

Jack Monroe

**30 THRIFTY
MEALS
FOR LESS**

A free ebook of delicious, low-cost recipes



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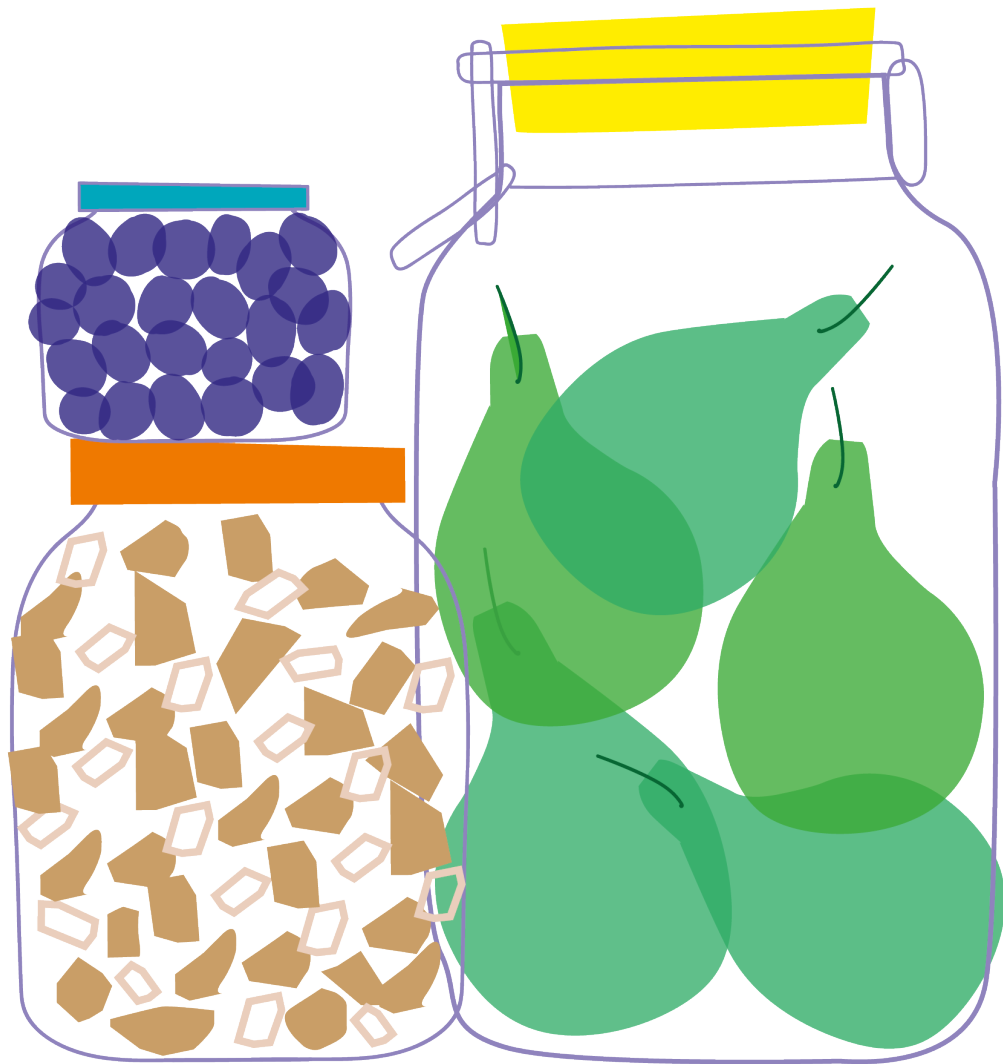
INTRODUCTION

Almost a decade sits between me and my accidentally viral blog post, *Hunger Hurts*, where I documented the realities of life as a job-searching single mother in the pit of both a recession and depression, snarled up in a confusing and hostile welfare maze, clinging to my young son with an irrational fear of losing him because he was all I had in the world. As I write this today, I am no longer living in the grinding, miserable poverty of my previous years, but I am still incredibly careful with how I cook, spend, shop and keep house. I continue to talk and write about poverty because it is incredibly rare for working-class voices to break through to mainstream media platforms, and lived experiences of poverty are often shrouded in the apologetic whispers of shame, isolation, loneliness, depression, desolation and denial.

Over the last decade the queues at the food banks have grown larger, as they have been casually and deliberately ingrained into an informal support structure for the brutally decimated welfare and social care support system. Where once queuing for a food parcel in the sixth richest economy in the world would have been a stain on our national conscience, now it's such a casual part of popular culture that collection baskets are in almost every supermarket, and used as background props in television game shows. While I vehemently abhor the need for emergency food aid in this country, I also urge people to support their local food bank, as and when you can. Proselytizing about the indignity of unmet basic human needs is futile when in the immediate here and now, millions of our neighbours are going hungry behind closed doors. First we feed the people, then we plan the revolution.

Every item donated to a food bank goes directly to a person in need in your community who, without your help, may have gone hungry. And until not one single person needs the help of a food bank or other community hunger-relief organization in this country, those of us who can afford to give a little to keep their vital and often literally life-saving work going, should try to do so. Pasta, rice, ambient meals like tinned curries, noodle pots and packets, tinned meats and fish, cereals, long-life milk, period products, hearty big soups, it all helps.

In this eBook you will find a handful of the recipes from my cookbooks that have kept me and my Small Boy – who isn't so small any more – going for the last ten years. I hope you find some of it mildly inspiring, a bit useful and adaptable for your own household needs and circumstances. Frugality can be exhausting, complicated and overwhelming; I've tried here to make some elements of it genuinely enjoyable, simple and very gently life-changing instead. It won't make everything easier overnight, but it may make some things a little better, one day, one tin of budget tomatoes, one extra pound in your pocket, at a time.



BREADS AND BREAKFAST

RASPBERRY AND LEMON CURD BAKED OATS [Ⓟ]

You can use any fresh or frozen berries in this simple baked oats recipe – or even dollops of jam or applesauce at a pinch! The lemon curd is a lovely touch, but marmalade works as a substitute if you don't have any in. Failing that, a dash of lemon juice and a sprinkling of sugar provides the same contrasting tart sweetness in a tight spot.

SERVES 2

oil, for greasing
60g porridge oats
120g natural yoghurt
120g raspberries or
other berries
2–4 tbsp lemon
curd, to taste

Preheat the oven to 160°C/fan 140°C/325°F/gas 3 and make sure there is a shelf roughly in the centre of it. Lightly grease a 20cm cake tin or roasting tin.

Weigh your porridge oats into your tin – there's no point messing up a mixing bowl here and creating more washing up! Add your yoghurt, then your berries, and stir well to combine.

Dollop the lemon curd on top, and spread with the back of a spoon to lightly coat the top layer, then place in the oven.

Bake for 40 minutes, until the oats are swollen and slightly golden at the edges.

Remove carefully from the oven and serve immediately. You can enjoy these as they are, or add a splash of milk or natural yoghurt if you like.

TO KEEP: Leftovers can be chilled in the fridge and enjoyed warm or cold over the next 3 days.



RHUBARB AND CUSTARD PANCAKES ^{Ve}

My little family loves pancakes and I try to come up with new ones every weekend for them to try, eaten in bed with the weekend newspapers and a comic for Small Boy. These were a particular hit; although the first time I made them I blended the rhubarb in a small bullet blender to make it less detectable for my increasingly fussy son.

SERVES 4

350g self-raising flour
½ tsp salt
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
or 2 tbsp baking powder
300g tinned custard
300ml milk (UHT is fine)
2 eggs
½ x 600g tin of rhubarb
– use the rest on top!
butter or oil, for cooking

TIPS: *The rhubarb can be replaced with the same quantity of any very soft tinned fruit. To make the pancakes vegan, simply replace the egg with applesauce and use plant-based milk and soya custard.*

First combine the flour, salt and bicarbonate of soda or baking powder in a large mixing bowl, and stir well to evenly distribute.

In a separate bowl, pour in the custard and thin with a little of the milk. Add the rest of the milk gradually, stirring, until it is all incorporated in a loose, liquidy mixture. If you have a small blender, you can whizz them together in that, but I do it by hand to save on washing up. You have to do it slowly, though, or else you run the risk of ending up with a milk soup and lumps of custard floating in it, so patience is a virtue here!

Make a well – a sort of hole – in the centre of the dry ingredients. Tip in the custardy milk, crack in the eggs and mix well to form a thick batter.

Drain the rhubarb, keeping the syrup to drizzle on the pancakes later. Tip the rhubarb into the pancake mix and stir briskly. Pop the whole lot in the fridge to chill out for half an hour or so – the best pancakes are made when cold, cold batter hits a hot, hot pan, because . . . science.

When the batter is nice and chilled, preheat your oven to 160°C (fan 140°C/320°F/gas 3) and place a clean baking tray on the middle shelf. This is so that you can keep your pancakes warm as you cook them in batches, and it also gives them a little rise, for extra fluffy thickness.

Warm the largest frying pan that you can find. Dollop in a little butter or oil, and crank that heat up until it's hot but not smoking. Turn the heat OFF immediately if it starts to smoke, remove the pan, allow it to cool, rinse it with cold water and start again. Always opt for five seconds' inconvenience over a potential house fire, and pay close attention to your pan!

When the pan is hot, dollop a hefty spoon of batter onto it, and another, and another, leaving a gap between each pancake to allow you to turn them over. Cook for a few minutes until light golden and starting to set before turning them over with a spatula, and cook for a few minutes more. Transfer to your warm baking tray while you cook the rest. When all the batter is used up, serve with the reserved syrup, and enjoy.

BREAKFAST BURRITOS ^{Ve}

This recipe is known affectionately in my household as 'breakfast burritos', such is my penchant for making so much of the mixture that we usually end up having it for breakfast the next day as well. The defining characteristics of a classic burrito – at least, those that I have eaten in my lifetime, and that is a great number – is a tortilla wrapped into a closed-ended cylinder, stuffed generously with refried beans, slow-cooked meat, rice, any variation on cheese, salsa in a range of heats, lettuce and guacamole. I confess, to keep things simple, I buy in my guacamole and salsa most of the time. When I want to be a culinary martyr, I'll knock up my own, but most supermarkets make halfway decent versions of them these days.

For vegan 'cheese', I recommend Follow Your Heart Cheddar Shreds, or FYH Pepperjack-style slices for a Tex-Mex kick. For tortilla wraps, check the back of the packaging carefully – most supermarket wraps are suitable for vegans, but they occasionally contain milk, so keep an eye out.

MAKES 4 GENEROUS BURRITOS

1 large onion
1 x 400g tin of jackfruit
in water – I like
Summer Pride
1 tbsp smoked paprika
1 tbsp cumin, seeds
or ground
1 tbsp any cooking oil
4 fat cloves of garlic
1 x 400g tin of
black beans
1 x 400g tin of
chopped tomatoes
100g plain white rice
A few handfuls lettuce
120g vegan 'cheese'
(see intro note)
4 large tortilla wraps

To serve

Shop-bought guacamole
Shop-bought salsa

First peel and finely slice your onion, and toss into a large mixing bowl. Drain the jackfruit and thoroughly squeeze out any excess juices. Separate the jackfruit with your fingers and add to the onion. Sprinkle over the paprika and cumin, add the oil, and finely grate in the garlic. Drain the black beans and add to the bowl. Mix all together, cover and chill for at least an hour so it all marinates.

When the jackfruit, onions and beans have marinated, tip into a large, non-stick pan over a medium heat. Cook for 20 minutes, then pour over the tomatoes and cook for 20 minutes more.

