce poured over.



herby cauliflower 'couscous'

Cauliflower is a really underrated vegetable. Its white colour and mild flavour make it far less 'healthy' tasting than its cousin broccoli while still providing just as many valuable nutrients. I love this healthy alternative to couscous not only because it's better for you, it's quicker to make as well.

Herby Cauliflower 'Couscous'

enough for 4 as a side

1/2 large cauliflower

2 tablespoons lemon juice

1 large bunch coriander (cilantro)

1 bunch flat leaf parsley

1. Remove any leaves from cauli. Chop into chunks and whizz in the food processor until you have fine 'couscous' grains.

2. Toss in lemon juice and 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Season.

3. Remove most of the stems from the herbs then finely and coarsley chop the remaining stems and leaves.

4. Toss herbs into the cauli.



Herby Cauliflower 'Couscous'

leftover potential?

Great! Will keep in the fridge for a few days. Longer than that it will still be edible but the herbs will have wilted.

variations for serving sizes

Will easily decrease or increase. You just may need to whizz in batches in the food processor.

variations for fun

wintery – after you whizz the cauliflower, cook it in a frying pan in a little oil for long enough to warm it up but not brown. Remove from the heat before adding the lemon juice and herbs. Serve warm.

prefer real couscous? – place 1 cup couscous in a heat proof bowl. Pour over 1 cup boiling water. Cover and stand for 5 minutes or longer. Fluff with a fork and add lemon juice and olive oil then toss in the herbs.

different herbs – mint or basil or any combo will be great.

problem solving guide

no food processor? – you have a tough job in front of you. Just chop the cauliflower by hand as finely as you can be bothered to do.

difficult to eat – if your herbs are too coarse they can be a pain. Next time be a little more careful on herb chopping duty.

serving suggestions

Makes a delicious light side anywhere you'd normally serve regular couscous or steamed rice.



shaved zucchini salad

Shaved vegetable salads are great for entertaining because they're slightly unusual and super forgiving, meaning they will sit around for a while without any detrimental effects.

Shaved Zucchini Salad

serves 2-3 as a side

2 tablespoons lemon juice

2 medium zucchini (courgettes)

small handful flat leaf parsley leaves

1. Combine lemon juice with 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil in medium bowl. Season.
2. Using a vegetable peeler or a mandoline or a sharp knife and a steady hand, shave the zucchini into very fine ribbons.
3. Toss zucchini in the dressing with the parsley.



Shaved Zucchini Salad

leftover potential?

No problems. I actually like it better when the zucchini has had a chance to marinate in the dressing for 30 minutes or so.

variations for fun

carnivore – Lovely with some finely sliced prosciutto draped over the top.

fun – play around with the herbs. Mint and basil or chives are all good.

asian-inspired – replace the parsley with coriander leaves (cilantro) and the lemon juice with lime juice.

problem solving guide

too bland – Season with salt & pepper and more lemon juice.

difficult to eat – the zucchini needs to be really fine for this salad to work. Next time try shaving even finer ribbons Or chop the zucchini into very fine rounds.


too dry – if your zucchini are too large, you'll need more dressing. Either mix up a little batch of lemon juice and olive oil on the side or just drizzle over a little of each.

serving suggestions

Serve as a side salad to baked tofu or a roast chook or even bangers and mash. Or turn it into a main course with some roasted nuts, boiled eggs, prosciutto or a few handfuls of cooked lentils.

yoghurt cake





So you're probably wondering who Claudia Roden is? Well she's one of my favourite food writers who specializes in Middle Eastern cooking. She lives in London but grew up in Cairo and has spent much time in the area. I also love that her approach tends to favour simplicity. This yoghurt cake is like a more light and lemony version of a classic cheese cake. It's lovely on its own but I also like to drizzle it with honey and some pistachios for something a little more special.

Claudia Roden's Yoghurt Cake

enough for 6-8
4 eggs, separated
100g (3.5oz) sugar
3 tablespoons flour
3 tablespoons lemon juice
400g (14oz) thick Greek-style natural yoghurt

1. Preheat your oven to 180C (350F). Grease and line a 20cm (8in) cake tin.
2. Combine egg yolks, sugar, flour, lemon juice and yoghurt in a small bowl. Mix until combined.
3. Add a pinch of salt to the egg whites and whisk using a stand mixer until the mixture looks like marshmallow.
4. Fold the yoghurt mixture carefully into the whites.
5. Transfer the mixture gently to your prepared cake pan.
6. Bake for 45-55 minutes or until the cake is risen and golden and feels springy when you touch it.
7. Cool and refrigerate before serving.



Claudia Roden's Yoghurt Cake

leftover potential?

