

Kitchen Instinct

13 ½ Recipes to Help You Know What You're Doing

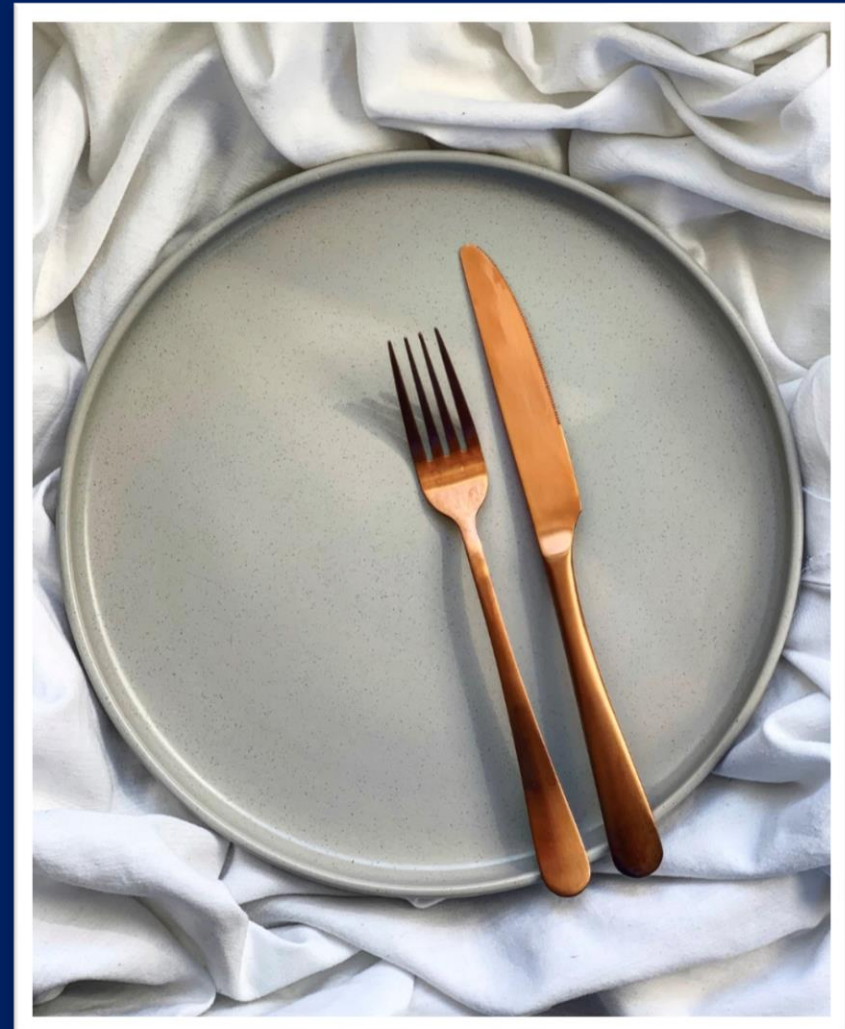


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13 ½ Recipes to Help You Know What You're Doing
Free eBook
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Instinct is half of the battle...

Over time I've had the privilege of talking to lots of people about cooking.

From someone baking one of my cakes for a loved one to someone throwing together my noodle recipe for a work lunch, food is my natural connection to people.

What I have discovered through this food talk is that when it comes to cooking and ones relationship to recipes, there are two kinds of people: those that cook often and regularly refer to recipes for inspiration, and those that don't cook but will follow a recipe to the letter once in a while.

I have been both delighted and shocked to discover that most of my readers fall into the latter.

Most people who reach out to me for advice tend to not consider themselves confident cooks. They often fly through the week from one pre-made meal to the other and will occasionally want to push the boat out and cook from scratch or will get a hankering for something different. Therein lies the need for a recipe.

As a result, what gets compromised is the confidence to instinctually cook from scratch in-between. That's not to say that reaching from a grab-and-stab meal isn't the answer sometimes and that isn't to say that you should cook from scratch every single night. But there's something to be said for the confidence you build in yourself when you have a small arsenal of dishes to pull from when the time calls for it.

Let me introduce you to Scruffy.

Scruffy (this is not his real name nor is he a dog) is a one of my best friends. He will eat a hot meal every day because he has to stay alive. Great. But if I was to ask Scruffy to make a curry or roast a chicken or make some cookies, he would either stare blankly into my eyes and open mouth laugh or he would turn to Google to find instructions on how to cook these things. And to me, this is a shame.

Not because searching for a recipe is a bad thing (you wouldn't be reading this eBook if you felt that way) but it's a shame that he wouldn't just have the instinct of how to cook these very simple things off the cuff, or at least have his own approach to it engraved in his head.

That's why I wrote this eBook. For people like Scruffy.

I made a list of the recipes I could cook off by heart. Recipes that if I wanted to cook them or needed to advise somebody how to cook them, I would not have to research. The list was not long, but it told the story of cosy familiarity, gentle confidence and Kitchen instinct. But that's everyday cooking for you.

After reading this eBook I never want you to second guess the basic principles of some really familiar recipes again. No recipe here is scary and to be honest, nothing here is even groundbreakingly new.

I understand that reading and sticking to my recipes may go against the ethos of 'instinctual cooking', but I hope this eBook will allow you to familiarise yourself with the beginning and end of the cooking process and as a result, enables you to build your own confidence to fill in the gaps and elaborate on them afterwards.

That way if you do ever fancy a curry or a roast chicken or some cookies, you'll know how to approach it. This then puts into practice the instinctual cooking that builds your confidence and takes away the fear of the Kitchen. It's this kind of cooking that has made me a better cook and that's why I want to bring it into the routines of my readers, and of course, people like Scruffy.

I distinguish the two because I don't think Scruffy has ever once looked at my recipes for fear of having to actually cook one. Fuming.



Before we begin...

While I tend to hate recipes that come with a caveat, there are a few notes I wanted to make here so that I don't have to repeat myself and so that you won't have to read the same sentence twice.

Salt & Pepper

These two godly gifts are not listed in any ingredient list in the eBook (because they're almost a given) so where appropriate, I've mentioned them in the method. I much prefer sea salt flakes - I use Halen Mon Pure White Sea Salt - and my pepper is bog standard from Lidl.

Olive Oil

Keep it grassy, fruity and punchy. You don't have to spend a small fortune on good oils. Anything around the £2 - 3 mark will be good. Any more and it's a waste of money. But always taste it to see if you like it because it's more than just pan lubricant; it genuinely does influence flavour. If you're feeling ridiculous though, get yourself a small vial of truffle oil. Drizzle it in your risotto, on your meat sauce, over your chicken, on your steak... that, my friend, truly is worth the money.

Butter

Mine is always unsalted. Much like in life, I feel it's important to control your own saltiness, so I add salt to butter when and where I see fit.

Eggs

Never small, preferably organic and always free-range. And I pledge allegiance to my fellow 'out-of-the-fridge' keepers.

Stock

I make my own. I fill a big pot with the week's leftover vegetables (and any bones I have spare) with salt and black peppercorns, maybe a herb or two if I'm lucky, cover with boiling water and put a lid on and leave to infuse all day. No event on the hob, just on the countertop. Strain it, bottle it in washed out milk cartons, fridge it and it's good to go.