Pour the rice into a medium saucepan and add double the volume of water. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 18–20 minutes, or until the rice is soft and swollen. Drain if needed (in an ideal world, the rice would absorb all of the water, but it took me a long time to get that right, so don't beat yourself up if there's a little water left in your pan), then set to one side.

Finely slice your lettuce and grate your 'cheese', and get your guacamole and salsa in position.

To assemble your burrito, lay the tortilla in one hand. Spoon rice into the centre, then beans, then add lettuce, 'cheese', guac and salsa. Fold up the bottom a quarter of the way up, then roll tightly into a cylinder, sealing with a dab of guac. Eat immediately, or chill for later, and enjoy.



BREAKFAST MUCKMUFFIN [Ⓥ]

I started with a standard McMuffin as my point of reference for this recipe, thinking I would recreate the beef patty and egg in a white muffin with a slice of American cheese. It's not where I ended up. Lentils and onions and veg gave way to a haggis-style patty, and the rest was history. Serve in a white muffin, lightly toasted, with a generous dollop of ketchup.

SERVES 4–6

2 large onions
2 large carrots
10 meaty mushrooms
– chestnuts, shiitakes
or baby portobellos
4 fat cloves of garlic
1 tbsp light cooking oil,
plus extra for frying
and greasing
½ tsp grated nutmeg
½ tsp ground allspice
A few pinches of salt
and a generous grind
of black pepper
220ml chicken-style or
vegetable stock
75g dried red lentils
75g dried brown lentils
75g porridge oats
2–4 tbsp stuffing mix
1 tbsp chopped
sage leaves
1 tbsp nutritional
yeast (optional)
plain flour, for dusting

To serve

4 white muffins,
sliced in half
8 slices of cheese
Tomato ketchup

Finely grate or very finely dice the onions, and wash and finely grate the carrots into a large mixing bowl. Grate the mushrooms, and peel and finely chop the garlic. If you have a small bullet blender or food processor, you can speed up this part simply by roughly chopping the onion and garlic and halving the carrots, slinging them all in with the mushrooms and blitzing everything to smithereens.

Add all the vegetables to a large non-stick frying or sauté pan, and measure in the oil, nutmeg, allspice, salt and pepper. Cook on the smallest hob ring on a very low heat for 15 minutes, until the onion starts to soften but not brown at all, and stir intermittently to disturb it and prevent it sticking and burning.

Pour over the stock. Thoroughly rinse the lentils in a sieve or colander, under a cold tap, and add to the pan. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer, and cook for 40 minutes until the lentils are very soft and swollen. Add the porridge oats, stuffing mix, sage and nutritional yeast, if using, and cook for 10 minutes more, stirring to combine. The oats and lentils will absorb the liquid so you may need to add a splash more, but too much will make the patty mixture too sloppy, so try not to go overboard.

When the porridge oats and stuffing mix are cooked and the mixture is thick, remove from the heat and tip into a mixing bowl. Allow to cool and then transfer to the fridge to firm up for an hour, or overnight.

When the mixture is cool and firm, remove it from the fridge. Heat a little oil in a non-stick frying or sauté pan. Break off a piece with lightly floured hands, the size of an average egg. Roll it in your hands to form a ball, adding a little more flour if it sticks to your palms. You want a patty the width of your muffin, and quite thin – this helps it to crisp up and cook through on both sides, and stops the dreaded 'soft middle' that vegetarian and vegan patties can fall victim to. You will be putting two patties in each muffin for the 'double muckmuffin' experience, so don't worry if they look a little flimsy at this stage.

If cooking for a crowd, preheat your oven to 160°C (fan 140°C/325°F/gas 3) and place a lightly greased baking tray on the middle shelf, and one on the

shelf above. Fry each patty on a medium-high heat for 6 minutes on one side, and 4 minutes on the other. Remove and transfer to the oven, and repeat until all the mixture is used up.

Place your muffins on the top shelf of the oven for a few minutes to toast. Remove and assemble: bottom half of the muffin on the plate, patty, cheese, patty, cheese, ketchup, top half. Enjoy!

COCONUT MILK SODA BREAD ^{Ve}

Sometimes I think I want another baby, and so I go to bake some bread while I mull it over. A 40-minute incubation period later, and I'm rocking a warm snuggly bundle against my hip that will sleep all night, not chew my nipple or eject sour milk down my back, and you know, I'm over it. This is one of those recipes for one of those days, and based on my original easy-peasy soda bread, but suitable for vegans and lactose-intolerant folk, too. If you want to use cow's milk instead, as coconut can be a little pricey, feel free. This is a small loaf, but the recipe can be doubled or tripled for larger homes – just turn the oven down to 160°C/325°F/gas 3 after the first half an hour and add an extra 30 minutes of cooking at the end.

250g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
1 level tsp bicarbonate of soda
2 tsp lemon juice, fresh or bottled
180ml coconut milk, from a tin (pop the rest in a different container in the fridge to use in the next three days, but it cannot be stored in the tin)

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas 4 and dust a baking tray with flour.

Mix the flour and bicarb together in a large mixing bowl until evenly distributed. Soda bread doesn't take much kneading, so it's better to evenly scatter the bicarb throughout when mixing than end up with a wonky loaf.

Squeeze or pour the lemon juice into the coconut milk, depending on whether you are using a fresh lemon or the bottled stuff – I have never noticed a difference between the two in cooking and always keep a bottle kicking around.

Make a well (a kind of hole) in the middle of the dry ingredients and pour in the milk and lemon juice mixture. Mix firmly but briefly until just combined, then tip out the dough onto a floured worktop. Knead for 30 seconds, no more, just to bring it together. Pat it into shape and pop it on the baking tray.

Score the loaf down the middle – that is, cut it lightly with a sharp knife, then dust the top with flour from your work surface. Bake for 40 minutes. Allow to cool slightly on the tray, then slice and enjoy. Store in an airtight bag or container and keep for up to 3 days, or in the freezer for up to 3 months.

COURGETTE AND CHEESE SODA BREAD [Ⓟ]

Delicious when eaten soft and warm from the oven, toasted with marmalade spread thickly on top, as a chunky homage to a grilled cheese, or doused in a beaten egg and gently fried for an irreverently Irish twist on French toast.

MAKES 1 DECENT-SIZED LOAF

oil, for greasing
250ml milk
2 tbsp lemon juice, fresh or bottled
400g self-raising flour
1 ½ level tsp bicarbonate of soda
1 large courgette or 2 small ones, finely or thickly grated according to preference
50g strong cheese: mature Cheddar, feta or Greek-style salad cheese, blue cheese all work here

Preheat the oven to 160°C/fan 140°C/325°F/gas 3 and make sure there is a shelf at or just below the centre of it. Lightly grease a 450g loaf tin and set to one side.

Measure the milk into a jug or mug and add the lemon juice, squeezing in the juice from a lemon half or measuring in the bottled stuff. Stir to combine and stand it to one side for about 10 minutes to curdle. It will look grim, but it's doing science, so give it the respect it deserves.

Meanwhile, weigh the flour into a large mixing bowl and add the bicarbonate of soda. Mix through thoroughly. Fold the courgette and the cheese through to distribute evenly, but do not overmix, as the moisture can start to form little clumps of dough, and we don't want that just yet.

Pour the curdled milk and lemon juice into the centre of the bowl and mix well to form a very sticky dough. This doesn't need kneading, so if it's a little goopy, that's absolutely ideal.

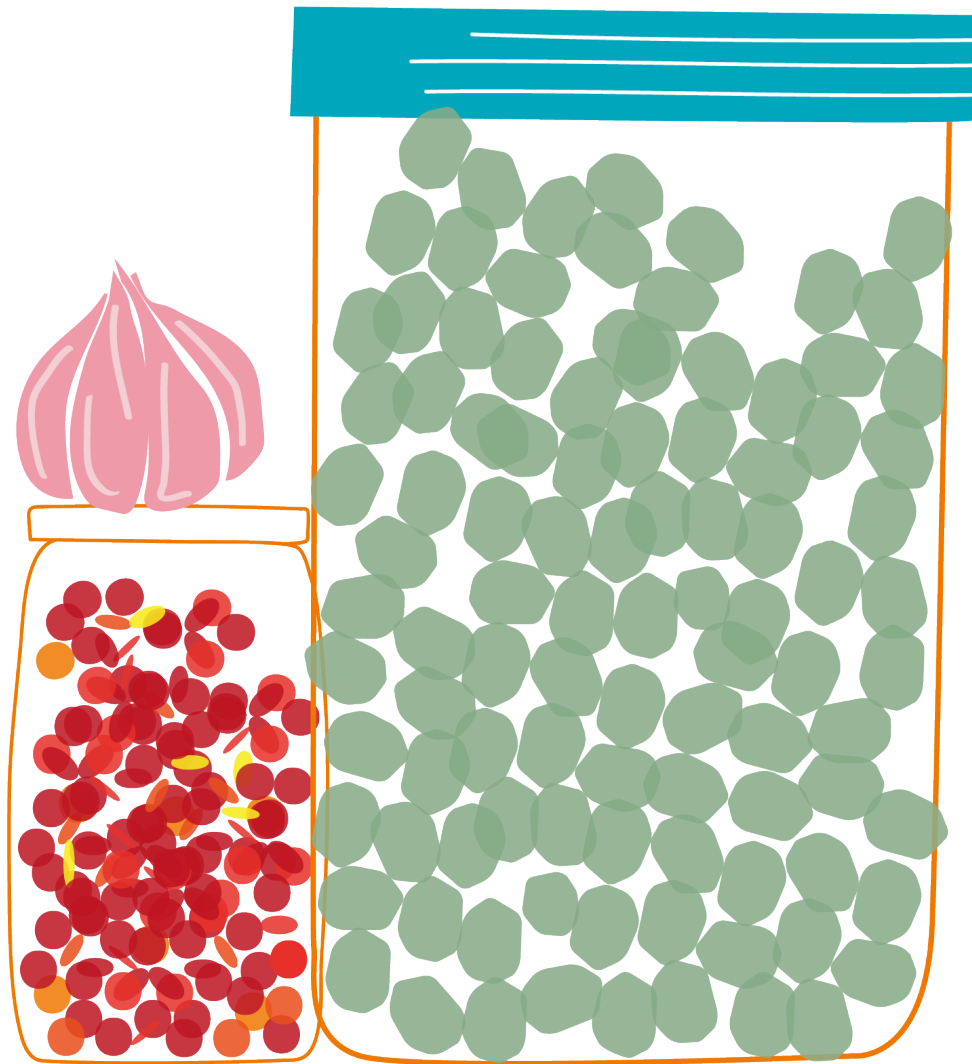
Tip the dough into your prepared loaf tin and shake gently to distribute it into the corners. Don't worry about smoothing the top – soda bread is meant to be delightfully knobby! Pop it into the oven on the middle shelf and bake for 1 hour, or until a knife inserted in the centre comes out completely clean.

Remove the tin from the oven and allow to cool for 30 minutes, before turning out the loaf onto a wire rack to cool completely. You can leave it in the tin if you don't have a wire rack, but bear in mind that this retains some of the moisture from residual steam, and the bread will be a little softer and heavier for it. Not a bad thing, by any means.

Slice and serve warm or allow to cool completely and wrap in cling film or tin foil to keep fresh.

TO KEEP: Keep tightly wrapped or in an airtight container for 2–3 days, or slice and freeze for up to 4 months.





LIGHT BITES

THE JACK REUBEN ^{Ve}

I've eaten a lot of salt beef sandwiches in my life: fat heavy numbers from Baker Street cafes that I could barely get my sizeable jaw around, midnight bagels in taxis passing through Brick Lane, New York food trucks, and supermarket pretenders that didn't quite hit the spot but were better than not having one at all.