Great! One of those cakes I think is better cold from the fridge. Will keep for at least a week.

variations for serving sizes

If you wanted to halve, you could bake in individual muffin papers – half the mixture should do 3-4 muffins. And decrease the cooking time to 15-20 minutes. To double use a 28cm (11in) and bake for 1 hour or longer as needed.

variations for fun

gluten-free – replace flour with gluten-free flour such as rice flour or corn flour.

vegan / egg-free – I'm afraid eggs are key here so try serving a salad of sliced ripe oranges instead.

dairy-free – try it with [coconut yoghurt](#).

short on time? – skip the egg white whisking and just mix all the ingredients together – the texture will be denser but still lovely.

sugar-free – replace sugar with a natural sweetener such as a blend of erythritol and stevia.

problem solving guide

watery liquid leaking out – this is a sign the eggs have been over cooked. Next time check earlier. The other cause could be your yoghurt wasn't thick and creamy enough. Next time try a different brand of yoghurt – look for the one with the highest fat content.

cake sinking as it cools – this is one of those cakes that does that so no need to stress – think of it as part of the rustic charm.

cake too brown – this is one of those cakes that tends to brown quite readily. If you think it's browning too quickly, cover with foil in the oven and continue to cook until firm.

serving suggestions

Lovely with honey and pistachio and a little cream.



*All About
The Beef*

All About the Beef Menu

pea & parmesan crotsini
pepper crusted beef fillet
chimmichurri
buttermilk mash
burnt carrot salad
no-bake chocolate 'tart'

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All About the Beef Menu Variations

vegetarian

try tofu steaks instead of the beef and serve with chimmichurri mash. For vegan mash and dessert see the vegan alternatives.

the lazy cook / short on time?

Serve your best olive oil with crusty bread as a starter – or a few of your favourite cheeses or salami. Skip the chimmichurri and serve mustard with the beef. Make sure you chop the spuds small so they cook quickly for the mash. Replace the burnt carrot salad with a quick mixed leaf salad. And just serve a variety of good quality chocolates instead of the 'tart'.

healthier

Skip the mash and serve beef with another salad or some [lovely lentils](#). And replace the chocolate dessert with a big bowl of fresh berries and some natural yoghurt.

budget

Replace beef with cheaper cuts of steak and serve pepper steaks with the mash instead.

All About the Beef Menu Planning Guide

menu total active time: 4 hours

step 1. any time up to 5 days and at least 2 hours before

Make chocolate 'tart' (15 minutes)

step 2. 2 hours before guests arrive

Boil spuds for the mash. Drain and return to the saucepan & keep warm (60 minutes)

Remove beef from the fridge (1 minute)

Char carrots for the salad and make dressing (15 minutes)

step 3. 1 hour before guests arrive

Make chimichurri (10 minutes)

Make pea mash for the crostini & slice bread (10 minutes)

Grind pepper for the beef + preheat oven to 180C (350F) (5 minutes)

Set the table (10 minutes)

Put plates somewhere to warm (1 minutes)

Change into your party outfit (20 minutes)

step 4. when guests arrive

Appoint someone to look after drinks (especially yours!) (1 minute)

Put pea mash on bread and serve crostini (5 minutes)

Preheat pan for the beef. Cover beef with pepper on all sides. Brown beef on all sides.

Transfer to the oven. (10 minutes)

Mingle while the beef cooks.

step 5. about 30 minutes after guests arrive

After the beef has been baking for the allotted time. Check doneness and wrap in foil. (15-20 minutes)

Rest beef (10 minutes)

Mash spuds and reheat with hot milk and butter while the beef rests. (10 minutes)

step 6. about 1 hour after guests arrive

Dress salad and serve on the table. (5 minutes)

Divide mash and beef between plates and serve with chimichurri on the side (10 minutes)

Enjoy some wine!

step 7. when you're ready

Delegate someone to clear the table (5 minutes)

Make tea or coffee (10 minutes)

If you feel like it stack the dishwasher and put a load on – or delegate this step. (10 minutes)

Serve dessert (5 minutes)

step 8. when the guests leave

Finish cleaning up + congratulate yourself!

All About the Beef Problem Solving Guide

Note: for problems with individual recipes see the problem solving guide for each recipe.

guests running late

No problem. Serve the crostini if you like but wait until they arrive to cook the beef. If it's getting super late, you could start cooking the beef.

guests early

I hate when this happens! Get them to fix themselves a drink while you finish whatever you were doing then return to the plan.

beef not cooked when carving

Most people will be happy with 'rare' beef. So ask. If it's a problem you can always pop it back in the oven or slice into steaks and just cook until the outsides are brown.

cook running late / short on time

Focus on getting the beef cooked to perfection. outsource dessert and starter if you can. Skip the chimichurri and serve with mustard instead. REplace burnt carrot salad with a quick green salad. Chop spuds for the mash small so they cook asap. Try to keep calm ;)

A top-down view of four small, round crostini on a white plate. Each crostini is topped with a mixture of bright green peas and melted parmesan cheese. The plate is scattered with a few loose peas and small dark specks, likely pepper. The background shows a wooden surface at the bottom right.

pea & parmesan crostini

Frozen peas are a real life-saver to have in the fridge. In an instant you can have them ready for a fresh, green starter.