Herbs

Remember that fresh and dry are not interchangeable - they bring completely different flavours. In terms of dry, I tend to stay away from them as much as possible because I think dried herbs taste like musty teabags. So I just go for a jar of Herbs de Provence (a nice mix of a few little herbs, don't ask me which ones) for emergencies, and some oregano for pizza and bolognese. In terms of fresh herbs, my fridge is never without parsley, thyme, coriander and basil. The rest may come and go.

Spices and stuff

Because I like cooking and I spend a lot of time in my Kitchen, I have amassed a small surplus of spices that I obnoxiously keep in random jars with the name of the spice written in chalk pen on the lid. You needn't be so weird. While I feel comforted by a well-stocked pantry, you could get through life with a very small selection (and don't feel lesser just because you keep it in the jar you bought it in). I think a good place to start is some cumin, paprika, cardamom, nutmeg, garam masala and some turmeric. It'll certainly get you through this eBook anyway.

Garlic and ginger

Big, fat pieces of both and kept in the pantry, not in the fridge - garlic in particular goes waxy and weird in the fridge. I grate garlic cloves and pieces of ginger with a micro plane grater. Little tip - the best way to peel ginger is to scrape the skin with a teaspoon.

Citrus

I grate the zest of lemons and limes into food like they are salt and pepper, bringing a sharp but fresh roundness to dishes. For this reason, all lemons and limes and in my Kitchen are unwaxed, because who wants to grate a candle into their food? Watch out for pips though. Damn things fall out everywhere. And psssst... sometimes I use lemon juice from a bottle when I'm struggling... don't say a word...

Shopping

I make a list of everything I want to cook in a week on my phone and then write the ingredients I need to cook it underneath. The ingredients I'm writing down for one dish then influence what else I cook throughout the week. There will be no surprise ingredient in this eBook. The promise I make is that everything can be bought from your nearest supermarket.

Oven

Wherever I've used an oven in this eBook, its fan assisted so if you're using a conventional oven, just whack the heat up a little bit.

Equipment

I'd be gutted if I've mentioned any equipment in this eBook that you don't already have but if you don't have it, it's fine. If you don't have a loaf tin, shove it in a 20 cm cake tin. If you don't have an electric whisk, go nuts with a whisk and skip the gym.

Prepare

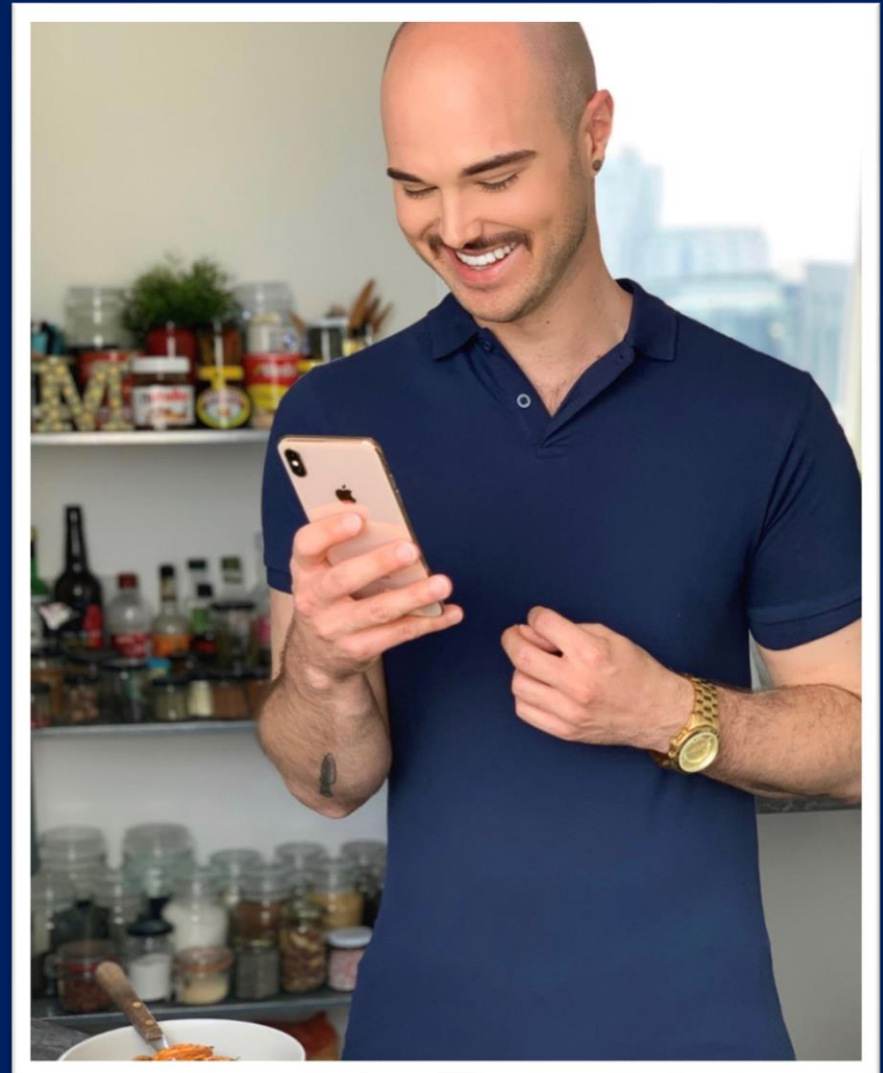
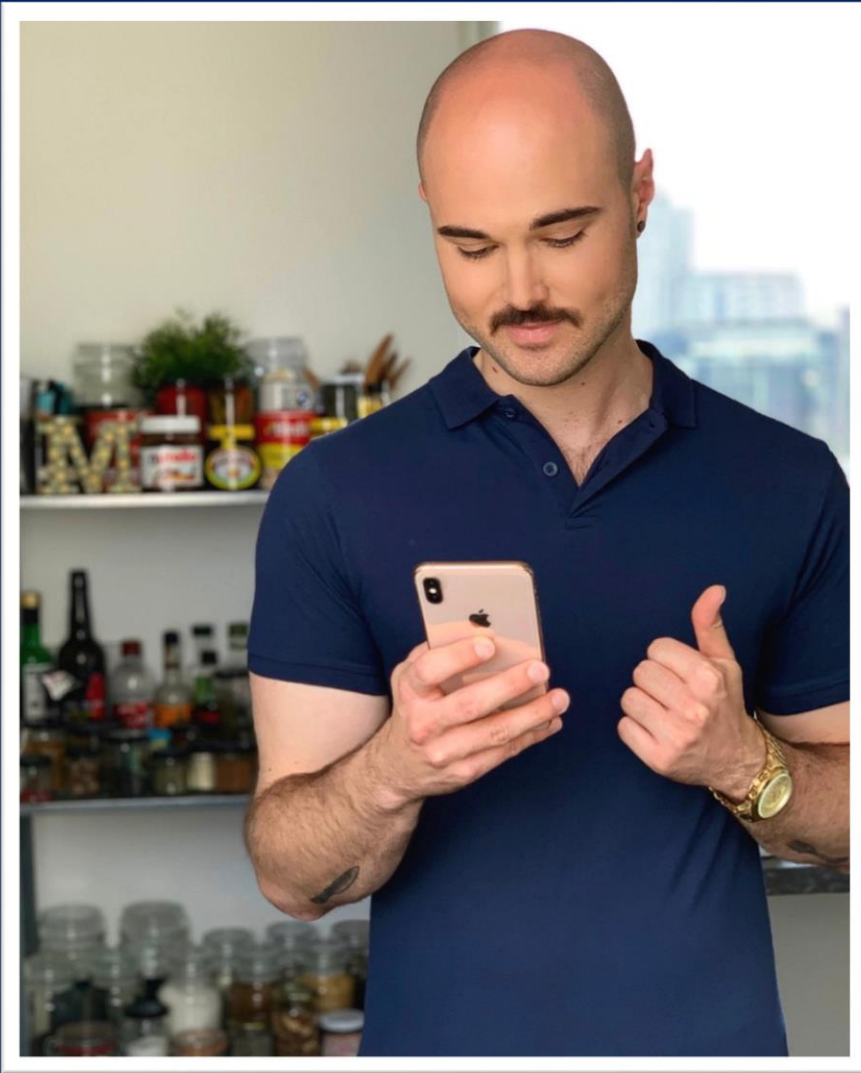
It's easier to cook when you have everything you need weighed and ready before you cook. They call this *mise en place* and this, I think, is French for 'get your shit together' or something. In addition to this, all your ingredients (in every recipe unless specified) should be room temperature – especially with baking.