This is the undisputed king of all sandwiches, so I set about trying to create a vegan version that would be just as delicious in its own right, while staying as faithful as possible to the original. This took a few tries; I marinated in beer, in powdered mushroom stock, in dark hoppy ales and Bisto granules, before I decided to just let the flavours speak for themselves and stop trying to imitate the actual beef. The result is crisp but tender, dry enough but with a juicy bite and a tangy, salty, peppery familiarity, something that's equally at home in a toasted white bagel as a hunk of dark, sweet rye bread.

MAKES 2

- 1 x 400g tin of jackfruit in brine – I like Summer Pride
- 1 cooked small red beetroot
- 1 tsp vinegar – any clear kind
- 1 tsp each of salt and black pepper
- ½ tsp smoked paprika
- 2 tbsps light cooking oil, plus extra for frying

For the dressing

- 1 tsp finely chopped dill pickle
- 1 tsp finely chopped onion
- 2 tbsps Vegan Mayo
- 2 tbsps ketchup
- 1 tsp horseradish, if available, or English mustard
- A dash of hot sauce

To serve

- 2 bagels, sliced, or 4 slices rye bread
- Sauerkraut
- Dill pickles, thinly sliced
- 2 slices smoked vegan 'cheese'

First drain your jackfruit through a fine-mesh sieve. Squeeze the excess liquid using your hands to push it against the sieve, until the fruit feels fairly dry, then pop it into a large mixing bowl.

Finely grate the beetroot over the top. Add the vinegar, salt and pepper, paprika and oil. Break up the jackfruit with a fork or spoon into tiny shreds so the marinade soaks right in. Leave for an hour in the fridge.

Meanwhile, make your dressing. Place the dill pickle in a small bowl with the onion. Add the Vegan Mayo, ketchup, horseradish or mustard and hot sauce, and stir well to combine. Put it in the fridge until required.

When the jackfruit is well marinated, tip it into a large non-stick frying pan. I prefer to do mine in a wok, but that's because I like the space to shove it all around a bit. A normal frying pan will do just fine. Add a splash of oil and cook on a high heat for a few minutes until it starts to sizzle, then reduce to a medium heat and cook for 15–20 minutes more, stirring occasionally to disturb it. You want the jackfruit to be slightly crisp at some of its edges, with a dry-but-juicy texture to imitate the salt beef.

Toast your bread – whether a bagel or rye bread – lightly on both sides. Now you need to move quickly. Smother the base layer with your jackfruit. Pile it high. Add sauerkraut, pickles and 'cheese'. Top with dressing. Pop the other slice on top. Halve it if you please – I prefer not to. Devour, over a plate, to catch all that will inevitably plop out the other side as soon as you take a bite. If it's not leaking, it's not full enough. There is no gracious way to eat this, you just have to get on with it! And enjoy.





ROASTED COURGETTE AND RED LENTIL SOUP

Courgettes, when in season, are cheap and abundant, and even when they're not they're still one of the more reasonably priced vegetables for their weight and size. Roasting gives them a lightly smokey, caramelized flavour and dispenses with some of the excess water that they hold, concentrating their often-overlooked qualities into a surprisingly tasty morsel. Red lentils, on the other hand, can be quite dull, so the balsamic vinegar in this recipe does a lot of work in marrying the two together. If you don't have any balsamic, you can use red, white or cider vinegar, with a teaspoon of sugar or sweetener of your choice to replicate the acidity and background sweetness. It won't be exactly the same, but it will be delicious.

MAKES 4 GENEROUS BOWLS

1 tbsp cooking oil
700g courgettes (around
3 medium-sized ones)
1 whole head of garlic
2 large onions,
red or white
black pepper, to taste
220g dried red lentils
450ml chicken stock
1 tbsp lemon juice
2 tsp balsamic vinegar

TIP: Red lentils will hold a lot of water, so check to ensure you do not need to top up your pan; should they start to dry out a little, add an extra splash of water as required.

Preheat the oven to 190°C/fan 170°C/375°F/gas 5, and make sure there is a shelf in the centre of it. Lightly grease the largest roasting tin that you have that will fit in your oven. Thickly slice the courgettes using the whole vegetable, including the ends, only discarding any particularly tough pieces of the top stalk; the roasting process will pleasantly soften everything, right down to the little button on the bottom.

Quarter your slices and toss into your lightly greased roasting tin. Peel the garlic cloves and add those too. Quarter your onions and peel away the papery outer skin, then place them evenly throughout your roasting tin. Season everything generously with black pepper and roast in the oven for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, bring a medium pan of unsalted water to the boil and add your red lentils. Once boiling, reduce the heat to a simmer and cover and cook gently for 40 minutes while the courgettes roast.

When your lentils are soft and swollen and your courgettes caramelized and sticky, remove the courgettes from the oven, then drain and thoroughly rinse your lentils under a cold tap. Add both to your blender with the chicken stock, blend until smooth, and then return to your pan. Add the lemon juice and balsamic vinegar and continue to cook on a very low heat for 10 minutes to thicken and reduce. Season to taste with black pepper and a splash more vinegar, if required, and serve hot.

TO KEEP: Allow to cool completely then store in the fridge in food storage bags, clean jars or airtight food-safe containers for up to 3 days. Freeze for up to 3 months. Heat to piping hot to serve.

GARLIC BREAD RIBOLLITA

An excellent way to use up leftover garlic bread, or any crusty or stale bread that you have kicking about the place, and transform it into a hearty, healthy meal suitable for almost any time of day. I say almost but I have been known to crack an egg into leftover ribollita, poach it, and scoff it for breakfast. So it really is that versatile.

SERVES 4

- 1 onion
- 4 celery stalks
- 1 large or 2 small carrots, washed if they are a bit grubby
- 2 fat or 4 small cloves of garlic
- 2 tbsp light cooking oil
- a pinch of chilli
- 1 tsp mixed dried herbs
- 1 chicken or vegetable stock cube
- 1 x 400g tin of plum or chopped tomatoes
- 1 x 400g tin of borlotti, pinto or cannellini beans, or baked beans with the sauce rinsed off
- 2 tsp light-coloured vinegar or bottled lemon juice
- 150g garlic bread (or other bread)
- a little hard strong cheese, grated
- plenty of black pepper
- 200g spring greens, or kale, finely sliced, or frozen spinach

Peel and finely slice your onion and chop the celery. Finely slice your carrots, there's no need to peel them. Peel the garlic and halve it lengthways, and set everything to one side for a moment.

Heat your oil in a large non-stick pan and add the chopped veg and garlic. Fry on a medium heat for around 5 minutes, stirring every now and then to disturb them a little.

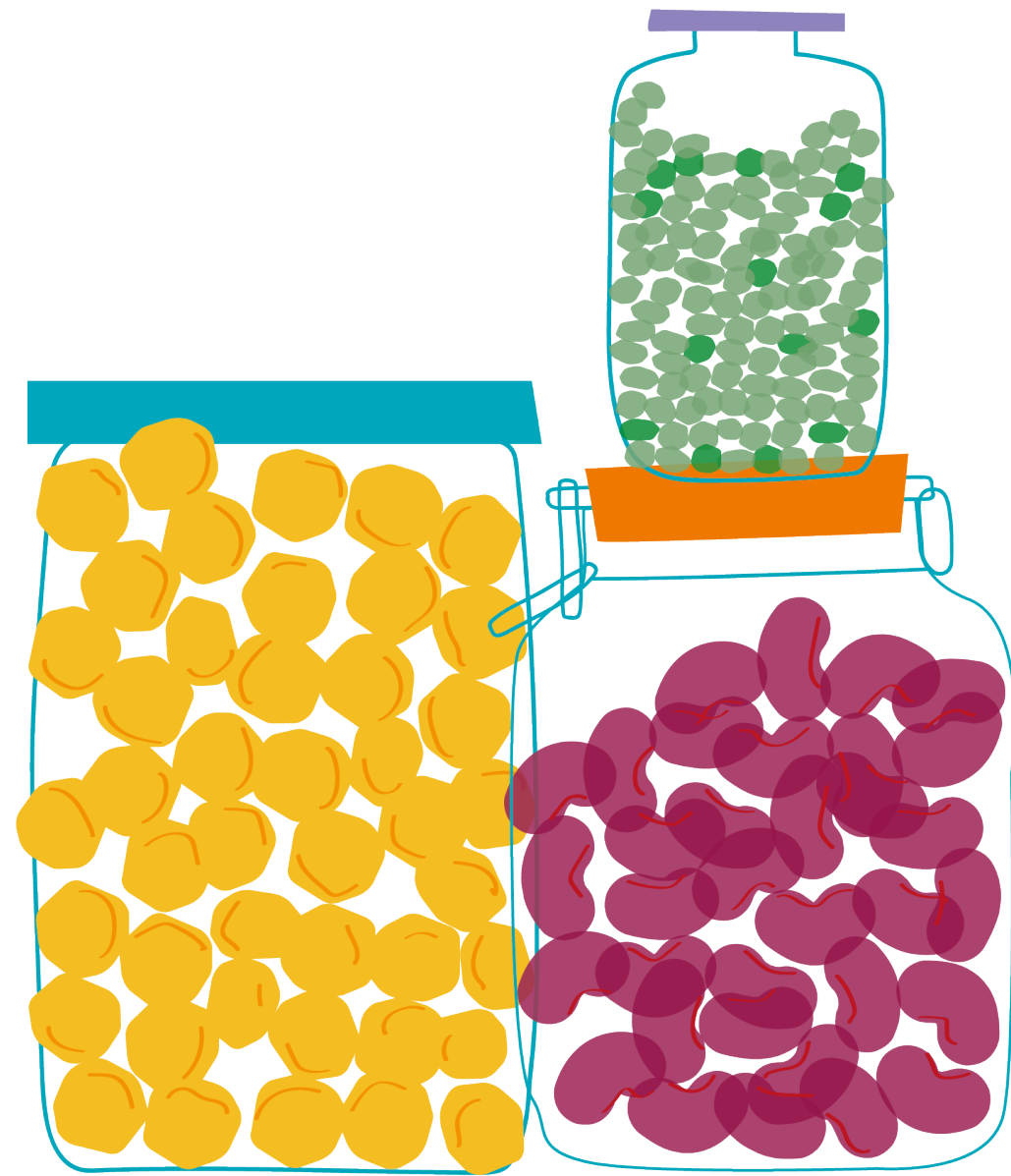
Add the chilli and herbs and crumble over the stock cube, then pour over the tomatoes and the beans, including their liquid – it adds a rich texture and helps to thicken the overall finished ribollita. I do this with most beans, except kidney beans, these days. Add 300ml cold water, which is roughly the volume of one of your empty tins, and the vinegar or lemon juice. Bring to the boil, mashing the tomatoes with a fork, wooden spoon or spatula, then reduce to a simmer.

Dice your garlic bread and add to the pan, along with most of the cheese, and plenty of black pepper. Simmer on a medium heat for 25 minutes, topping up with a splash more water if necessary – not all hobs nor pans were created equal, so the likelihood of needing a little extra water is infinitely variable.

Finely slice your greens, if using fresh ones, or simply toss them in if using frozen ones, around 4 minutes before the end of the cooking time. Serve immediately, topped with the remaining cheese and plenty more pepper, or warm through if made in advance.

TO KEEP: This will keep in the fridge, tightly covered or in a food-safe bag or airtight container, for up to 3 days, or in the freezer for up to 3 months. Defrost thoroughly and reheat to piping hot to serve.