This mixture is also lovely as a fresh, pesto-like sauce for pasta. If you are lucky enough to have access to fresh peas in the pod, straight from the garden, feel free to use them instead. Please try to not feel superior over those of us who only have frozen peas at our disposal.

Pea & Parmesan Crostini

serves 2-5

2 handfuls frozen peas
1 handful freshly grated parmesan cheese
1 sprig mint, leaves picked
lemon juice
10 slices crusty baguette

1. Cover peas in boiling water for a minute or so. Drain.
2. Mash peas with a fork, then stir in parmesan, mint, a squeeze of lemon and 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil.
3. Taste and season.
4. Divide pea mixture between the bread and drizzle with a little more extra virgin olive oil.



Pea & Parmesan Crostini

leftover potential?

Pea mixture will keep in the fridge for a week or so. The bread is best when fresh but can be toasted to revive.

variations for serving sizes

If you think you're going to have hungry guests, make the quantity above for 2 people but I'm much more likely to allow 2 pieces per person so the above quantity will serve 5. Easy to increase as needed.

variations for fun

different cheese – most hard grating cheeses will be good here. For something different try a pecorino or ossu iraty. Fresh goats cheese or ricotta can be scattered over the top if you like.

different herbs – fresh basil or parsley can work instead of the mint.

gluten-free – serve on rice crackers or with GF bread.

vegan / dairy-free – replace the parmesan with finely grated brazil nuts.

broad beans – replace peas with double peeled broad beans.

problem solving guide

bland – use more cheese and lemon.

too dry – add more olive oil.

serving suggestions

Great with the bread as a starter. Or use as a 'sauce' with grilled lamb, chicken or fish.

pepper crusted fillet of beef



If you want your guests to feel like you've spared no expense for them there are few better ways than to invest in an eye fillet of beef. Although if you're a champagne and caviar type of person that will work too. While it is expensive, fillet is reliably tender so it does take a lot of stress out of the cooking process. To keep it even more reasonable, I recommend investing in a meat thermometer.

Pepper Crusted Filet of Beef

per person

about 150g (5.5oz) eye fillet of beef

1 teaspoon black peppercorns, coarsely ground

1. Remove the beef from the fridge an hour before you're ready to cook.
2. Preheat your oven to 180C (350F). And get a cast iron pot or frying pan on to heat up on the stove top.
3. Rub beef with olive oil and coat in the pepper.
4. When your pot or pan is very hot, sear beef for about 2 minutes each side. Then transfer to the oven and bake for 10 minutes (rare), 15 minutes (medium rare) or 20 minutes (medium). If your frying pan won't go in the oven, transfer to a roasting tray and an extra few minutes to the cooking time.
5. Remove the beef from the oven and check the temperature:
rare: 50C (125F)
medium rare: 55C (135F)
medium: 60C (145F)
well done: 70C (160F)
6. If the temp is too low, return to the oven and recheck.
7. When you're happy wrap the beef in foil and rest for 10-20 minutes before carving.



Pepper Crusted Filet of Beef

leftover potential?

Wonderful in salads or on sandwiches with hot mustard. You won't have any problems getting rid of leftovers.

variations for serving sizes

For 6 people you'll need about 1kg (2.2lb) beef and 2 tablespoons pepper. Although if you're serving super big eaters you might like to share this amount between 4 people. If serving less than 4 I'd chop the beef into individual steaks and just cook them on the BBQ or stove top. For more than 6 just get a larger piece of beef or go for 2 pieces or more. The cooking time won't increase too dramatically for larger pieces of beef because they tend to be longer rather than fatter.

variations for fun

vegetarian / vegan – serve roast portabello or field mushrooms instead.

budget – make pepper steaks with a cheaper cut of beef – cook on the stove top or BBQ.

mustard – rub beef with a thin layer of dijon mustard before coating in the pepper.

chicken breasts – you could use a pepper crust and the same cooking method on chicken breasts. You'll need them cooked to well done which should take about 15 minutes in the oven after they've been browned. The same temperature targets apply.

problem solving guide

pepper crust burning – this charring is part of the process – make sure you turn on your extractor fan so your kitchen doesn't get smoked out.

don't have a pan that will go from stove top to oven – no probs just use your frying pan and transfer the meat to an oven tray for roasting. And expect to add a few minutes to the cooking time to make up for the fact that you're using a cold pan in the oven.

not cooked as expected, even when tested with the thermometer – it's important to make sure your thermometer goes into the middle of the meat and not through to the other side. I also make sure I check a few different places and take the average temperature rather than just relying on one reading. IF you've used a pan that has gone from stove top to the oven, remember that the beef closest to the pan would have received much more heat than the beef in the air, so make sure you turn and check the temperature from both sides (like I didn't do in the video! – Note that if I had checked both sides I would have had a very different temperature reading and would have not cooked for longer and ended up with pinker and lovelier beef)

no thermometer? – when you think the beef is done, cut through and check that you're happy.