Using the eBook

I've made sure that I haven't left you high and dry after a recipe. I've offered advice and tips on how else you can adapt the recipe and get the most out of leftovers, even recommending other recipes in the eBook as a good accompaniment. Eventually you'll develop your own rhythm with these recipes.

Washing up

Get someone else to do it.



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Pancakes with Chocolate Orange Sauce

Now not every morning is going to be a pancake day. Not at all. We do not live in an American sitcom. But I don't like the idea of not having batter to call upon at a moment's notice.

This pancake does not deliver the thin, crepe style pancakes we Britons may demand for Shrove Tuesday. These are the fluffier, cakier kind found across the pond in America. That sitcom life doesn't seem so far away now, does it?

Of course, a lot of pancake magic lies in the accompaniments, so what I've provided here is a very simple chocolate sauce that requires no *bain-marie*'ing or balancing bowls on hot water or any of that nonsense. Just a zap in the microwave, a few stirs and be done with it.

This batter will get you 4 plump pancakes so double up if you need more. I've advised it serves 2, meaning 2 pancakes each. But I have, and will forevermore, be willing to eat 4 pancakes to myself. Remember I told you.

Serves 2

50 g self-raising flour
½ teaspoon of baking powder
1 teaspoon of soft brown sugar
1 egg
50 ml full fat milk

For the sauce

50 g orange-flavoured dark chocolate
1 orange
20 ml double cream



Tip the flour, baking powder, sugar and a pinch of salt into a bowl and fork everything together. Crack in the egg, pour in the milk and stir everything to create a velvety batter.

You can make this batter ahead and leave it in the fridge until you need it but when you're ready for pancakes, commence as follows.

Pour a drizzle of oil into a frying pan and with a piece of kitchen roll (but truth be told I often just use my hand) smear it over the surface of the pan. Off the heat, of course.

Now put the pan on a medium heat until it gets hot and add the batter a quarter cupful at a time. I can usually fit all four in my pan but it depends on your pan size.

When you start to see little bubbles on the surface, it's time to flip and fry on the other side for about 2 minutes. You can neaten up the pancake by pushing the edges back under the pancake. After 2 minutes, remove them to a plate and cover with a tea towel.

For the sauce simply break up the chocolate into a microwaveable bowl and grate in the zest of the orange. Zap it in the microwave for 30 seconds, stirring every 10 seconds until the chocolate is all melted and gloopy.

Now pour in the cream, gently whisk together to create a thick sauce and slather over your waiting pancakes. Grate over a little more orange zest if you want that extra morning pep.

Also...

- A batter is as a batter does, let's be honest. So if you add a little black pepper, an extra egg and maybe some fresh thyme strands to the batter, it makes a good Yorkshire pudding batter. Add it to a hot roasting pan of sausages and slip it back in the oven for a banging Toad in the Hole.
- If you want to go one extra with this batter for some pancakes, you could add a little soft brown sugar to the batter to give it a treacly undertone.
- The sauce is extremely versatile and works with both milk chocolate and dark. You can vary up the flavours of the chocolate as you see fit, but I also wouldn't sleep at night if I didn't recommend adding a dollop of peanut butter to the chocolate before you microwave it too.
- Also, if you're eyeing up the Party Cake on page 33 but can't be arsed to make the icing, you could literally just make the cake sponge, make this chocolate sauce but up the cream to 50 ml, let it rest for a few minutes and then pour it over the sponge.

As long as you're...

frying a flour/egg/milk mix in a hot pan and
drizzling something tasty over it

... you're fine!

Coffee & Cardamom Banana Loaf

You could absolutely coast through your entire life never having to make a loaf of anything. My question to you would be – why would you want to and is everything okay with you?

My mother will never not have one on the go and I, as a result, am comforted by the sight of a springy breakfast loaf in the Kitchen. It means that breakfast, even in my most chaotic morning, is covered.

This recipe also encourages you to let your bananas go gross. By gross I mean allow them to ripen and go brown and shmushy in your fruit bowl until you need them for this recipe.

And don't be deceived into thinking the cardamom is going to infuse your loaf to the point of it tasting like a confused curry. The smoky breath of the cardamom marries perfectly with the sweet banana giving it gentle warmth as opposed to full on throat attack. Serve it with a lick of butter and a coffee and everyone loves you.

Serves 8 - 10

3 bananas – ripened to the point of being brown
150 ml flavourless oil
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 eggs
70 g caster sugar
70 g soft brown sugar
180 g plain flour
½ teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda
½ teaspoon of coffee (instant is fine)
½ teaspoon of ground cardamom



Preheat the oven to 170 °C and line a standard sized loaf tin.

In a bowl, mash up the bananas and then pour in the oil, vanilla extract, crack in the eggs and tip in the sugars.

Mix these together until they form a sloppy batter.

Toss in the flour, bicarb, coffee and cardamom and mix everything together.

Pour into the prepared loaf tin and slip into the oven for about 50 minutes and a little skewer comes out of the loaf clean when prodded in.

Let it rest for a bit in its tin before taking out. There is nothing wrong with this in its unmessed-with form, but your morning will thank you when you serve it with a little crème fraîche and a coffee.

Also...

- If you really want to sparkle this loaf and having something super proud on the table, you could make the Chocolate Orange Sauce on page 9 and serve with each slice
- Or, if you fancy a bigger sparkle and want this to almost double up as a fancy pudding instead of just being confined to the breakfast table, make up a small batch of the Buttercream on page 33 and spread some over the top of the loaf.
- If you don't have access to ground cardamom, you could grab 8 whole cardamom pods, bash them open and ground up the seeds. But to be honest, I would never. I'd just use the coffee and grab ground cardamom next time you see it.
- As far as loafs go, this is a pretty simple and untouched affair that allows the smoky spices and sweet bananas to do all of the singing. However if you wanted to throw in a handful of raisins and some bashed up walnuts, nobody is going to shout at you.

As long as you're...

adding some mashed up brown bananas to a batter
and baking it

... you're fine!

Guacamole & Jalapeno Salsa

The words 'guacamole' or 'salsa' often conjure images of big bowls on tables with lots of people milling around and dunking an assortment of chips into it in between drink clinks. There's something celebratory about them, or at least something that warrants a gathering.

But I'd be lying if I said I most often make these dips and spread on big honking fudgy pieces of sourdough to eat them on my sofa. I don't even need a table. I won't even need a plate.