BEANS, PULSES AND LENTILS

BLACK BEAN DAAL

This daal is based on one of my favourite recipes, from an Indian street food-inspired restaurant in London's Kings Cross, called Dishoom. They use black lentils and a 24-hour cooking time, as well as a splash of cream, to achieve their famously rich, creamy and decadent daal. This is a poor imitation of the original, which I have probably got all wrong, but it is still extremely good, and as a bonus it freezes really well, too. It's so easy to make this vegan if you swap chicken for vegetable stock.

SERVES 6–8 GENEROUSLY

100g frozen sliced onion,
or 1 small onion, diced
4 tbsp garlic paste,
or 1 whole head of
garlic, chopped
1 tbsp oil
1 tbsp garam masala
1 tbsp curry powder
¼ tsp ground cinnamon
(optional)
½ tsp fennel seeds
(optional)
1 x 400g tin of black
beans, drained
and rinsed
1 x 400g tin of green
lentils, drained
and rinsed
1 x 400g tin of
chopped tomatoes
800ml chicken or
vegetable stock
100ml coconut milk
salt and pepper

Toss the onion into the largest saucepan you can find. This recipe makes a fairly generous amount of food, so you'll want a big vessel to cook it in! Then add the garlic to the pot. If using fresh garlic, the size doesn't matter so much here, as it has a long, slow cook to soften it; I like to leave mine fairly chunky, to find later on as sweet, hedonistic surprises.

Add the oil, garam masala, curry powder, cinnamon and fennel, if using, and set over a gentle heat. Cook together for around 5 minutes, stirring to coat the alliums in the spices.

Tip the black beans and green lentils into the pot. Add the tomatoes, and stir everything together. Cook for a further 5 minutes.

Add half the stock or the same 400ml water, and bring to the boil by turning up the heat. Reduce to a simmer as soon as it comes to the boil, stir well, and cook for 45 minutes, adding a little more stock or water occasionally if it thickens and looks like it is starting to dry out. Stir occasionally to stop the beans sticking and burning.

When the daal has been cooking for 45 minutes, stir through the coconut milk, and season with a few generous pinches of salt and pepper. It is ready to eat now, but if you can spare the time and the fuel, cooking it for a further half an hour really develops the flavours and takes this dish to a whole new level.

If that sounds like a hassle, you can leave it to cool completely – it will continue to cook – for half an hour, then just blast it with a little more heat just before serving.

CANNELLINI BEURRE BLANC

I have very little time for the notion that some foods are 'not for poorer people' – it is a criticism I have come up against time and again, whether it is kale pesto irritating the commentariat at the *Daily Mail*, or a slosh of £2.50 table wine in a risotto, there is a frankly hideous misconception that good food is for the 'deserving', with the parameters of who deserves exactly what seemingly set by those who have never had a tenner in their pocket to last a week. Sometimes, when testing new recipes, I have a moment of hesitation, wondering how to frame it to reduce the petty background chatter around what I consider to be 'food for everyone'. And then I carry on.

This was one such recipe. An unctuous and subtly powerful sauce reduced to a thick, provocative shroud for slow-cooked cannellini beans and a scant handful of pasta. It would sit proudly on any hifalutin restaurant menu, but its main ingredient is a tin of beans and a slug of vinegar. You can use wine or cider for the sauce; and only a few tablespoons of each. I make this for myself often, in varying guises; and once you have the knack for it, I'm sure you will too. And politics be damned; I want to live in a world where everyone should be able to put a beurre blanc on the table without hesitation.

SERVES 2

For the beans and pasta

1 x 400g tin of cannellini
beans or haricot beans,
drained and rinsed
800ml vegetable or
chicken stock
120g small pasta shapes
pepper

For the beurre blanc

4 tbsp white wine or cider
4 tbsp white wine vinegar
or cider vinegar
1 tbsp garlic paste or 2
fat cloves of garlic,
finely chopped
25g butter

Pop the beans into a large saucepan that will easily hold three times their volume; for you will be adding pasta to this later. Cover with the stock, and bring to the boil. Reduce to a simmer for 20 minutes; the longer the cooking time, the softer and creamier the beans will be.

While the beans are cooking, make the beurre blanc in a separate small pan. Combine all of the ingredients and cook on a low–medium heat, for 15 minutes, to reduce the volume and combine the fat and acid together. You will need to keep an eye on this and stir it fairly continuously, as I have burned and lost many a beurre blanc sauce through a moment's distraction. Turn off the heat and allow the beurre blanc to settle.

When the beans have cooked for 20 minutes, add the pasta. Cook the pasta for 10 minutes, or until soft, then combine with the beurre blanc sauce. Season generously with pepper, and enjoy.

LENTIL KEEMA [Ⓥ]

Keema is traditionally made with lamb, but this lentil version more than holds its own, and for a fraction of the cost. If your budget stretches to butter, a tablespoon or two stirred through at the very end of the cooking process makes this dish utterly delectable, but if not, it's perfectly fine without.

SERVES 4

120g dried brown or green lentils
1 large onion
8–10 fat cloves of garlic
20g fresh root ginger
a handful of fresh mint and coriander
½ tsp chilli flakes or ¼ tsp chilli powder
2 tbsp light cooking oil
a pinch or two of salt
1 tsp cumin, seeds or ground
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp ground turmeric
100g natural yoghurt
1 tbsp flour (optional)
100g frozen peas

Place your lentils in a large saucepan and cover with cold, unsalted water. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes. (You can soak them first to reduce the cooking time if you have time.)

Meanwhile, peel and finely slice your onion. Place half in a blender or food processor, and set half to one side to use in a moment.

Peel the garlic and add to the blender, then roughly chop your ginger and add that too. Add most of the mint and coriander, including the soft stalks and discarding any tough mint stalks. Set aside the remainder. Add the chilli, and 1 tablespoon each of oil and water, then blend to a smooth paste.

Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large non-stick pan and add the reserved finely sliced onion and a pinch or two of salt. Fry on a medium heat for 2–3 minutes to start to soften, then add the cumin, coriander and turmeric. Stir for a minute to coat the onion in the spices, then pour over the paste from the blender and stir in slowly and gently. Turn the heat down very low, and let it cook gently.

Measure the yoghurt into a bowl, and add 1 tablespoon of the hot paste mixture. Stir in well, then repeat. Repeat this step until your yoghurt has doubled in volume and is warm to the touch, then tip the whole lot back into the saucepan and stir through. This brings the yoghurt gently to temperature, which should stop it splitting and separating, but if it does separate a little, simply add a tablespoon of flour and beat it briskly to bring it back together again, then thin with a little water and beat some more until it is well combined.

When your lentils are soft, thoroughly drain and rinse them, and add to the sauce. Mix well and cook for a further 10 minutes. Add the frozen peas a minute or two before serving, and garnish with the reserved fresh coriander and mint.

TO KEEP: Store in an airtight container, jar or food storage bag in the fridge for up to 3 days, or freezer for up to 3 months. Defrost thoroughly and reheat to piping hot to serve.



CHILLI NON CARNE ^{Ve}

A good chilli recipe is essential for feeding a crowd, for slinging a pile of stuff into a pot or slow cooker and forgetting about it, and for a hearty, almost effortless dinner. Serve this version with a pile of plain rice, or atop greens or salad for a healthier alternative, on buttery mash (sweet potato, polenta or plain old potato), in wraps, in toasted sandwiches, or however you please. Leftovers can be half blended, half left chunky to make a hearty, spicy soup for the next day's lunch or light dinner. This freezes wonderfully, and the flavour develops if you cook it and cool it, and warm it back through later on.

SERVES 6

2 large onions
6 fat cloves of garlic
2 tbsp cooking oil
1 tbsp smoked paprika
1 tbsp cumin, seeds or ground
¼ tsp cayenne pepper (optional)
½ tsp salt
½ tsp black pepper
2 x 400g tins of chopped tomatoes
1 x 400g tin of black beans
1 x 400g tin of kidney beans
1 x 400g tin of jackfruit in brine or water – I like Summer Pride
175ml red wine
1 tbsp lemon juice or red/white wine vinegar
1 tsp cocoa powder

To serve (optional)

Wedges of lime
Tortilla chips

First peel and finely chop your onions, and peel and finely slice your garlic. Toss both into a large pan, along with the oil. Add the spices, and salt and pepper and cook on a low heat for 10 minutes to sweat the onions and soften the garlic without burning or browning them.

Tip in the tomatoes. Drain and thoroughly rinse the black beans and kidney beans, and add those too. Drain the jackfruit and tip it in, and pour in the wine and lemon juice or vinegar. Add the cocoa powder, and give everything a good stir. Bring to the boil very briefly, then reduce to a simmer. Cook for 40 minutes until the sauce has thickened and is glossy and dark red, and smells amazing.

You can serve this now, or if your timeframe and energy bill allow for it, cook it for another 20 minutes with a splash of water to stop it drying out, to really pump up the volume on the flavour front. Allowing it to cool and then blasting it back through with heat will produce a similar effect if the thought of an hour of cooking on the hob seems excessive!

Serve hot, but it's also delicious fridge-cold, as my midnight snacking tendencies will testify.



KIDNEY BEAN AND PINEAPPLE CURRY ^{Ve}

The combination of fruit and beans may sound an odd one, but this recipe is based loosely on the most popular dish on my website, the peach and chickpea curry from *A Girl Called Jack*. Encouraged by a decade of enthusiasm and delighted surprise from my lovely readers, I set out to make a new variation that would be just as good, and dare I even suggest it, but I think this one hits that spot. If you have a blender, blend half of the pineapple with the chopped tomatoes to make a sweet-sour sauce base, but if you don't have one, or don't want the hassle of cleaning it, it's just as delicious cooked whole and hearty instead.

SERVES 4

1 large onion, or
140g frozen onions
1 tbsp cooking oil,
any kind
a generous pinch of salt
4 fat cloves of garlic
1 cm piece of fresh
root ginger
2 tbsp medium
curry powder
1 x 540g tin of
pineapple chunks
1 x 400g tin of
kidney beans
2 x 400g tins of
chopped tomatoes
black pepper

First peel and dice your onion, if using a fresh one, and place it in a large non-stick pan. If you're using frozen onions, simply tip them in. Add the oil, and a generous pinch of salt, and cook for 5 minutes on a medium heat to start to soften.

Peel the garlic and chop finely, along with the ginger, and stir in well, then spoon in the curry powder. Pour in the pineapple, along with all of the juice (if you're using pineapple in syrup, tip in around a quarter of the liquid, any more and it may be too sweet). Drain and rinse the kidney beans thoroughly and add those too, then cover with the tomatoes and stir well to combine. Season generously with black pepper, and simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent it from sticking and burning. You may need to add a splash of water to stop the pan from drying out – this is not an exact science, as all tins of fruit and tomatoes tend to have slightly different liquid contents, so keep an eye on it and adjust it to suit.

When the curry is ready, remove from the heat and serve.

TO KEEP: This is a dish that improves with age (to a point!) so leftovers the next day are even more delicious as the flavours develop further as it cools. Keep in an airtight container, covered bowl, or food storage bag in the fridge for up to 3 days, or in the freezer for 3 months.

CHILLI ROASTED CHICKPEAS ^{Ve}

These chickpeas make for a tasty little snack, and once you have the hang of them, you can vary the flavours to use whatever you have to hand. A splash of lemon juice to taste works well, ¼ teaspoon ground cumin is nice, and a generous seasoning of salt and pepper is good, too. For a more substantial meal, use them to top a warm winter salad, or toss with scraps of meat and a loose tomato sauce for a quick dinner.