beef tough or dry – sounds like overcooked beef. Next time check earlier on in the cooking process. Also make sure you don't skip the resting stage.

serving suggestions

Great with bernaise sauce, chimichurri or your favourite mustard.



chimmichurri

Inspired by Francis Mallmann. Feel free to play around with this recipe. Especially the garlic levels and the seasoning. Mallmann recommends 'always red wine vinegar' but I'm happy to go out a limb here and say that sherry vinegar is even better. Sometimes it's good to live dangerously. Note, this recipe originally appeared on Stonesoup without the problem solving guide etc.

Chimmichurri

serves 4

3 tablespoons sherry vinegar
large handful flat leaf parsley
large handful fresh oregano, leaves picked
1/4 teaspoon chilli powder
2 cloves garlic, peeled & very finely chopped

1. Combine sherry vinegar with 1/4 teaspoon salt, 1/4 cup water and 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil. Stir until salt is dissolved.
2. Finely chop herbs and add to the sauce along with the chilli and garlic.
3. Stir until well combined. Taste and adjust seasoning as required.



Chimmichurri

leftover potential?

Great. I think it even improves with a little age. Keeps in the fridge for a week or so. Just return to room temp before serving.

variations for serving sizes

This is generally the smallest batch I make because we usually use it for a few days.

variations for fun

different herbs – parsley and oregano are traditional but you could replace the oregano with extra parsley or marjoram if you like. A little mint can be good too.

dried herbs – the Argentinian ‘gauchos’ carry dried herbs with them to make their chimmichurri on the road. To be honest I find dried herbs a little dusty tasting and prefer the flavour of fresh herbs. If dried are your only option consider reducing the quantity of herbs to about 1/4 because they are more intense than fresh herbs.

can't find sherry vinegar – red wine vinegar is the best substitute here.

super hot! – try doubling the chilli.

problem solving guide

too pungent – go easy on the garlic. Next time reduce the garlic, for now try diluting it with a little more olive oil and water.

difficult to eat – it's important to chop the herbs finely.

short on time? – you could just whizz it all in a food processor or blender but the texture and colour won't be as good.


bland – no! Get busy with your seasoning and consider adding a little more vinegar and or chilli too.

serving suggestions

A super versatile sauce, I'm struggling to think of something it wouldn't enhance. So far I've tried it with tofu, steak and chicken and they've all been super delicious. Keen to try it with fish next. Especially oily fish like mackerel or sardines. Wonderful as a dressing for steamed new potatoes.



buttermilk mash



If you like mash, I highly recommend investing in a potato ricer. Something like a giant garlic press, this is one single-use piece of kitchen equipment that my minimalist kitchen wouldn't do without. The real bonus, apart from perfect fluffy mash every time is that you don't need to peel the spuds. Just pop them in the press and mash comes out while the skins stay in. If you don't have a potato ricer, just peel the potatoes before cooking and mash with a hand held masher and lots of muscles.

Buttermilk Mash

serves 8-10

8 - 10 medium sized potatoes, scrubbed
1 cup buttermilk
3-4oz (80-110g) butter

1. Cover spuds with cold water in a large saucepan. Add some salt, cover with a lid and bring to the boil.
2. Simmer for 40 - 60 minutes or until the potatoes are very tender when tested with a knife.
3. Drain well.
4. Heat the milk in the saucepan until just simmering. Remove from the heat.
5. Pass each potato through the potato ricer letting the riced potato fall into the hot milk.
6. Add butter and whisk until the mash is smooth and fluffy. Taste & season.



Buttermilk Mash

leftover potential?

OK. Re-purpose leftover mash into a shepherds pie (or make a gardeners pie with vegetables like eggplant and tomato)

variations for serving sizes

I generally allow 1 medium potato per person. But if I were cooking for a bunch of Irish people, I'd be inclined to increase this to 2(!)

variations for fun

dairy free – Replace the milk with unsweetened soy, oat or rice milk and use a little olive oil for richness in place of the butter, but be careful that the oil doesn't overpower the flavour of the potatoes.

regular mash – replace butter milk with milk.

short on time? – If you want the potatoes to cook quicker, you can cut into quarters or smaller and they'll only take about 1/2 hour.

different veg – other root veg make great mash, but because they aren't as starchy as potatoes you can puree them in your food processor instead of using the potato ricer. CAuliflower is another mash favourite.

slow-carb – Puree cooked or canned white beans then warm up in a pan with a little milk or butter milk. Won't need as much butter as the spuds.

luxé mash – After you mash the spuds pass them through a sieve so they're super smooth and double the butter. This will give a more Parisian style 'pommes puree' and you'll be getting rave reviews.