The reason I've included them here is because these are dips I can make on autopilot without even a second guess of what goes in them, and I think for people without that knowledge, it suddenly seems easier to buy them from the fridge in the supermarket.

Yes, on some level I guess it is easier, but on no level is it quicker or tastier. Serve with whatever brings you joy... even if that's just a spoon...

Serves 6 – 8

For the guacamole

2 avocados
1 lime
A handful of fresh coriander

For the salsa

2 big tomatoes (on a vine is the best, just saying)
4 spring onions
1 tablespoon of pickled jalapenos
1 lime
A handful of fresh coriander



For the guacamole, destone the avocado and scrape the green flesh out into a bowl.

Scatter in some salt and pepper before squeezing in the juice of the lime.

Roughly chop the coriander and add to the bowl before crushing everything together with the back of a fork until everything combines.

Guacamole needn't be anything more. Sprinkle some fresh coriander on top before serving.

For the salsa, finely chop up the tomatoes, spring onions and pickled jalapenos and pop into a bowl.

Add in some salt and squeeze in the juice of the lime. Stir through the coriander.

That's it. That's the recipe. This, a tortilla chip, a few cold beers and a banging playlist is my idea of a party.

Also...

- I could write an entire eBook on how I have adapted these recipes in the past and had to practice a lot of self-restraint not to go wild when writing the recipes on the previous page but there are so many ways to adapt these.
- I won't judge you for buying your own guacamole and salsa I promise. But try and kink them up a little, won't you? For the tub of guacamole, squeeze through some more lime and stir through some coriander and for the salsa, you could buy a tub and amp it up with some lime and the pickled jalapenos.
- If pickled jalapenos aren't your thing, you could chop up a regular chili. Remember that the longer and thinner they are, the hotter they tend to be. And a lot of the heat is in the seeds, so if you want to calm it down scrape them out with a spoon.
- If you're lucky to have leftovers, fry up some chicken, mince or mushrooms in some cumin and paprika, put it in a tortilla with some salad, some of the guac, some of the salsa and you've got yourself a nifty little makeshift taco.

As long as you're...

crushing up an avocado/some tomatoes with a couple of flavourings

... you're fine!

Roast Mushroom Soup with Baked Feta

Seldom will I actually look for a soup recipe because I use the same method every single time. Said method, you ask? Roast everything.

There is a lot to be said for simmering everything on a hob, as you would traditionally have a soup, but I'm lazy. The moments I crave the gentle succour of a soup are usually the moments when I want to do the least amount of admin. So slipping a tray of ingredients in a hot oven and blasting them in a blender is just about as much work as I can muster.

I was raised on mushroom soup and this recipe is a lazy boy's twist on the one I stole from my mum, but you will thank me for it when you get home from work and can't even face stirring a pot.

And ignore those that tell you soup is not a complete meal. They clearly have not had a good bowl of soup and an inappropriate, wobbling stack of crusty bread and real butter by its side.

Cut those people out of your life.

Serves 4 - 6

400 g mushrooms
2 garlic cloves
1 onion
A pinch of nutmeg
A small bunch of fresh thyme
½ litre of vegetable stock
200 g block of feta



Preheat the oven to 180 °C and get a roasting tray that will fit all of your ingredients snugly.

Tip your mushrooms into this and fling in the peeled garlic cloves, the onion (peeled and barely chopped) and scatter over some salt, pepper and some olive oil.

Scatter over a pinch of nutmeg and a generous dusting of fresh thyme plucked from their strands. Toss everything together

Slip the roasting tray in the oven for about 30-35 minutes.

Once the time is up, carefully spoon everything into a blender, adding the vegetable stock and flick the switch. You could also do this in a bowl with a hand blender, but the moral is to get it smooth and creamy, adding more stock if you want it thinner or less than the amount specified if you like it chunky. Your call.

For the feta, place a sheet of baking paper on roasting tray and crumble the feta on to it. Drizzle with a little oil, sprinkle with pepper and slip in the oven, still hot from the mushrooms, and bake for about 15 minutes until the tips start to catch and char a little.

Serve the soup with a further scattering of fresh thyme and some of the baked feta on top.

Also...

- I specified mushrooms for this recipe but if you swap them out for some tomatoes and follow the same method, you'll have an amazing tomato soup. You won't even need as much stock because the tomatoes have more liquid in them.
- Don't limit yourself to mushrooms and tomatoes either! This is great with courgettes or some carrots and parsnips – just roast them for an extra 15 minutes or so until they are soft.
- If you have some of this mushroom soup leftover, gently heat it up on the hob until it thickens a little and then run it over some cooked pasta and sprinkle with the Baked Feta.
- Cook some green beans as per their packet instruction, plunge them into some of this cold soup and then bake in the oven on 200 °C for 15-20 minutes for a delicious makeshift Mushroom & Green Bean Casserole. Goes perfect as a side dish to the chicken on page 29.
- You know when you roast the mushrooms and herbs etc. when you take them out of the oven, all plump and juicy, they are perfect served as a side dish – unblended – to any meat dish.

As long as you're...

roasting vegetables with some onion, garlic and herbs and then blending them

... you're fine!

Beef Ragù

Everybody has their own approach to the craft of ragù making, don't they?

My recipe is an amalgamation of my own habits, my mother's traditions, my boyfriend's Romanian influence and the orders of my Italian mentor Marcella. A lady who, in all of her years of professionally cheffing, had never seen somebody eat five big bowls of meat sauce back to back until I walked into her Kitchen.

I have three must-do's whenever I'm making a ragù.

They are: using two different meats to build a flavour profile, to let the pot simmer for as long as my life allows to deepen the flavours and finally, to serve it tossed up WITH pasta, not slapped on top like a sloppy crown.

This is easy and as delicious as a meat sauce gets. Whilst eating it pissed from our laps, cross-legged on my sofa, my best friend Alex once said that this recipe was 'restaurant quality'.

Make of that what you will.

Serves 8

- 2 onions, carrots, garlic cloves and celery
- 1 tablespoon of butter
- 3 sausages
- 400 g of beef mince
- 1 teaspoon of dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon of fresh rosemary
- A grating of fresh nutmeg
- 2 tablespoons of tomato paste
- 1 can of chopped tomatoes
- 2 beef stock cubes
- 1 "can" of red wine – see method



Peel the onions, carrot, garlic and celery and toss into a food processor and blitz to a rubbly mix, or in the absence of a processor just chop as finely as you have the patience for.

Melt the butter in your biggest pan and drop in the blitzed veg with a little salt. Remove the sausage meat from the sausages (bin the skins) and add to the vegetables along with the beef mince.

Break everything up with a spoon and cook until the meats begin to lose their rawness. Add the oregano, rosemary, nutmeg, tomato paste and some more salt and pepper and cook for about 5 minutes.

Now throw in the can of chopped tomatoes along with the beef stock cubes. Fill the now empty can of tomatoes half way up with tap water and fling into the pan. Now fill the can up with red wine and fling it in also.

Bring the pan to a boil and then drop the heat down low, clamp on a lid and let it cook for about 2 and a half hours... you could stretch to 3 if you're feeling idle. Just stir it now and again. Once the meat is tender and the sauce is thick and sexy, you're ready to serve.

If I'm eating this with pasta, I like to grate in some parmesan and throw some basil leaves into the sauce before tossing it up with the pasta, but when using it for other purposes (see next page) I like to keep it simple and meaty.

Also...