SERVES 4 AS SNACKS

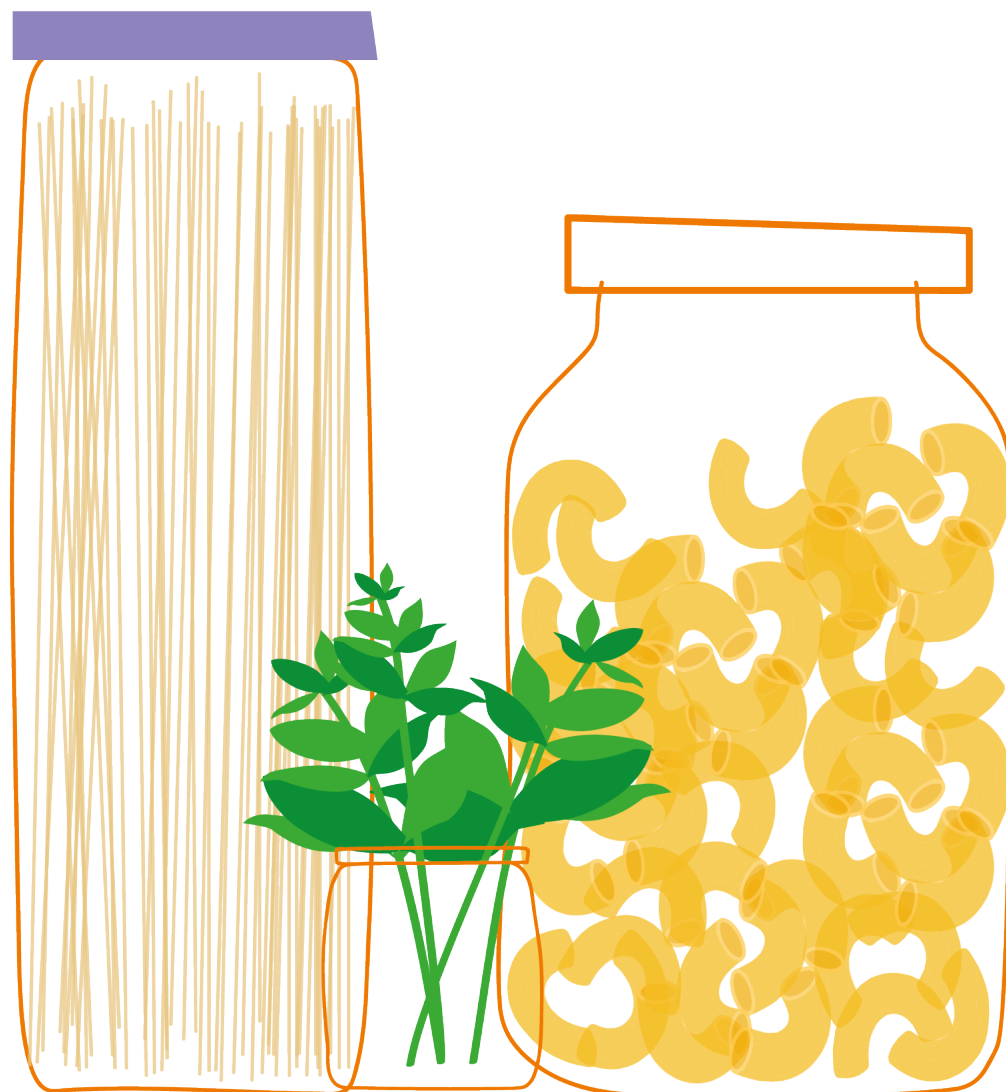
1 x 400g tin of
chickpeas, drained
2 tbsp oil
a few pinches of salt
¼ tsp chilli, powder or
dried chilli flakes

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C/350°F/gas 4).

Give the chickpeas a good thorough rinse under the cold tap to get rid of the 'tinny' taste. (You can retain the liquid from the tin.)

Tip the chickpeas into a mixing bowl and add the oil. Sprinkle over the salt and chilli and jostle the bowl gently to cover them all in oil and flavour. Tip them onto a baking tray or roasting tin – one with a lip around the edge, not a flat baking sheet, else they'll just roll off again!

Pop the tray into the oven for 30 minutes, removing it halfway through and shaking it gently to stop the chickpeas sticking and burning. Best served immediately.



PASTA

CREAMY CRABBY PASTA

Eagle-eyed readers may recognise elements of this from my first book *A Girl Called Jack*.

The recipe is so popular that I have included it here too, and updated with a new ingredient: crab.

This speedy pasta recipe takes just a few lazy minutes to put together, and tastes absolutely divine.

The sharpness of the lemon brings out the crab flavour in the paste, and the yoghurt lends a creamy subtlety. Top-end restaurants often feature 'creamy salmon mousse' on their menus, which is where I took my inspiration from – except instead of expensive cream I used natural yoghurt, and instead of pulverising a perfectly good piece of salmon or crab flesh, I bought it in a jar, with the hard work already done for me.

I could go on and on about this; I didn't expect to be able to make a restaurant-quality dish from a jar of value-range fish paste, and almost daily I am contacted by readers who have tried this for themselves and been very pleased with the results.

SERVES 2

140g pasta (works well with penne and spaghetti but any will do)

½ onion, finely sliced

1 small red chilli, very finely chopped

1 bunch of flat-leaf parsley, very finely chopped, plus extra

To serve

1 tbsp lemon juice, plus extra to serve (optional)

oil, for frying

100g natural yoghurt

1 x 75g jar of crab paste (or fish paste)

Bring some water to the boil in a medium saucepan, and cook the pasta according to the packet instructions, usually simmering for 8–10 minutes.

Add the onion, chilli and parsley to a frying pan with the lemon juice and oil, and cook on medium heat to soften the onion.

When the pasta is cooked, remove from the heat and drain. Quickly stir the yoghurt and fish paste into the onions to warm through.

Tip the pasta into the pan, coat with the sauce, and serve. Garnish with extra parsley and lemon juice, if desired.

SALAD BAG PESTO ^{Ve}

Bagged salad is one of the most wasted foods in Britain, with over half of it ending up in landfill.

I have had this recipe in mind since my first cookbook, *A Girl Called Jack*, and although it is something I make for myself on a regular basis, absorbed into my household as a common staple, it has never been committed to paper until now.

Bags of salad can be expensive to buy full price, but they can often be found in the reduced chiller at the supermarket, which is where I nabbed the first one I ever made this with. I like using salad leaves for pesto for variety, too, the peppery tang of rocket, the pop of colour from a beetroot leaf or baby chard, the sweet crunch of a tiny piece of spinach – and as an easy way towards five-a-day, hot and slathered all over slick, soft pasta. May the reduced stickers be ever in your favour.

SERVES 1

150g bag of salad

1 fat clove of garlic or ½ tsp garlic paste

4 tbsp sunflower oil

4 tsp lemon juice

Salt and black pepper, to taste

To serve (optional)

300g spaghetti or linguine

2 tomatoes, finely chopped

Finely chop your salad into smithereens with a heavy, sharp knife. If you have a bullet blender or food processor you may find it easier to bung them all in here, but (on a good hands day) I enjoy the vigorous satisfaction of grinding a blade repeatedly into a bunch of leaves until they resemble a small pile of dust.

Pop the tiny pieces of leaf into a bowl. Peel and finely chop your garlic, if using fresh cloves, and add that too, or half a teaspoon of garlic paste.

Add the oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper and mix well.

To serve with pasta, cook the pasta according to packet instructions, then mix the pesto through the pasta and serve. You could stir through the tomatoes and extra ground pepper, if liked. Store leftover pesto in the fridge in a clean jar, preferably sterilized, for up to 4 days, or in the freezer for a few months.

PASTA E CECI (PASTA AND CHICKPEAS) ①

Pasta and chickpeas is a classic Roman dish, and I have upped the ‘tin factor’ on this version by making it with tinned spaghetti hoops because, why on earth not? Tinned spaghetti is pre-cooked and very very soft, so it needs little more than a gentle warm through at the end. This recipe may look a little impetuous, or at the very least unappetizing, but it is so much more than the sum of its parts, I promise you.

SERVES 2

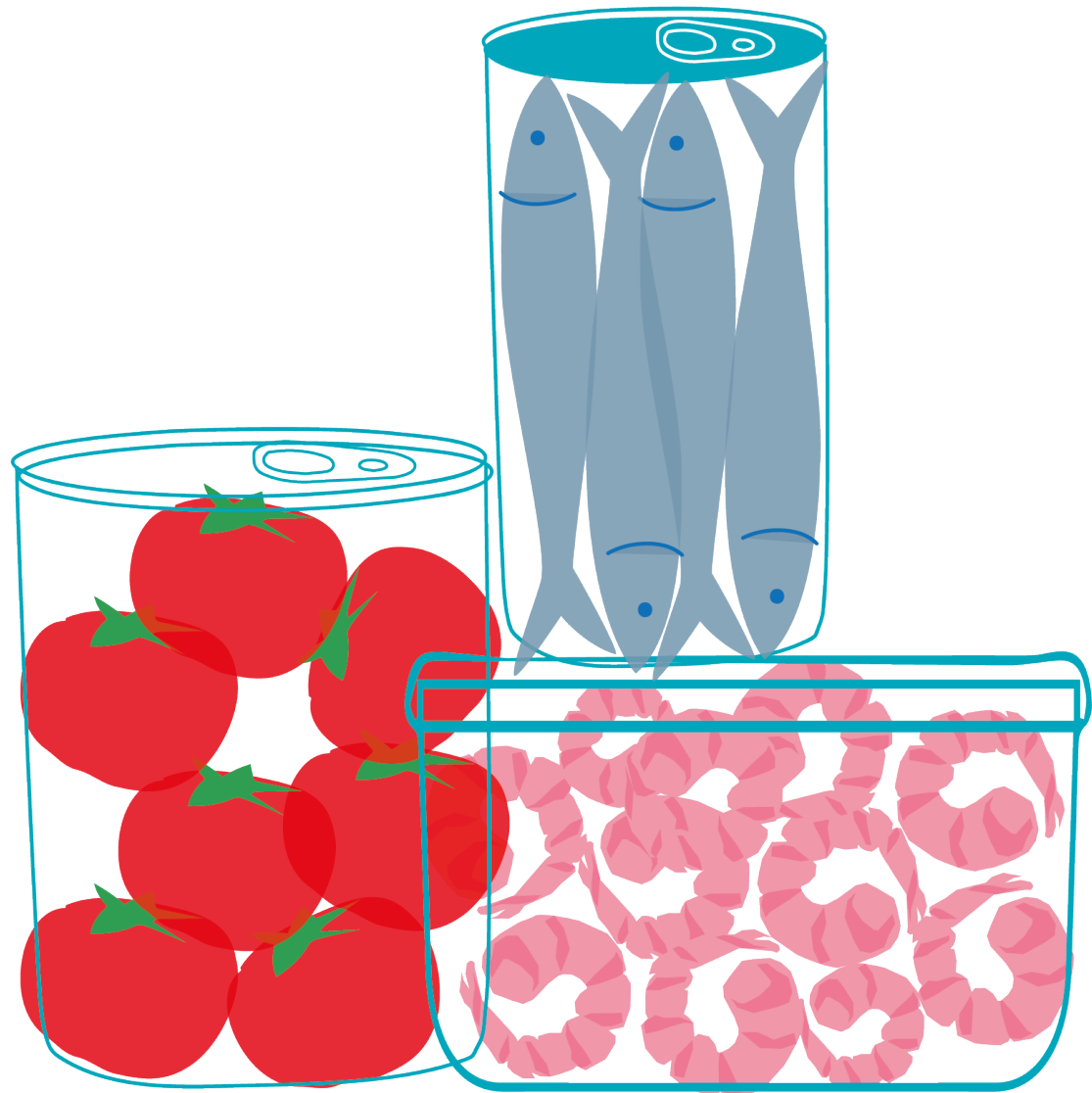
- 1 x 400g tin of chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 6 cloves of garlic, peeled, or 2 tbsp garlic paste
- vegetable stock cube dissolved in 700ml boiling water
- 1 x 400g tin of chopped tomatoes
- 1 tsp vinegar
- 1 tbsp oil or 15g butter
- ½ tsp mixed dried herbs
- salt and pepper
- 1 x 400g tin of spaghetti hoops
- a pinch of chilli powder or dried chilli flakes (optional)

Tip the chickpeas into a medium saucepan and add the garlic cloves – whole is fine as they will be cooking for quite some time, so will end up soft and sweet rather than raw and terrifying – or use paste. Add the stock (or just use 700ml water) and bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Cook for 40 minutes to make the chickpeas super soft and squishy.