problem solving guide

too dry – Heat up some more milk and butter and stir through.

too watery – sounds like too much milk or the potatoes weren't drained properly. Next time cut back on the milk and add a little at a time. For now you can manage expectations and rebrand the potatoes as potato 'sauce'.

bland – Not all potatoes are created equally in the flavour department. A little extra salt and butter can help boost the flavour for now but next time try a different variety of spud.

lumpy – Next time cook potatoes for a little longer and mash more aggressively. If it's really a problem you can pass through a sieve, but this can be very time consuming.

gluey – When potato gets overworked the starch tends to go 'gluey' – not the greatest texture. This can increase with time as well. Not much we can do now, but next time, ease up on the muscle power. Pureeing in the food processor or with a stick blender will cause glueyness as well.

serving suggestions

Mash works well as a side to so many things. The obvious choice is to serve it with roast meat, steak or bangers (sausages). But it's also lovely with fish especially fish 'steaks' like tuna or swordfish.

burnt carrot salad



Another recipe inspired by the grill master Francis Mallmann.

The first time I made this salad I cooked the carrots on the BBQ and served it with only a little cheese as a side dish to a BBQ rib eye steak. The salad completely outshone the meat.

Burnt Carrot Salad

serves 4 as a side

1 bunch baby carrots
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon soy sauce
2 handfuls mixed salad leaves
100g (3oz) fresh goats cheese

1. Heat a large heavy frying pan on a very high heat for 3-4 minutes.
2. Meanwhile trim and discard carrot tops. Halve carrots lengthwise.
3. When the pan is super hot. Add a little oil and the carrots, shaking to make sure they are in a single layer.
4. Cover and cook for 5-6 minutes or until carrots are a little burned and charred in places.
5. Meanwhile, combine balsamic, soy and 2-3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil.
6. Turn the carrots and cook for another minute or until cooked to your liking.
7. Scatter leaves over a serving platter. Top with hot carrots, drizzle with dressing and finish with little chunks of the cheese.



Burnt Carrot Salad

leftover potential?

Best when fresh because the leaves will wilt in the dressing but will still be edible for a few days in the fridge.

variations for serving sizes

Increase or decrease as needed. If you have too many carrots you may need to cook them in batches.

variations for fun

vegan – replace the cheese with a generous handful or two of roasted almonds or sunflower seeds.

dairy-free – see the vegan option. Or try a couple of chopped boiled eggs instead of the cheese.

side salad – either decrease the cheese or skip it all together and serve as a side salad to BBQ steak or chicken.

more substantial – I'm keen to try this as a carrot & lentil salad. Just toss a drained can of lentils in the dressing. Or use home cooked lentils that have been boiled in water until tender (15-20 minutes) and drained.

carnivore – replace the cheese with shredded cooked BBQ chicken.

soy-free – just skip the soy sauce in the dressing and be more generous with the salt & pepper.

budget – replace the goats cheese with ricotta or another less expensive cheese. And use 5-6 regular carrots quartered lengthwise instead of the baby carrots.

problem solving guide

carrots too crunchy – it's important to cut the carrots so that they'll cook through in the time it takes them to char in one side. Next time cut finer or use smaller carrots. For now, you could pop them in the oven or microwave to finish cooking.

bitter – a sign your carrots are too burnt. You could try cutting off some of the charred carrot. Next time watch more closely as the carrots are cooking,

serving suggestions

Pate loves toast or crusty bread. Or crackers. If you're in a healthy Great as a side to most meats or fish. Also make a great light lunch on its own.

no-bake chocolate 'tart'





This isn't really a tart because it doesn't have a crust. But I'm sure there won't be any complaints.

You could easily line the pan with some crushed cookies mixed with a little melted butter if you wanted to be more traditional.

No-bake Chocolate 'Tart'

enough for 6-8

250g (1 cup) whipping cream (35% milk fat)

200g (7oz) dark chocolate

200g (7oz) whole pecans

1. Line a loaf tin with baking paper so the sides are covered.
2. Place cream in a small saucepan and bring to a simmer.
3. Meanwhile, roughly chop the chocolate into chunks and place in a bowl.
4. Pour hot cream over the chocolate and allow to stand for 5 minutes so it melts.
5. Stir until smooth then pour into the prepared pan. Arrange pecans on top, only using the best looking ones.
6. Refrigerate until set – about 2 hours or more.

No-bake Chocolate 'Tart'

leftover potential?