- This is the perfect meat sauce for a lasagne. A reliable ragù can be the basis of so many things but when I'm not tossing it up with some pasta, it's finding itself in between my lasagne sheets. Use the white sauce I use for my Mac & Cheese on page 19 and your lasagne is literally a party on every level.
- This ragù method would also naturally extend itself to lamb if you had a pang for something lighter but you could also do as I have done many times and blitz up 400 g of mushrooms in a processor and use this as a mince. Perfect for vegetarians (if you swap the beef stock cubes for veggie ones, of course)
- You could absolutely throw this mix in a pie dish and cover the top with some pre-made puff pastry and bake. Meat pie. Done.
- Ever heard of Sloppy Joes? A thick bread bun buttered to the depths of hell and back, some of this meat sauce ladled in? Eaten filthily with the sauce dripping everywhere? That's heaven right there.
- I am evangelical about few things in life – the pasta I serve meat sauce with is one of them. Thin sauces are for thin pastas, thick sauces are for thick pastas. I'd only serve a meat ragù with big ribbons of tagliatelle or tubes of rigatoni. I mean, do what you want, but just don't tell me about it.

As long as you're...

simmering mince, onions, garlic and carrots in a red wine and tomato mix for an hour or so

... you're fine!

Maple Bacon Mac & Cheese

I have never not finished a bowl of Mac & Cheese and thought "I absolutely needed that". It's the kind of food you deserve in a world that stresses you sometimes to the point of cruelty.

No, it's not something you eat every single day but a pox on anybody that wants a diet or healthy version of Mac & Cheese. Enjoy this in its full, filthy glory.

I've only specified mature cheddar here but don't feel confined to such strict limitations. I often use three different cheeses but I wanted to keep this recipe in its simplest form for you to elaborate on top of as you see fit. But I draw a line with plastic cheese. I once saw a chef in Florida add those spookily orange Kraft singles into a pot of cheese sauce... behave now...

For the bacon, you could just buy rashers of maple bacon, I've definitely seen it in supermarkets but I always have both maple syrup and bacon in the house... so why the hell not...?

Serves 4

100 g macaroni pasta
20 g butter
1 tablespoon of plain flour
200 ml full fat milk
1 teaspoon of English mustard
A pinch of fresh nutmeg
100 g of grated mature cheddar cheese

For the maple bacon

4 - 6 rashers of streaky bacon
1 tablespoon of maple syrup



Preheat your oven to 200 °C and start cooking the pasta as per the packet tells you, but we're usually talking 9 minutes or so. This comes together quickly.

Meanwhile, melt the butter in another pan. Once the butter turns slightly golden, drop in the flour and stir to create a sand coloured paste. Cook this for a minute or so, stirring.

Pour in the milk and start whisking everything until the sauce begins to thicken. Add salt, pepper, the mustard and nutmeg and keep it bubbling gently. Now drain the pasta and pour into a roasting pan.

Add the cheese (keep a fistful back) to the white sauce and stir it in so that it melts and the white sauce goes all goey. Pour this over the macaroni and stir in the roasting dish. Sprinkle the cheese you held back over the top.

Now, place the bacon on a roasting tray and drizzling with a little maple syrup.

Place both the macaroni and bacon in the oven at the same time for 20 minutes until the macaroni is gold and bubbling and the bacon is burnished and crisp.

Remove from the oven and let everything rest for a bit before breaking the bacon up, scattering over the pasta and serving.

Or serve in individual pots as I've shown here in the picture and shove a rasher of bacon into each pot as a spoon. It's just for show though, let's be honest.

Also...

- As I said in my Beef Ragu on page 17, the white sauce in this recipe makes a very good bechamel layer in a lasagne. Remove the mustard (but amp up the salt and pepper) if you want an un-tampered white sauce. Keep the nutmeg though.
- If pasta is not your thing (I am judging you... maybe a little bit) you could also follow the same method but swap out the pasta for vegetables. Broccoli and cauliflower would be great here. Just cook them quickly in some boiling water first.
- In a similar vein, this sauce would also be great in a fish pie but leave out the cheese.
- Also, follow the same method for the white sauce but swap the milk for some beer. Pour the white sauce into a square baking tin and chill. When it's hard, slice the white block into slices, place on a piece of toast and shoved under a grill – makes a great rarebit!
- The Baked Feta on page 15 is also perfect to sprinkle on top of the Mac & Cheese before slipping it in the oven. If you already have the feta baked, just sprinkle it on before serving.
- There is no excuse for not having bacon on any and everything. Make the maple bacon here to go alongside the Pancakes on page 9 and everybody at the table is happy. Except vegetarians... sorry guys...

As long as you're...

adding cooked pasta to a mixture of flour, butter, milk and cheese and baking

... you're fine!

One Pan Chicken & Chorizo

There are two things that I could do at gunpoint without a second thought. One is rap Lisa Left Eye Lopes' verse in TLC's 'Waterfalls' and the other is cook this one-pan chicken dish.

Adapted from Nigella Lawson's *Spanish Chicken with Chorizo and Potatoes* (Kitchen, 2010) this recipe is so easy, delicious and curiously impressive that for years, this became the staple "first time cooking for my boyfriend" recipe that my friends and I turned to.

All you need here is a big tray and some foil. The foil over the chicken for the first half hour means you are steaming the chicken in the orange juice, meaning the chicken stays moist and melting. There are a few twists I've made on Nigella's original recipe but I feel that I'm allowed because food has to be in use and evolved to stay alive.

Also, if you need further convincing, three out of four couples who had this for their first cooked meal are still together. That's all I'm going to say.

Serves 3 - 4

2 red onions
6 skin-on chicken thighs
800 g of small potatoes
500 g of chorizo
1 orange
Handful of fresh coriander



Preheat the oven to 200 °C and grab a nice, big roasting pan. Slice your onions and lay the slices in the pan to create a bed and lay your chicken pieces on top.

Slice your potatoes into equal sized chunks; don't be militant about it though. Scatter them around the chicken pieces. Slice the chorizo into disks roughly the thickness of pound coins and scatter them in.

Grate the orange over the pan so everything is covered in sun coloured flecks, before halving it and squeezing the juice over everything. Mind the pips.

Drizzle some olive oil, scatter with salt and pepper and cover the tray with some foil.

Slip the tray into the preheated oven for an hour but halfway through, remove the foil and let it cook uncovered for the last 30 minutes.

I serve this by putting out some plates and slamming the pan directly on the table, letting people fend for themselves.

This meal wouldn't be complete without a tower of bread to sop up all of the orangey chorizo juices left over in the pan.

Thank me later.

Also...

- You will be the luckiest person walking if you manage to have any of this to see the pale light of leftovers. But if you do, absolutely shred up that chicken, place on a warm tortilla with some lettuce and a little hot sauce and it makes a brilliant makeshift taco.
- You can freestyle this one pan as you see fit. I know people who have thrown red wine into the mix along with the orange juice, some red peppers, some baby sweet corn, cauliflower – you can totally make it your own.
- If you want something with this kind of ease but resembles something a bit more traditional, you could remove the chorizo, swap the orange for a lemon (but reduce it down to one, not two), swap the coriander for rosemary and have yourself a Lemon & Rosemary Chicken and Potato Bake – the method stays the same

As long as you're...

roasting a tray of chicken on the bone and chopped potatoes in a drop of orange juice

... you're fine!