Pour over the tomatoes and add the vinegar, oil or butter, herbs and a pinch of salt and a good grinding of pepper, then cook for a further 10 minutes.

Tip the spaghetti hoops into a sieve or colander and rinse very slowly and gently to get rid of as much of the sticky orange sauce as possible. I must admit I omit this step as I don’t mind the sauce and like the sweetness it adds, but if I were cooking it for someone else I would rinse it off! Add the hoops to the pan and warm through for 2 minutes, stirring carefully, then serve with a grinding of pepper and some chilli on top, if you like.





FROM THE SEA



CRAB RAREBIT

A simple lunch that takes just enough effort to feel as though you've done something nice for yourself, but not so much that it's overwhelming. I vary this recipe sometimes and have used anchovies, tuna or tinned mackerel, lightly mashed, in place of the crab paste, and it works a treat however you do it.

SERVES 1-2

2 slices of bread
1 tbsp butter or oil
1 tsp flour
4 tbsp milk
½ tsp mustard – any kind
50g cheese – mild/
mature Cheddar or
a nutty red will do
1 small jar of crab or
salmon paste
a dash of lemon juice
or chilli sauce
black pepper, to taste

Toast the bread lightly, either in a toaster on a low setting or under the grill. Keep the grill on low, if using, otherwise turn the oven on to 160°C/fan 140°C/325°F/gas 3 and ensure there is a shelf in the centre of it.

Melt the butter on a low heat in a small saucepan or heat the oil, and quickly mix in the flour to form a thick paste. Add a tablespoon of milk to loosen it, then a tablespoon more to thin it out. Stir in the mustard and grate in the cheese, and melt it for a minute or two, stirring continuously until it is a thick paste. Add another tablespoon or two of milk as required – it needs to be spreadable but still hold its own.

Spread the crab paste thickly on the bread, then top with the cheese sauce. Add a dash of lemon juice or chilli sauce, whichever you prefer, and season with a little black pepper. Return to the grill or the oven for a couple of minutes, until golden and bubbling. Eat (almost) immediately, allowing a moment for it to cool first!

ANCHOVY SAVOURIES

This may seem like the sort of simple thing you don't need a recipe for, more an idea than a prescriptive set of instructions. I stumbled across it in my copy of *Mrs Beeton's Everyday Cookery*, and as a bit of an anchovy fiend, I was immediately sold. The original calls for 'very thick white sauce and essence of anchovy'. I jotted it down in my notebook as one to explore. A few weeks later, I was having a light lunch at the Brackenbury, in Shepherd's Bush, run by Ossie, son of the late, great Rose Gray, and an anchovy toast savoury appeared from the kitchen. The notebook came back out (to the chagrin of anyone who accompanies me these days, I rarely have a meal without a pen in my hand). Under Mrs Beeton went Ossie Gray. Simple it may be, but if it's good enough for Isabella and Ossie, it's definitely good enough for me.

SERVES 2, OR 1 IF YOU'RE HUNGRY

1 tsp butter
1 tsp plain flour
120ml milk
a lump of hard strong cheese, to taste
a pinch of cayenne pepper
4 slices of good white bread
a fistful of fresh chopped parsley
6 anchovies, fresh or tinned in brine – the choice is yours

Make the cheese sauce. Gently melt the butter in a small saucepan on very low heat, and whisk in the flour with a fork to form a smooth paste. Add a splash of the milk and mix well, then keep gradually adding the milk, mixing all the time to stop lumps and clumps forming. If you get lumps, pop a sieve over a bowl and pour the mixture through to separate the lumps from the liquid. Tip the lumps back into the pan with a smattering of flour to recombine, add a little more butter, and start adding the liquid back in gradually. Things rarely go so wrong that they aren't redeemable.

Grate in the cheese, add the cayenne, give it all a stir and remove from the heat to settle and thicken.

Meanwhile, toast the bread until golden. Smear the cheese sauce on both pieces, add a smattering of chopped parsley, pop in the anchovies, and voilà! The sloppy sauce is part of the appeal for me, but you can firm up the whole experience with extra cheese, if you like.

LEMON ROASTED SARDINES

I first made this recipe for friends on holiday; we were staying in Spain and the nearest supermarket had an entire aisle of tinned fish. Sardines were 1 euro for three tins, and we lived off them all week.

Initially my housemates were sceptical at my enthusiasm for feeding them tinned fish all week; by the end of the first dinnertime, there wasn't a scrap left and everyone requested them again. They're simple, barely any effort, but a real showstopper if you have friends for tea. If you don't, just pop them on toast or toss through pasta with a little tomato sauce for a quick and easy meal.

SERVES 2

1 lemon or lime, thinly sliced
2 x 90g tins of sardines in oil
salt and pepper

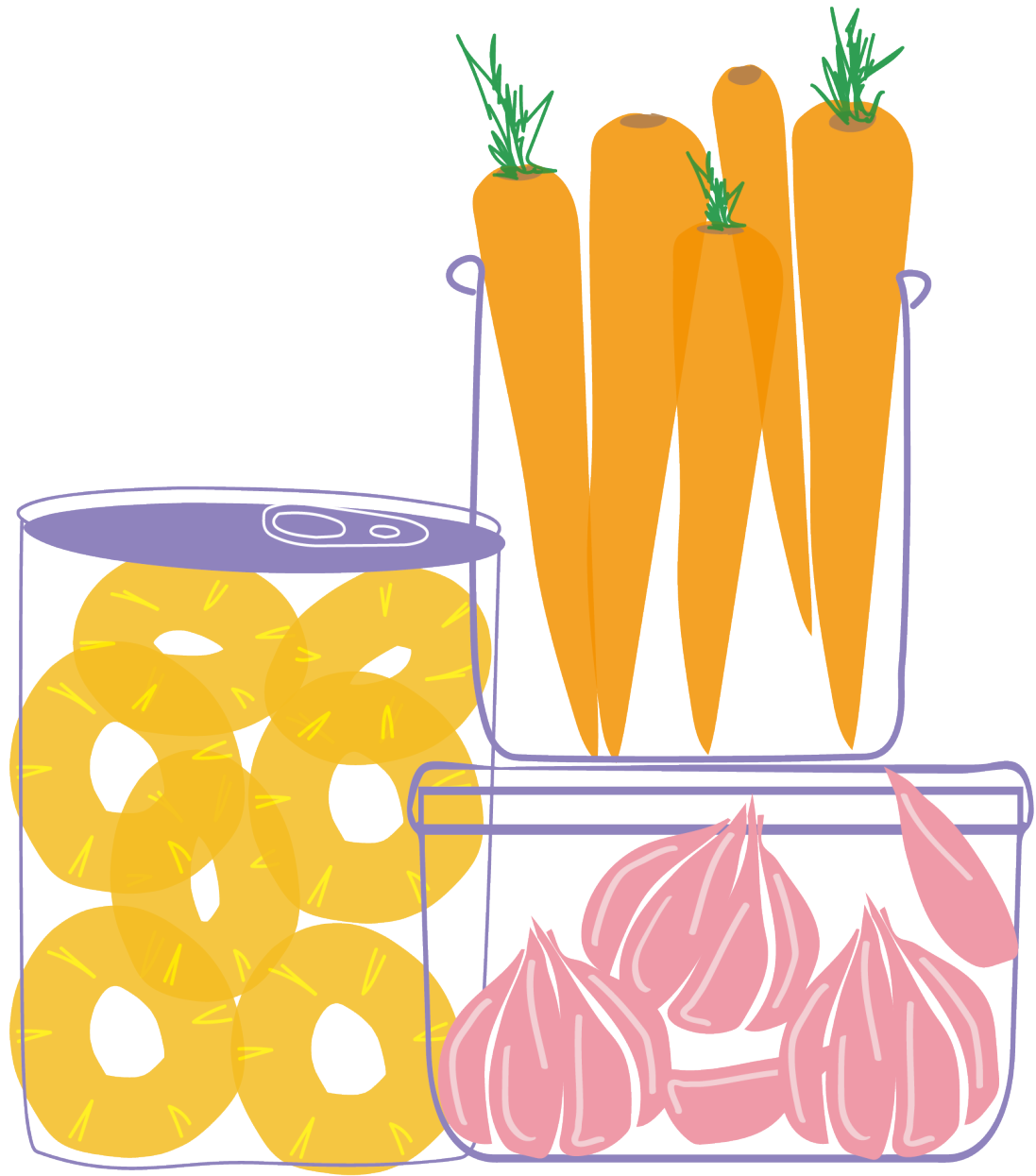
First preheat your oven to 190°C (fan 170°C/375°F/gas 5).

Next, lay your lemon or lime slices in the bottom of a small roasting dish, to cover it if possible.

Open the tins of sardines, and drain the oil into a small jar. You can pop this into the fridge and keep it for 2 weeks to cook something fishy in, like fishcakes, or anything you don't mind having a slightly umami background taste.

Using a fork or a small sharp knife, gently remove the sardines one by one and lay them on the lemon slices, keeping them as whole as you can manage.

Season with a little salt and pepper, and pop the dish into the oven for 30 minutes to roast. The whole dish can be eaten, including the lemon slices, which will be soft, tart, sweet and a perfect companion to the salty strong sardines.



FROM THE LAND

CHEAT 'N' SOUR CHICKEN

My first book, *A Girl Called Jack*, contained a very popular recipe for Diet Coke Chicken, which is still doing the rounds in the wilds of the internet today, much to my delight. Since its publication, several readers got in touch to suggest a riff on sweet and sour chicken using Fanta Orange, and my interest was caught immediately. I scrawled it as a one-line footnote in a recipe notebook and, as so often happens, time ran away with me and the intention to try it remained exactly that. So when I was writing the longlist of recipes for this book, I wrote it down in capital letters, determined to finally give it a go. It took a bit of tweaking to get it right, much to the delight of my son, who absolutely loved it in all its iterations. This, I believe, is the best version of the bunch.

SERVES 4

4–6 generous-sized chicken thighs or drumsticks
1 very large onion, or 200g frozen onions
1 fresh pepper, any colour, or 200g frozen sliced peppers
1 small tin of pineapple, chunks or slices, around 200g
2 fat cloves of garlic
a small piece of fresh root ginger
1 x 225g tin of water chestnuts, or a handful of thinly sliced broccoli stalk
2 tbsp light cooking oil
a pinch of salt
plenty of black pepper
330ml fizzy orange drink
3 tbsp tomato puree or ketchup
4 tsp light-coloured vinegar

First, cut the chicken meat from the bones using a small and very sharp knife. Run the blade as close to the bone as possible, almost scraping it along it if you can bear it, to yield the maximum amount of meat for your meal. When done, examine it carefully and feel your way along it with clean hands – you're looking for any gristly, knobbly or rubbery bits – basically, the stuff you don't want to surprise yourself with while tucking into your dinner!