Absolutely. Will keep in the fridge for over a week (if no one knows it's there).. The pecans will lose some of their crunch, but I don't find it to be a problem.

variations for serving sizes

You can easily double or halve the recipe. It's just about finding a good sized pan. Actually, if halving, I'd serve in 4 individual ramekins with the pecans finely chopped in the base of each. If you need to double and you don't have 2 loaf pans, just make it in two batches.

variations for fun

milk or white chocolate – don't be tempted to substitute in milk or white chocolate because there won't be enough cocoa butter coming from the chocolate to 'set' the pie.

dairy free – Replace the cream with coconut milk OR other dairyfree milk like soy milk or almond milk. The flavour profile will change, but not necessarily in a bad way.

proper 'tart' – either pour the mixture into a pre-cooked and cooled pie crust. OR crush about 120g (4oz) of plain sweet biscuits (cookies) and mix with 30g (1oz) melted butter and spread over the base of the pan before filling with the chocolate mixture.

problem solving guide

not sweet enough – this is not a very sweet dessert, with the only sugar coming from the chocolate itself. If you'd prefer something sweeter, stir in a few tablespoons of icing (powdered) sugar into the cream before you add the chocolate. Or if it's too late for that, generously dust with icing sugar at the table.

too rich – I'm afraid that's the nature of this beast! Serve with something refreshing like sour cream or cream fresh to brighten it up. And make sure you serve small slices.

pie not setting – We're relying on the cocoa butter from the chocolate to 'set' the pie. So make sure you're using a good chocolate with at least 70% cocoa solids, otherwise you run the risk of having a chocolate 'soup'.

serving suggestions

Lovely on its own but I like it even better with a dollop of double cream or whipped cream on the side.

The Bonus
15-Minute Menu

A collage of various ingredients used in sushi-making. In the top left, a white bowl is filled with fluffy white rice. To its right is a piece of green nori seaweed. Further right is a small green bowl containing sliced green vegetables. Below the rice bowl is a small white bowl with a pinkish substance, likely salmon roe. In the center, there are several pieces of light-colored fish, possibly salmon or tuna. To the right of the fish is a piece of sliced green cucumber. The bottom half of the image shows a wooden cutting board with two pieces of maki sushi. One is a hand roll with a dark seaweed exterior, filled with white rice, salmon, and avocado. The other is a smaller roll with a green exterior, also containing rice and avocado. In the bottom left corner, there are two small metal bowls, one containing a dark liquid (soy sauce) and the other containing a lighter liquid (wasabi or ginger).

Sushi Party

A Sushi Party

One of my favourite strategies for stress-free entertaining is to get my guests to do as much work as possible. Not only does this make things more interactive and fun, I find everyone appreciates their food more when they have contributed. Please just use this as a guide and substitute in your favourite sushi fillings.

serves 2

for the sushi:

200g / 7oz (1cup) sushi rice
2 tablespoons rice vinegar
1 tablespoon sugar
1/2 avocado
100g (3oz) smoked salmon
3-4 large nori sheets

for the salad:

3 handfuls baby spinach
1 tablespoon sesame seeds

to serve:

wasabi
soy sauce
pickled ginger

1. **rice:** Bring a medium saucepan of water to the boil. Add rice and simmer for 11 minutes.
2. **dressing:** combine vinegar and sugar with 1/4 teaspoon fine salt. Stir to dissolve the sugar.
3. **to serve:** Prepare salmon and avocado and place on a large platter or wooden board along with the wasabi, soy and ginger. Chop the nori sheets into quarters and place on the platter.
4. **rice:** When the rice has cooked, drain very thoroughly in a strainer then transfer to a baking sheet and spread out to cool the rice as quickly as possible.

5. **salad:** While the rice is cooling, wilt the spinach in the saucepan used or the rice. IT will take only a minute or so on a high heat. Remove from the heat, cool under running water and squeeze dry. Place spinach in a small bowl and top with sesame seeds

6. **to serve:** Transfer cooled rice to a serving bowl and take everything to the table.

7. Get your guests to make their own sushi by placing a little rice in the centre of a nori sheet top with avocado, salmon, spinach and a little wasabi. Roll into a cone shape and try to eat delicately. Repeat.



A Sushi Party

leftover potential?

Will keep in the fridge for a few days but the pastry will lose its crunch.

variations for fun

fish - feel free to experiment with proper sushi fish if you can access it. Make sure your fishmonger knows you will be eating it raw. Tuna and salmon are the two most popular. Prawns and squid can also be lovely.

vegan / vegetarian - try cucumber rolls and of course have extra avocado on hand.

can't find sushi rice? - substitute in white short grain rice.

slow-carb - serve with raw grated cauliflower sprinkled with a little of the vinegar dressing instead of the sushi rice OR serve sashimi with nori on the side.

sushi bowls / can't find nori? - if the idea of 'roll your own' is a bit daunting, serve rice in bowls and top with the fillings. Serve soy and wasabi on the side.

problem solving guide

rice chalky - this means the rice has been undercooked. Next time simmer for a little longer before draining and cooling.

rice sticking together - it's supposed to for sushi - don't worry about it. :)

can't find sushi rice? - just use other short grain white rice like calrose.

can't find rice vinegar - sherry or white wine vinegar will work.

too sweet - the sushi dressing does add quite a bit of sweetness to the rice - balance this out with more soy sauce but next time use less sugar in your dressing.

serving suggestions

Best in the middle for everyone to help themselves.