Malaysian Courgette & Chickpea Curry

I constantly look for shortcuts and quick ways to get to the flavour in all dishes. Over time, and speaking to a lot of cooks, I have found that curries are the most 'shortcutted' (not a word, roll with it) meal.

I don't know where this jar culture stemmed from. Okay, cooking a curry from scratch is not quick work but it's definitely just as easy. Once you've done it, you'll do it again. And I'm not above a jar of curry paste, absolutely not. But the steps for a really banging curry are so easy, I scarcely even think of reaching for a jar.

But picking one curry recipe for my go-to is hard as I vary up my curry recipes every time. If I had to pluck a consistent theme for my most cooked curries, those that borrow from Malaysian inspiration see my plates more than any other.

That's not to say this is a strictly Malaysian recipe, but inspired by their flavour profiles. Giving vegetables and pulses a technicolor burst of fiery warmth, cinnamon sweetness and creamy coconut. Perfect combinations.

Serves 3 - 4

- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 teaspoon of garam masala
- 1 teaspoon of coriander seeds
- ½ a teaspoon of turmeric
- 1 onion
- 1 clove of garlic
- 1 chilli
- 1 courgette
- 1 can of coconut milk
- 1 vegetable stock cube
- 2 tablespoons of soy sauce
- 1 lime
- 1 can of chickpeas
- A handful of fresh coriander



Temper your spices by heating the cinnamon stick, garam masala, coriander seeds and turmeric in a pan, pushing around and gently heating for 5 minutes.

Chop your onion, garlic and chilli as small as you can be bothered and add to the pan with some olive oil, salt and pepper and cook until they take on the colour of the spices and sweat down.

Slice up the courgette and add to the pan so that it too takes on the golden stain of the spices. Cook for about 10 minutes. Boil a kettle now as you'll need it in a second.

Pour in the can of coconut milk, add the vegetable stock cube and a splash of the boiling water. Add in the soy sauce and squeeze in the lime juice, stir well and bring to a bubble.

Drain your chickpeas and add them to the bubbling pan. Stir them into the mix, bring to a bubble again, clamp on a lid and drop the temperature down and let simmer for about 15-20 minutes.

Serve the curry scattered with some fresh coriander and with whatever accompaniment you see fit.

Also...

- Once you've got this recipe pattern locked down you can literally go anywhere you want. Swap out the courgette for other soft vegetables or even some chopped chicken or pork, swap out the chickpeas for other pulses, stir through some spinach or other green vegetables at the end – you can really make it your own.
- You could dumb this down if you really wanted and instead of going with the spice list I've mentioned, you could just start with a premade curry powder and carry on the recipe from there. The method stays the same.
- If you have a jar of curry paste and wanted to use that in this recipe, do away with the spices at the start and just fry the paste for a little bit before adding your onions etc.
- If you wanted you could omit the coriander seeds, up the vegetable stock and create a really punchy broth and have it with noodles for a quick coconut noodle soup.
- While I love serving this with a big, fluffy bowl of lime spritzed rice, I have also enjoyed this by the bowlful with nothing more than a pillowy naan bread and some chutney as an accompaniment.

As long as you're...

frying vegetables in the spice mix and adding
coconut milk and some seasonings

... you're fine!

Steak & Oven Chips with Brown Butter Sauce

I struggled with this recipe because not everybody likes their steak still moo'ing like I do. In which case, come to this recipe for the steak but please stay for the Brown Butter Sauce and Oven Chips.

My chips are a sigh of relief. Crisp on the outside, fluffy and pillowy on the inside but never once having seeing a deep fat fryer. There are so many ways to cook chips; so many in fact that it has rendered the unconfident cook to seek refuge in a big bulging bag of the frozen stuff.

My method is no more than chopping potatoes, rinsing them and baking them, I promise.

And this sauce. My god. My kingdom for this sauce. Imagine a silky, velvety, nutty 'dripping'. This is that. But it's butter. And better than I just described.

There is no real mystique to it... you're literally burning some butter until it becomes conker like glossy. You will look for ways to incorporate it into every dish once you make it. You will not stop dunking.

Serves 2

2 or 3 big potatoes
Some fresh thyme
2 big steaks (I loves a rump)
75 g butter
A handful of fresh thyme



Preheat your oven to 200 °C, boil a kettle and fill a big bowl with cold water from the tap. Cut the potatoes into chips. See the next page for my method to this, but to be honest, just 'chip them' however you see fit.

Drop the chips in the bowl of cold water and rustle them about to get the starch off of them. Drain the cold water out of the bowl and then pour in the boiling water from the kettle. Leave them sit in the hot water for 5 minutes.

Carefully drain the chips, pat them dry, put them on a roasting tray, drizzle with olive oil, scatter with salt, pepper and slip in the oven for 40 minutes, turning halfway through. You can let the chips rest on their tray while you steak up.

Get a frying pan real hot. Season one side of the steaks with olive oil, salt, pepper and place it seasoned side down on the hot pan. It'll make that sexy TSSST sound. Leave it sit untouched for 2 minutes and in this time, salt, pepper and oil the other side that's now facing up.

Flip the steak over and fry for a further 2 minutes. When the time is up, let the steak sit on a wooden chopping board to rest while you make your sauce.

Put the butter in a saucepan and cook on a medium heat. Let the fat curds separate and foam up until it turns a deep brown and smells rich. Take off the heat immediately and pour into a small bowl.

Serve with the chips, the sauce and sprinkle over some fresh thyme if you fancy the drama of it all.

Also...

- To cut potatoes into chips, slice a side off and place it cut side down on the board. Slice down on the potato and cut it into strips. Turn each individual strip on to its side and slice these into further strips roughly the width of your finger. Don't measure and cut at the same time, for god's sake.
- For those of us who are not rarers, for medium rare fry your steak for 3 -4 minutes a side. For medium, fry the steak for 4 -5 minutes a side. For well done, just cook it until you're happy and have a word with yourself.
- These really are fool proof chips. The kettle step is important because this softens and warms the potato before the hot oven, saving you having to actually boil them. But these chips should never be selfishly confined to just steak. You could make these to cook alongside the chicken on page 29 or even as dipping utensils for the guacamole and salsa on page 13.
- Same goes for the Brown Butter Sauce. Make a batch of this to go alongside the chicken I mentioned above and dip the wings into it... I promise you'll never go back. The Brown Butter is also a very good starting point for brownies... but that's neither here nor there... (there's a recipe for Brown Butter Brownies on my website... just saying).
- If you wanted to be really resourceful, if you have any of the soup of page 15 left, you could heat that up gently on a hob for the whole cooking time, adding a generous grinding of pepper to it and using it as a Mushroom Sauce *in lieu* of the Brown Butter.

As long as you're...

frying steak on a hot pan for a short time and serving it with some sliced and roasted potatoes

... you're fine!

Lemon Mushroom Risotto

When I think of stand-by dinners that I don't need a recipe for, a risotto just screams cosy familiarity to me.

In times of high-stress levels, there is a serene comfort in knowing that mindful stove-side repetitive stirring can produce such a delicious dinner. Rice sometimes scares people but a risotto is just stirring. Believe me.

As it were, a risotto was the first thing I ever cooked for a boy. It was a bacon and mushroom one to be exact. The boy in question accidentally trawled mud from his shoes all through my house and eventually told me my risotto was too salty. He didn't stay around long but appropriately salted risottos did. And cooking, as in life, is full of lessons to be learnt.