Back to the dinner . . . Peel your onion and dice it nice and chunky, then dice your pepper. Drain the pineapple, reserving the juice to use later, and if you've got rings/slices instead of chunks, chop it up.

Peel and slice your garlic and coarsely grate or finely chop your ginger. Drain the water chestnuts, if using, or finely slice the broccoli stalk if you've opted for that instead.

Heat the oil in a large, non-stick pan. Add the chicken pieces and season with a little salt and pepper, then fry on a high heat for a few minutes, turning occasionally, until the meat is sealed all over.

Add the onion, pineapple chunks and pepper to the pan, plus the water chestnuts or broccoli stalk, and fry for a further minute. Then add the fizzy orange, pineapple juice, tomato puree or ketchup, and vinegar. Simmer vigorously for around 15 minutes until the sauce reduces and the chicken is cooked through and the veg is tender. Turn the heat down to low for a further 10 minutes until the sauce is thick and glossy, then serve.

TO KEEP: Allow to cool completely then store in the fridge in a food-safe storage bag or container with a lid for up to 3 days. Will keep in the freezer for up to 3 months. Defrost thoroughly, preferably overnight in the fridge, and reheat to piping hot to serve.

MINCE AND ONIONS WITH NOTIONS

'Notions' is what my Northern Irish Granny Beatty would have called 'ideas about yourself', or popping your head a little above your station. This mince and onions dish certainly has notions of its own, transformed from slop in a tin to a rich and delicious dinner, ideal served on a pile of buttery mashed potatoes or, for even more excitement, creamy peachy-coloured carrot and potato mash. Of course, you could make this with fresh mince and onions very easily, by browning the mince and onions in a pan, adding gravy and wine, but this version is deliberately simple, and deliciously so. It makes for an excellent filling for a pasty, if you're inclined that way. To make it go even further, and more nutritious, add a can of drained green or brown lentils too.

SERVES 4

2 x 398g tins of minced beef and onions in gravy
100g frozen sliced onions or 1 small onion, finely chopped
100ml red wine
1 tsp mixed dried herbs
1 tbsp tomato purée or ketchup
toast, to serve (optional)

Pour the mince and onions into a medium saucepan. Add the onion, red wine, herbs and purée.

Cook on a low heat for 20 minutes until the sauce has reduced and it suddenly smells like something you want to eat, rather than whatever just slopped out of the tin. Serve with toast.

TIP: I serve mine on toast, because toast is fantastic and an oft-underrated vessel for a quick and easy dinner. To impress a friend – said with my tongue wedged firmly in my cheek – place a smattering of spinach or salad between the toast and the mince and onions, and grated cheese on top. It's quick, it's simple, it doesn't really count as cooking, but it's a fantastic little dinner for when you don't feel like stretching yourself.

SAUSAGE AND CHICKPEA CURRY

An alternative use for sausages and chickpeas that is a hit with adults and children alike. The spice level here is fairly mild, so feel free to ramp it up if you like it a little wilder.

SERVES 4

1 large onion
4 fat cloves of garlic
or 6 dinky ones
2 tbsp cooking oil
6 sausages
a thumb-sized piece
of root ginger
1 tbsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground turmeric
1 tbsp garam masala
a pinch of chilli flakes
1 x 400g tin of chickpeas
1 x 400g tin of tomatoes
1 x 400g tin of full-
fat coconut milk
scant ½ tsp English mustard
salt and black
pepper, to taste
a handful of spinach,
kale or spring greens

Peel your onion and quarter it, then cut each quarter segment in half. If you have onion-averse household members, feel free to chop it much smaller to sneak past them, but I like it nice and chunky to complement the pieces of sausage in the dish. Peel the garlic cloves and quarter them lengthways.

Heat the oil in a large non-stick pan, add the onions and garlic and then the sausages. Grate in the ginger and turn the heat down to medium-low. Add the spices – the cumin, turmeric, garam masala and chilli flakes – and stir in to coat the onions evenly. Cook on a low-medium heat for around 10 minutes, stirring intermittently to keep it all moving so it doesn't stick and burn.

Drain and thoroughly rinse your chickpeas and add to the pan. Pour over the tomatoes and coconut milk, add your mustard and stir well. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook, uncovered, for 25 minutes.

Season to taste with a little salt and pepper, and fold the spinach through to wilt before serving.

TO KEEP: Will keep in the fridge for 3 days, or the freezer for 3 months. Defrost completely and reheat piping hot to serve.

CHICKEN, HAM AND MUSHROOMS IN A FANCY HAT

I am a real traditionalist when it comes to pies being pies – that is, having a floor, walls and a ceiling. You wouldn't call a hat a home, and in the same manner, a casserole in a hat is not a pie. The worst offender I ever had was at a pub in Lancashire, where, to be honest, I expected better. I was served a few floating cobbles of pastry in a stew that they had dared to advertise as a pie. I was astonished at their barefaced effrontery. And so this lazy dinner is absolutely not a pie. It's a casserole with a fancy hat. My friend Caroline, who has faithfully tasted almost every recipe in this book, described this as 'gastropub good'. Which, given its origins, made me very happy.

SERVES 6

1 x 400g tin of chicken in white sauce
1 x 340g tin of Spam or other tinned ham
100g finned spinach
1 x 400g tin of mushroom soup
salt and pepper
200g filo pastry, or ready-rolled puff or shortcrust pastry
oil, for brushing

Preheat the oven to 170°C (fan 150°C/325°F/gas 3).

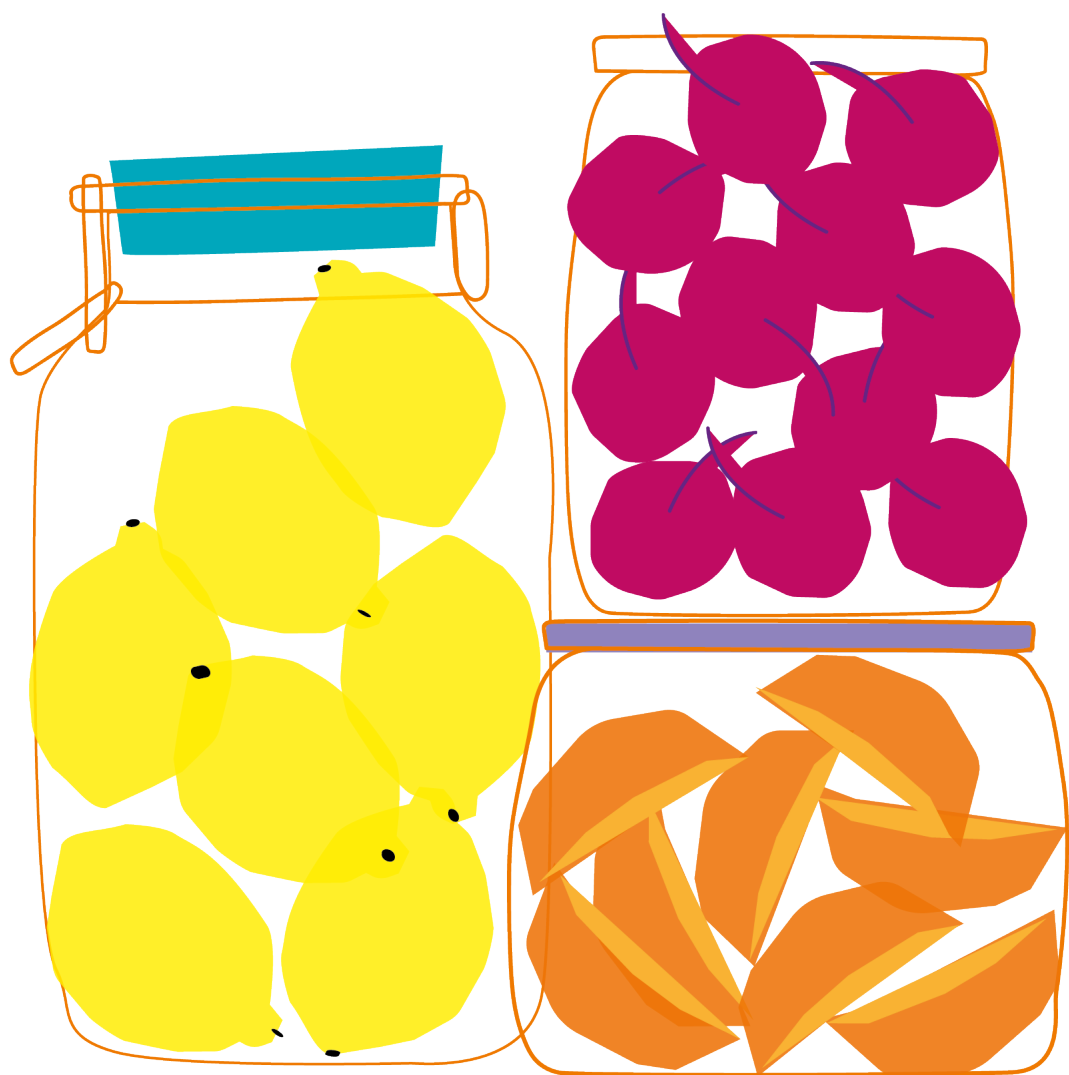
Tip the chicken in white sauce into a large pan. Prise the Spam from its tin and cut into small cubes, around 1cm, and add those to the pan. Drain the spinach, if necessary, and spoon it in, followed with the mushroom soup. Turn the heat to medium and cook for 5 minutes just to warm everything through and combine it, breaking the chicken up with your wooden spoon as it heats through. Season with salt and a little pepper.

Spoon the pie filling into a deep dish or cake tin – mine was 20cm square. Top with the pastry and brush the top with oil.

Bake in the centre of the oven for 30 minutes, or until the pastry is golden. Serve hot or cold.

TIP: I used shop-bought filo, because I like it, and it can be bought relatively cheaply in the freezer department and defrosted overnight in the fridge, but shortcrust or puff pastry would work too, and the same rules apply.





SWEET TREATS

CHOCOLATE ORANGE THUMBPRINTS

These small biscuits are an evolution from the very popular Peanut Butter and Jam Thumbprint Cookies in *A Girl Called Jack*, and are my go-to for birthdays, rainy days and the biscuit tin. Easy enough for the smallest of hands to help with, but decadent enough for the most grown up of palates.

MAKES 12 SMALL BISCUITS

50g baking spread or butter, plus a little extra to grease the baking sheet

2 tbsp sugar

2 tbsp cocoa powder

1 medium egg

8 tbsp self-raising flour

8 tsp orange marmalade

Preheat the oven to 180°C/fan 160°C/350°F/gas 4 and lightly grease a small baking tray or cookie sheet.

Weigh the baking spread into a mixing bowl and add your sugar and cocoa. Beat well with a fork or wooden spoon until well combined and even. Add the egg and mix again, taking care to incorporate it well into the mixture.

Add the flour, 2 tablespoons at a time, mixing well until it forms a soft, pliable dough. Take a walnut-sized piece and roll it into a ball to test its structural integrity. A little crumbling at the edges is to be expected, and indeed is part of the particular charm of this recipe, but any more than a little will need a very small splash of water added to the dough to bring it together. A teaspoon should suffice, if required.

With lightly floured or oiled hands, take a walnut-sized piece of dough and place it on your prepared baking tray. Flatten it twice with a fork, then repeat with the remaining dough. I weigh the entire lump of dough and divide it by 12, then weigh each individual piece to make sure they are even, but I am ridiculous, and this is by no means essential. (It is very satisfying, though!)