Lamb Cutlets
+ Parmesan Peas



Lamb Cutlets with Parmesan Peas

Lamb cutlets, or 'lolly pop chops' as my friend's daughter calls them are one of my favourite cuts of meat. They are expensive, which makes them more of an entertaining or 'special' occasion item in our house. And they're super quick to cook which means perfect mid week dinner party fare.

serves 2

6-8 lamb cutlets
2 large handfuls frozen peas
1/2 bunch mint, leaves picked and torn
large handful grated parmesan cheese
splash sherry vinegar
1 can butter beans, 400g (14oz), drained

1. **lamb:** Get a large skillet on a high heat. Trim excess fat from along the bones of the lamb cutlets. Rub one side with olive oil and season.
2. Cook the cutlets in the hot pan for 2-3 minutes on each side or until cooked to your liking.
3. **peas:** Meanwhile heat a little extra virgin olive oil on a high heat in a medium saucepan. Add peas straight from the freezer and cook, covered for 4-5 minutes while the lamb cooks.
4. Combine mint and parmesan in a small bowl.

5. **lamb:** When the cutlets are done divide between warm plates. Return the skillet to the heat and add drained beans. Stir fry for a minute or so, just until the beans are starting to brown. Turn off the heat. Season.

6. Remove peas from the heat and toss in with the mint and parmesan. Season with a little sherry vinegar and divide between the plates.



Lamb Cutlets with Parmesan Peas

leftover potential?

Will all keep in the fridge for a week or so. Can be eaten cold or warmed up.

variations for fun

vegetarian - I'm thinking eggplant cutlets instead of the lamb. Slice and eggplant into 1 cm (1/2in) thick discs, brush with lots of olive oil and fry in the skillet. Will probably take 5 minutes or so on each side. Keep an eye on the temp, if they're starting to burn reduce the heat.

vegan / dairy-free - use large portabello mushrooms (2 per person) instead of the lamb and replace the parmesan with finely shaved brazil nuts.

cheaper lamb - cheaper lamb chops such as loin chops or chump chops can be used instead of the cutlets. Depending on the thickness, they may need longer cooking.

bean-free - the butter beans are an optional extra. The meal would be lovely without. Traditionalists with more time on their hands may prefer to serve with roast potatoes instead.

no sherry vinegar? - lemon juice will work equally well to freshen up the peas and mint.

problem solving guide

bland - season with more salt a little more parmesan may help as well. The butter beans in particular will need generous seasoning.

peas burning - if you forget to stir the peas like I did, they may burn around the edges. They still should taste delish.

lamb dry - if overcooked the cutlets will dry out. You're looking for a rosy pink. For now just drizzle with a little extra virgin olive oil but next time take more care during the cooking, because they're so small it doesn't take long to go from perfection to overdone.

serving suggestions

I've plated up the cutlets individually along with the peas and served the butter beans in the middle of the table. But you could serve the whole lot family style if you prefer.

A close-up photograph of a white ceramic bowl filled with ramen. The bowl is filled with a light-colored broth, yellow egg noodles, sliced chashu pork, green onions, and a piece of nori seaweed. A pair of dark wooden chopsticks is resting on the right side of the bowl. The bowl is placed on a dark, textured wooden surface. A semi-transparent white banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text "A Big Bowl of Ramen" in a black, cursive font.

*A Big Bowl
of Ramen*

A Big Bowl of Ramen

This dish was inspired by the fabulous Momofuku noodle bar in New York. I love the idea of taking something pretty every day like a noodle soup and dressing it up for company. The secret here is to use instant dashi flakes to flavour the broth and then add smoked speck or bacon for an extra umami flavour kick.

serves 2

for the soup:

200g (7oz) smoked speck or bacon
200g (7oz) fresh egg noodles such as
singapore noodles or ramen
1 tablespoon instant dashi powder
1 tablespoon soy sauce
handful snowpeas (mangetout)

to serve:

2 green onions (scallions), finely sliced
1 large sheet of nori cut into quarters

1. **soup:** Heat a little oil in a medium saucepan. Slice speck thinly and brown in the oil for a few minutes.
2. Meanwhile soak noodles in a bowl of hot water from the tap.
3. Add 3 cups water, dashi granules and soy sauce and bring back to a simmer.
4. Trim snow peas and add to the soup. Simmer for 2 minutes.
5. Drain noodles and divide between two deep bowls. Top with soup and finish with green onion and nori sheets tucked into the side.



A Big Bowl of Ramen

leftover potential?