This particular recipe is as soothing as you can get. Meaty morsels of mushrooms provide a welcome earthiness to the creamy dish contrasting with the sharp spike of lemon. It is as calm to make as it is soothing to eat.

Serves 6 - 8

- 1 onion
- 1 stick of celery
- 1 tablespoon of butter
- 300 g of mushrooms
- 1 lemon
- 300 g of risotto rice like Arborio
- 1 cup of white wine
- 1 litre of vegetable stock
- A handful of grated parmesan (to serve)



Blitz your onion and celery to rubble in a food processor or chop it into small bits.

Melt the butter in your widest pan and add the onion/celery mix and fry with a little salt. Roughly chop the mushrooms and fling them in, cooking until they begin to soften and then grate over the zest of the lemon.

Tip in the rice and stir it into the mush until the grains turn glossy and get coated with the buttery oils. Pour in the glass of wine and bring it to a bubble, gently stirring until the rice absorbs all of the liquor.

Pour a cupful of the stock into the rice, leave to come to a bubble and stir. Here you can be a little more relaxed. The jist is that you continue adding the stock cupful-by-cupful and stirring in between. Just keep going, adding stock and stirring until the rice starts plumping up and softening.

Keep going. You'll know the risotto is done when the grains are soft and creamy. I like checking it's done by doing what I call the 'Moses Tide'. By this I mean drag a spoon down the middle of the pan and if the rice stays on either side and slowly moves back together with no liquid spilling in the middle, it's as good as done.

Squeeze the juice of the lemon into the pan and stir it in before serving, preferably with a generous grating of parmesan (and a drizzle of cream, if you're nasty)

Also...

- You can go wherever you like with this recipe. The template will always remain the same. You could swap the mushrooms out for other vegetables or even some morsels of salty bacon. Just add stock and stir.
- If you want this risotto to be super mushroomy, which is by no means a bad thing, right at the end you could stir through a little of the Mushroom Soup on page 15, which will also make it infinitely creamier.
- A risotto is also a very good vehicle for using up cold chicken. When I have some of the chicken on page 21 and 29 leftover, I tend to throw some of the shredded meat into this risotto towards the end and ensuring it's cooked through.
- Ignore purist who tell you a risotto is not possible without risotto rice. Sure, it makes it easier, but if you want to use white or brown rice, go for it. It will just take a little longer to cook and as a result you'll need a little more stock. But the method stays exactly the same, I promise.
- You could make this sweet by using the very same method. Throw the rice straight in the pan with the butter and a little scattering of sugar and add some warm milk and vanilla extract the same way you would with stock, stirring as you go. Add a tiny splash of double cream at the end and you've got a wonderfully soothing, nursery style rice pudding. Dollop of jam on top optional, of course.

As long as you're...

stirring a pan of oniony things and rice in a pan and gradually adding stock as you go

... you're fine!

Thyme Butter Roast Chicken

My love for a chicken will never see bounds. Whether its wings that are crumbed and dunked in hot sauce or the whole damn bird all plump and dripping, chicken has a special place in my life.

A roast chicken tends to be the dish I want to cook the most when I return from a holiday or a big absence from my Kitchen. It fills the house with a welcome, snuggly scent and gives me a warm comfort that in addition to the meal for which it was roasted for, I now also have leftovers to cover me for a few days.

The fact it's easy to cook is just a bonus.

Everybody has their own way of cooking chicken but I have found that cranking your oven up to the highest setting, slipping the buttered bird into the blistering oven and immediately turning down the heat provides the juiciest and most succulent meat.

Go nuts with the accompaniments. Potatoes are always a good start, I'm just saying. A potato and a vegetable is all you need to make it a shy roast.

Serves roughly 3 – 4 (maybe 5 – 6 with some restraint)

1.6 kg medium chicken (room temperature... felt the need to stress)

1 onion

1 carrot

100 g of butter

3 garlic cloves

1 lemon

A handful of fresh thyme strands



Preheat your oven to 220 °C or as high as it will go. Cut your onion and carrots into rough slices and lay them flat in a big roasting tray. Salt and pepper them and drizzle with some oil.

Put the butter in a bowl and grate in one of the garlic cloves, grate in the lemon zest and mix in the thyme leaves. Beat this until everything is thoroughly combined and soft.

Using your hands, don't be a baby; start spreading the thyme butter over the chicken. Make sure you get it into every nook and cranny, give the damn thing a good massage.

Slice the lemon in half and shove it into the bird's bum along with any leftover thyme strands. Bash the remaining garlic cloves so that they're squished out of their skins. Slip them into the bird too.

Place the bird on the vegetable bed and sprinkle it generously with salt and pepper. Slip in the hot oven and turn the temperature down immediately to 200 °C and leave to cook for an hour. Once the hour is up, turn the oven to 220 °C and allow to cook for a further 15 minutes.

Pull the chicken out of the oven and let it rest, covered for about 15 minutes. In this resting time, you could make a gravy (see next page) but otherwise, after resting, it's good to carve and serve as you see fit.

Also...

- Roasting the chicken on the bed of onions and carrots provides a great base for a gentle chicken gravy. When your chicken is resting, if you're using a metal tray, you could pop it straight on the hob (otherwise transfer to a suitable pot). Let the onions/carrots sizzle in the chicken juices, add a tablespoon of flour and stir. Once the flour combines with the vegetables to create a thickish paste, add in half a litre of stock and stir, cooking on a gentle heat until it begins to thicken. Add some salt and pepper to taste. It will be light gravy, but you could umami it up a little with a teaspoon of Marmite, if you dare. A drop of wine before the stock would also be good.
- While this chicken recipe is designed to serve people lucky enough to be in the moment, it goes without saying that this will give you endless meals with leftovers. Shred the chicken and add to the curry on page 23 or even stir through the risotto on page 27.
- A leftover chicken breast is really good tossed up with lots of ginger, garlic and soy with some sugar snaps and noodles whereas any leftover legs I like ripped up and served in a mustard and mayo heavy sandwich. Plastic white bread and lots of butter, of course.
- Don't get rid of the carcass. Add it to a pot of vegetables you need to get rid with some water and salt of for a few hours and gift yourself the lifesaving elixir of chicken stock – perfect for the soup on page 15. Do this with any bones actually. I often wash up rib bones and boil them for a good stock.

As long as you're...

smothering a chicken carcass with herbed butter and roasting for an hour or so

... you're fine!

Salted Chocolate Chip Cookies

There's something to be said about the fact that Monica Gellar from *Friends* so badly wanted to be known as 'the mom who makes the best cookies'.

Cookies say I love you. Cookies say I'm homemade. Cookies say sure, you can have one more and you won't be judged - I'm only small. In short, cookies are the easiest and quickest way to put a homemade sweet treat on the table and give someone a hug at the same time.

This method here is lovingly borrowed and tweaked from Alison Roman (from her 2017 book *Dining In*) where the body of the cookie takes on that of a shortbread biscuit, studded with hunks of smoky, sweet chocolate. That doesn't mean they don't retain a crunch, which let's be fair, is what we really want from a cookie.

I wish Monica had this recipe, she would have been fine.

Makes 12 cookies

125 g of butter
55 g of caster sugar
30 g of soft brown sugar
½ teaspoon of vanilla extract
100 g of dark chocolate
170 g of plain flour
A generous pinch of sea salt flakes



In a big bowl drop in the butter, sugars and vanilla extract and beat together until they're fully mixed.