Repeat with the rest of the dough, and when you have used it all up, make a large dent in the centre of each biscuit with your thumb – and be bold about it; the larger the print, the more marmalade it holds!

Spoon a little marmalade into each indent – it will melt and spread out in the hot oven, so don't worry about being too neat about it.

Bake in the centre of the oven for 12 minutes, and allow to cool for 10 minutes to let the marmalade return to a non-volcanic temperature before tucking in!

TO KEEP: These will keep in an airtight container for 4 days, or in the freezer almost indefinitely, but they don't tend to stay around that long.



CRUMBLY ALMOND COOKIES

Last night I really, really fancied cookies, in that way that sometimes the sweet tooth takes a hold. Usually it's late at night. Usually when I have resolved to be healthier, and better, and eat fewer baked goods in the smallest hours. Like on New Year's Day.

Succumbing, I potted downstairs to the kitchen and rummaged in my flour bin (really, a bread bin full of various flours, with the ethos that if I want bread I will have to make it. Like a proper little bread martyr). The bread/flour bin turned out to be neither, as I had fed a few dozen people over the last few weeks of festivities, and somehow had managed to bake my way through my usual 3kg of plain flour kicking about the house. Instead, I had an array of what we might call 'experimental' flours, purchased in varying fits of panic over the last year or so, usually coinciding with some new health blogger or clean-eating trend, and then sitting, untouched, in the bottom of the flour bin. Until now.

I tipped out the bin. Quinoa flour. I definitely didn't buy that for myself. Brown rice flour – ah, that was for making pasta for my coeliac friend as a gift, that's legit, it can stay. Coconut flour – cheaper than coconut milk but can be blended into a rough approximation of it as required. Gram flour – useful for binding falafels and bhajis, and also makes an excellent fudge, allegedly, although I am yet to try it. And almond flour, simply a bag of ground almonds by another name. I will have cookies, I thought to myself, from one of these bags, I will have cookies.

I plumped for the almonds; crumbly, sweet, a relatively known entity, and accessible in a way that quinoa flour may not be in a bootstrap recipe, and these crumbly little morsels were born. I added thyme and lavender to mine – thyme as it was hanging about from Christmas, and lavender as it grows in my neighbour's garden, but neither are essential, so if you don't have them to hand, don't worry about buying them especially.

MAKES 10

100g ground almonds,
plus extra for dusting
a pinch of chopped
thyme leaves
a pinch of chopped
lavender leaves
2 tbsp marmalade
5 tbsp butter substitute

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas 4 and lightly grease a baking sheet. Grab an egg cup, shot glass, espresso cup or small cookie cutter, and set to one side.

Tip the ground almonds into a bowl and add the thyme and lavender, if using.

In a separate small bowl, mash the marmalade and butter substitute together with a fork until well combined. Tip into the almonds and mix well until it forms a consistent dough.

Shake some ground almonds onto your worksurface and press or roll the dough out until around 1cm thick. Cut tiny cookie shapes – smaller than you think you need – and place on the baking sheet. Leave a large space in between each as they spread out when they warm through. Smoosh the dough back together and roll and repeat until there are no more cookies to be made.

Bake for 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for a further 10 minutes on the baking sheet, to harden, before trying to move them – they are deliciously crumbly, so they need some time to firm up before they are solid enough to cart about! Enjoy warm, and don't forget to send me photos if you make them – I love seeing you making my recipes!

CHOCOLATE PEAR CAKE ^{Ve}

This soft, sweet, rich and heavy cake was made for one of my recipe books, *Tin Can Cook*, as I sat surveying tins of fruit and wondering how to plump up my pudding chapter. My eyes roved greedily over the tinned peaches, pears and cherries, looking for inspiration, and there it was. Fat, fulsome pears swimming sodden in their own slippery, succulent syrup. I licked my lips. I'm licking them now, typing up the recipe, my meagre home rich with the scent of freshly baked goods, impatiently picking at the slice I have promised myself as a reward for committing it to paper. I love this, and it's all the better for using tinned pears; I hope you love it too.

SERVES 6

75g applesauce from a jar
75ml oil, plus extra
for greasing
75g sugar
1 x 400g tin of pears
175ml coconut milk or
other plant-based milk
175g self-raising flour
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1 tbsp ground ginger
or cinnamon
6 tbsp cocoa powder

Spoon the applesauce into a large mixing bowl and add the oil and sugar. Mix well with a fork or wooden spoon until well combined.

Drain the pears and reserve the juice – I pour mine straight into a glass, dilute with water and drink it. Delicious! Pop the pears into a small blender, if you have one, and blend until smooth. If you don't have a blender, finely slice them by hand. You'll get a different cake, but still a very delicious one. Either way, blended or sliced, pop the pears into the mixing bowl with the applesauce-sugar-oil mix and stir well. Add the coconut milk and mix well.

Add in the flour, bicarbonate of soda, ginger or cinnamon and cocoa, and stir well to form a smooth, glossy cake batter.

Turn on the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C/350°F/gas 4). Lightly grease a 450g loaf tin and pour in the mixture. Bake in the centre of the oven for 45 minutes, until risen and a small sharp knife inserted into the centre comes out clean. Remove from the oven but leave in the tin for 20 minutes to cool and firm up, before turning out and serving.

FRUIT COCKTAIL CAKE

This bejewelled jolly little number is a simple way to use up any kind of tinned fruit; I like the veritable party that a fruit cocktail brings to the table – and the inevitable hunt for the scant cherry half that there only ever seems to be one of!

SERVES 8

250g butter, plus extra
to grease the cake tin
200g caster or
granulated sugar
3 eggs
200g tin of fruit
cocktail, drained
200g self-raising flour

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C/350°F/gas 4) and lightly grease a 20cm round or square cake tin.

Beat the butter and sugar together in a mixing bowl with a fork or wooden spoon until well combined. Break in the eggs and mix together, beating until smooth.

Add the fruit cocktail to the mixing bowl and stir through quickly. Add the flour, and mix well to combine into a soft, sweet batter.

Pour the batter into the tin and bake in the centre of the oven for around 45 minutes – depending on the size of your tin. A shallow tin will cook faster, whereas a deeper tin will take its time. To check if it is cooked through, insert a sharp knife into the centre of the cake. If the knife comes out clean, the cake is ready. Allow to cool in the tin for 10 minutes before turning out and slicing.

The cake can be enjoyed hot or cold.

TO KEEP: Leftovers freeze well for up to 3 months, wrapped in foil or popped in a freezer bag.

BERRY BREAD PUDDING

I made this as an emergency pudding for a dinner party for twelve strangers, having travelled forty miles with a rucksack of vegan pulled pork marinating in Tupperware containers held together with duct tape and carrier bags to stop any spillages as I navigated three trains and hundreds of bored, furious commuters en route. I arrived and unpacked my bag and realised that the pudding I had made was still sitting on the side in my own kitchen, forty miles and three trains away. Thinking on my feet, I rummaged in the freezer department of the local corner shop and found a bag of dubious frozen berries and asked my host if he had, and I quote, 'any cheap white bread kicking around'. Lo and behold, he produced a loaf of squashy, supermarket air and nonsense, and I set to work. I made enough for two puddings; one for the assembled guests, and one for my host and his family to enjoy the next day. It was a resounding success, and one I will no doubt pull out of the bag many, many times in the future.

SERVES 6-8

400g frozen mixed berries
8 slices of cheap white bread
Baking spread or vegan spread, for greasing

TIP: *I served this with a rosewater custard – a carton of fresh custard mixed with some rose petals I had at home (Oatly do a great vegan 'custard'). But corner shop tinned custard and a splash of rosewater does the job just nicely.*

Pop the berries in a medium-sized saucepan and bring to a medium heat – do not boil them as you will spoil the flavour. Cook the berries – with or without sugar, see Tip – for around 15 minutes, until they are well softened and juicy. Remove from the heat and spoon out 2–3 tablespoons to serve on top of the pudding. Set aside.

Cut the bread into quarters, and then each quarter into quarters again, so each slice is in sixteen pieces. Drop them into the saucepan – no point in dirtying a mixing bowl for this job – and mix well to absorb all of the juices from the berries. The bread should swell and all turn a lurid purple-pink colour. Leave the bread soaking for 15 minutes, stirring it occasionally to break it up and allow it to absorb evenly.

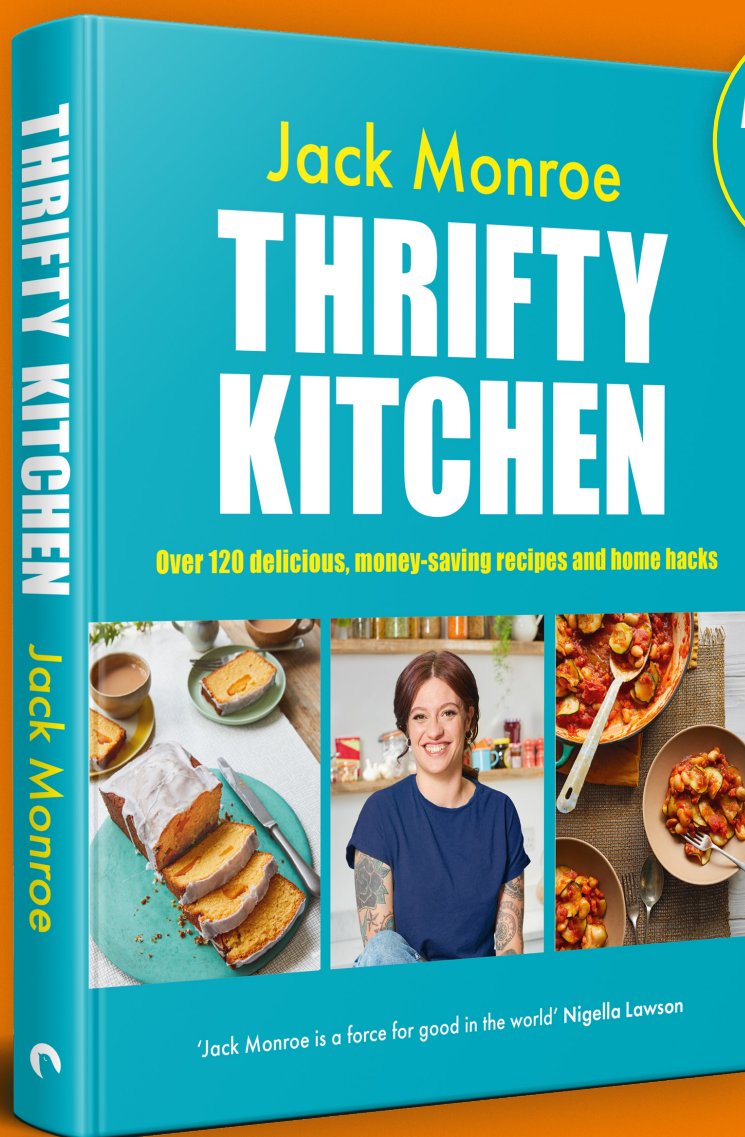
Preheat your oven to 180°C (fan 160°C/350°F/gas 4). Lightly grease a cake tin – a 20cm one will do, round or square – and spoon in the mixture. Press it down with your fingers to compact it tightly into the tin, and carefully tip off any excess juices that come to the surface – this is a very moist pudding, but it needs to be able to cook and set!

Pop it into the oven for 40 minutes, until slightly risen and caramelized on top, and firmish to touch. Remove from the oven and allow to cool in the tin for 10–15 minutes before serving topped with the reserved juices.



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