Will keep in the fridge for a week or so. The noodles will soak up the broth so you may need to add in some more water.

variations for fun

carnivore - true carnivores may like to follow the momofuku lead and slow roast a pork shoulder to use some of the meat in the soup.

vegetarian - use vegetable stock instead of the water, dashi and bacon. Serve with a very soft poached egg on top.

vegan - use 3 cups of best quality vegetable broth instead of the dashi and bacon. And make sure your noodles don't contain egg.

seasonal veg - snow peas tend to be pretty good all year round. But in Summer you might like to substitute in fresh sweet corn and in Winter wilted greens such as chard (silverbeet) or collard greens would add a wintery vibe.

fish-free - substitute vegetable or chicken stock for the dashi

gluten-free - use rice or mung bean noodles instead of the ramen. OR use zucchini shredded into noodle strips and simmer the zucchini 'noodles' in the broth for a few minutes before serving.

problem solving guide

can't find fresh ramen noodles - dried will do at a pinch (cook according to the packet directions before using). Spaghetti (also cooked as per the packet will be OK too) Fresh egg pasta noodles would be a better choice if it comes to that.

ramen too hard - if you find the ramen haven't softened up sufficiently after their hot water soak, simmer them in the broth for a minute or so, being careful not to over cook.

too salty - with the bacon, soy and dashi, it can be easy for the broth to get too salty. Either dilute with a little hot water or add a pinch of sugar to balance the salt.

can't find instant dashi? - just skip it and use chicken or vegetable stock instead of the water.

serving suggestions

Best with a pair of chopsticks and a soup spoon and plenty of serviettes.



*Comforting
Ragu*

Comforting Ragu

For me these days pasta is a special occasion only affair. So I love to treat myself and my guests to a little pasta supper. This sausage ragu is always a crowd pleaser. Everyone will think you've had this simmering on the stove for hours, thanks for our secret ingredient - the butter.

serves 2

for the pasta:

2 good quality pork sausages
1 can tomatoes (400g / 14oz)
2 large knobs butter
200g (7oz) rigatoni or other dried pasta

for the salad:

1 tablespoon sherry vinegar
2 handfuls washed rocket (arugula)
parmesan shavings, to serve

1. **sauce:** Place a large frying pan or skillet on a very high heat. Add a little olive oil and crumble the sausage meat into the pan, removing the skins as you go.

2. **pasta:** Bring a medium saucepan of salted water to the boil.

3. **sauce:** When the sausage meat is well browned add the tomato and butter and reduce heat for the sauce to simmer away while the pasta cooks.

4. **pasta:** Add pasta to the boiling water and cook according to the packet directions.

5. **salad:** Combine vinegar with 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Season and place salad leaves on top. Top with the shaved parmesan and take to the table.

6. When the pasta is al dente, drain and return to the pan. Toss in a few tablespoons of sauce to coat the pasta. Divide between two warm bowls and top with extra sauce.



Comforting Ragu

leftover potential?

Will keep in the fridge for a few days but the salad wilt down.

variations for fun

seafood - skip the sausages and toss a few handfuls of peeled cooked prawns (shrimp) at the end.

vegetarian - tofu will work in place of the sausages. Just crumble firm tofu into the pan.

dairy-free - replace the parmesan in the salad with finely shaved brazil nuts or sliced almonds. And use olive oil instead of the butter.

vegan - skip the parmesan as per the dairy-free option and wilt a few handfuls of baby spinach into the sauce before serving.

pappadelle - for an even more special treat, either make fresh pappadelle instead of the dried pasta or use store bought fresh lasagne sheets cut into fat ribbons - check the packet for cooking instructions but fresh pasta generally only takes a few minutes.

gluten-free - serve the sauce on a bed of pan fried butter beans or other white beans. OR serve on a bed of washed baby spinach leaves.

problem solving guide

bland - season with salt and serve with extra parmesan.

pasta sticking together - remember to stir the pasta a few times to prevent sticking. Especially important in the initial stages of cooking.

pasta gluey - sounds like overcooked pasta. Next time set the timer for a minute or two earlier than the packet says.

serving suggestions

I like these individual pies with a little salad on the side.

about the author



THANKYOU for making it this far! This is the part where you get to find out a bit more about the brains behind 'How to Love Your Waistline and Your Food'.

I'm Jules Clancy and am first and foremost a food lover who adores her veggies. The type of girl who plans her holidays around restaurant reservations.

Cooking and simplicity are my big loves. 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 like to think I'm not a nerd, really. In 2010, I packed in my day job as a chocolate biscuit designer for Australia's largest biscuit company to become a full time blogger.

A few years ago, I founded the Stonesoup Virtual Cookery School because I believe that the ability to cook simple, healthy, delicious food is a basic skill, like reading, that everyone should and can have.

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, red shoes and Irishmen, [OK one Irish man in particular].

If you haven't already done so, I'd love it if you became a regular reader of my blog. Just pop over to www.thestonesoup.com and sign up for my FREE weekly email newsletter. You'll get more delicious healthy meals in minutes delivered to your inbox each week.

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