Using a knife, chop your chocolate into a mix of chunks and dusty chocolate rubble. Add this into the butter along with the flour and mix,

You're trying to create a firm dough, so it may seem slightly tough, but don't worry - that's what we want. Once the mix starts coming together, it's much easier to get your hands in and form until all of the buttery and flour lumps are gone.

Snap the dough into two equal chunks and wrap them each in cling film. Roll these dough balls into long but thick cylinders and pop in the fridge to chill.

When you're ready to bake, preheat the oven to 180 °C and line a baking tray with some parchment. Grab your dough and bang each end on the counter to flatten the ends. Unwrap and slice the dough into disks roughly the thickness of a finger.

Place each cookie on the sheet, sprinkle with some sea salt and bake for 15 minutes. You may need to do this in two batches depending on how big your roasting tray is.

Let them rest on the tray for 10 minutes if you can before devouring,

Also...

- You could absolutely make these cookies as you see fit once you have the method sorted. Swap out the chocolate for white chocolate or a flavoured chocolate; add in some hazelnuts or pecan nuts... the dough will still bake the same.
- The dough can easily be frozen. When you need them in cookie emergencies (we've all been there) you can slice what you need and bake in the oven but add an extra 10 minutes on the cooking time.
- Something I love adding to cookies is glacé cherries. Don't throw stones at me, I know they're sugary and plastic but they make the cookies feel so gooey against all that crunch. I really recommend it.
- If you want to go a bit nuts with your cookie, try sprinkling some crushed up ready salted crisps on the cookie before baking it. I haven't gone insane I promise. It's a salty crunch. Try it. Thank me later.
- A step I omitted from Roman's original recipe was her addition of egg wash. I didn't omit it because I felt it was unnecessary, I'm just lazy (I'm sure it has its benefits, sorry Al) I will however note that once your dough is chilled, Roman recommends brushing the dough with some beaten egg and then rolling the dough cylinder in some crunchy brown sugar before slicing and baking. It is a very delicious step, but I didn't feel it was essential.

As long as you're...

making a cookie dough, chilling it, slicing it and
baking it

... you're fine!

Party Cake

There is always one friend in the group that bakes the party cake. Despite that you are currently reading the eBook of somebody who cooks a lot, I hate to break it to you, in my circle I'm not that friend.

That friend is Bronwen who on request, often bakes what we have anointed her Sky Cake. Named so because despite tasting like every jubilant memory of your childhood birthdays, it looks like she dropped it from the sky.

This recipe is not Bronwen's Sky Cake but a pimped up, thickly buttercreamed sponge that is fit for any celebration. That's why this recipe is titled a Party Cake. I would never confine such a recipe to just celebrating a birth. I'd wheel this out if I needed to celebrate waking up, if I'm honest.

And yes that is custard powder you see and I urge you to embrace the childish joy and bounce it brings to the sponge.

Serves 10 but 6 greedy people realistically

170 g of butter
330 g of plain flour
2 tablespoons of custard powder
330 g caster sugar
1 tablespoon of baking powder
3 eggs
180 ml of full fat milk
1 tablespoon of vanilla extract

For the buttercream

100 g butter
300 g of icing sugar
1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
70 ml double cream



Preheat your oven to 180 °C and grease and line two 23 cm cake tins.

In a big bowl combine the butter, flour, custard powder, sugar and baking powder and beat until you get a scruffy looking breadcrumb mix.

Crack in the eggs, pour in the milk and vanilla extract and beat everything together until the mixture is airy and has no lumps.

Divide the batter between the two tins, smooth the tops of the cake and slide them in the oven for 25 minutes until a skewer can be inserted into the cake and come out clean.

Let the cakes sit in their tins for about 20 minutes to cool before turning them out onto a wire rack to cool completely.

While they cool, make your buttercream.

Put the butter in a big bowl and whisk until its soft (so much easier with an electric whisk). Now add rest of the ingredients and mix. You will be covered in icing sugar, but embrace it.

Now you'll have your sponges and your buttercream and it's up to you where you go from here but go to the next page for some ideas.

Also...

- Now I'm not going to tell any lies. If you want a cake iced all over, it's very easy to make but it does require some patience. So what you'll need to do is turn one of the sponges upside down and layer cream on the flat top. Now place the other sponge topside down on this cream. Cover the whole thing with a small amount of the buttercream. You could leave it like this (looks quite naked and rustic actually) or, if you want to cover it properly, pop it in the fridge for half hour. Once firm, take it out and cover in more icing to conceal the unfinished look and chill again. To get the icing smooth, dip a spoon in some hot water and run the spoon over the top and sides so the warm metal gently smooth's the surfaces.
- If you want the sprinkle look you see on the previous page, once you've smoothed your cake with a warm spoon, empty 160 g of sprinkles into a flat roasting tray. Using patient hands, roll the iced cake like a wheel up and down the tray of sprinkles, going back and forth until you cover the sides. Place the cake on a plate and use your hands to cover the top, patting sprinkles into any gaps you may have missed. Be prepared for a clean-up mind. You'll be like Lady Macbeth seeing those bloody sprinkle spots everywhere you look for days.
- Or you could just put the buttercream in the middle layer and a generous dollop on top. Or you could go full on pimped up Victoria and put jam in the middle. Let's be honest, no one will complain about cake however which way you serve it.

As long as you're...

baking a cake batter and covering it in
buttercream

... you're fine!

Rosé Sangria

And here is my half recipe.

I only consider it a half recipe because I weirdly associate recipes with something I can eat... a recipe for something I can drink feels incomplete. Even martinis have the nerve to feature olives and stuff and try and masquerade as a snack.

But, while I generally would just burst open a Prosecco or fling out some beer bottles as a matter of instinct, I think it is always valuable to have a cocktail in your back pocket for when the times calls. But not literally in your pocket. I can barely hold a drink when I'm half cut let alone smuggle one in my clothes.

This light, fresh yet zingy and crisp little number was born during lockdown when my boyfriend and I tried to recreate a holiday in the apartment. We opened up the balcony doors, played 'beach SFX' in the background, sunbathed and threw these back like tomorrow wasn't promised.

Which it wasn't because Coronavirus got us by the balls, but hey... it's as close to a holiday as we could get at the time!

Serves a few. Depends how much your mates like to drink.

Lots of ice
A good handful of frozen berries
2 x 750ml bottle of rosé wine
800 ml of fizzy lemonade
2 oranges



Simply put, in a big jug, throw in a good few fistfuls of ice and follow this by a few fistfuls of frozen berries, I go with blackberries.

It's important to use frozen berries here and not fresh as the berries will gently thaw as you drink, spiking the cocktail with sweet fruit juices as opposed to fresh fruit which will just soften.

Now pour in the bottles of rosé. Yes. The whole bottle followed by the lemonade.

Slice the orange in half and squeeze in the juice of one half. Slice the other orange up into half-moons.

Stir everything up in the jug and pour into your chosen glasses, finishing it off with a garnish of orange.

Blast the 'beach SFX' music and imagine you're somewhere hot.

Also...

- There is nothing to add to this. I don't want you to have anything left over. I want you to make more until you don't have any left to make and then have yourself a lovely time.
- But of course, please drink responsibly and don't drive and/or text an ex.

As long as you're...

mixing rosé with some frozen fruit, some
lemonade and a squeeze of orange

... you're fine!



For my family, friends and readers – my lines for which all three are blurred – thank you for tolerating and celebrating me in equal measures.

This eBook is for you.