

Avocado & Chorizo Toast

Preparation time: 5 minutes

Cooking time: 5 minutes

Serves 4

Wake up your taste buds with this fiery alternative to the sausage sandwich—my perfect food for the morning after the night before. The quality of the bread will really make all the difference here; you want something with a good chewy crust and character. If you can't find sourdough, then halve and toast some ciabatta or baguette instead.

9 oz (250 g) chorizo sausages

2 ripe avocados

4 scallions (spring onions)

2 limes

a few drops Tabasco sauce

1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus
extra for drizzling

4 thick slices good-quality bread,
such as sourdough

1 clove garlic

1 handful fresh cilantro (coriander)

sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper

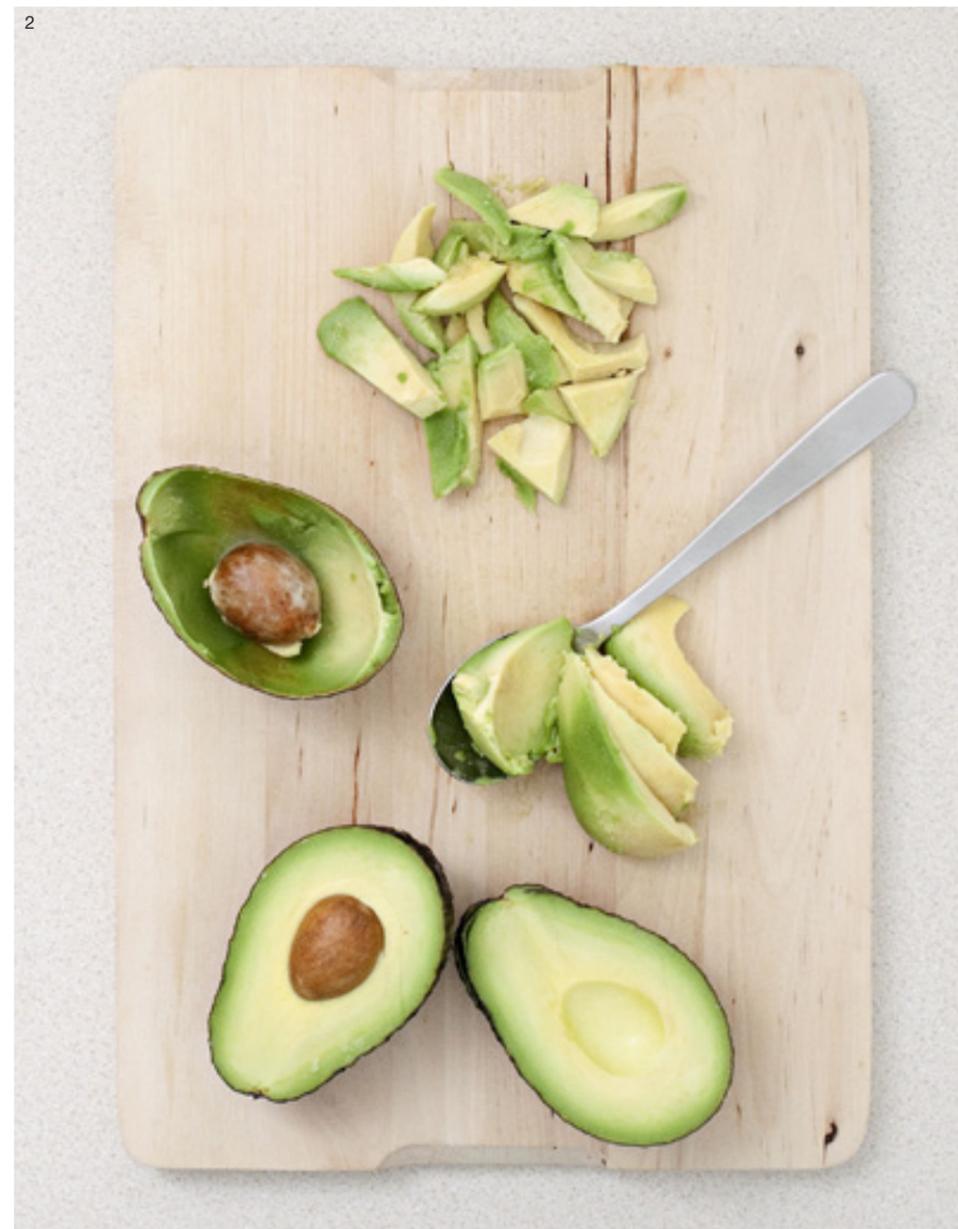


1

Cut the sausages into bite-size pieces. Heat a skillet or frying pan, add the sausages to the dry pan, then fry for 5 minutes, until golden and crisp around the edges. The sausages will release their own red oil as they cook.

CHORIZO

This piquant Spanish sausage is spiced with paprika and garlic, with a delicious smokiness. There are two types: cooking chorizo, which is soft like a regular sausage, and cured chorizo, which is firm and dry and eaten uncooked, like a salami. Either type will work in this recipe, but choose the cooking chorizo if you have the option.



2

Meanwhile, cut each avocado in half; then use a spoon to scoop out the pits (stones) and the flesh. Roughly slice or chop the flesh.

CHOOSING AND PREPARING AVOCADOS

A ripe avocado will yield when gently pressed at the stalk end. Don't buy anything that feels mushy, as it will be past its best. An under-ripe avocado will soon ripen up in the fruit bowl or in a paper bag with an apple (apples release a gas that speeds up ripening). Store the ripe fruit in the fridge.

To cut an avocado in half, very carefully push the blade of a knife into the flesh, until the knife stops at the pit. Slide the knife all the way around the avocado, keeping the blade against the pit. Pull out the knife, then twist the 2 halves apart.

3

Thinly slice the scallions (spring onions) and squeeze the juice from one lime. Add the juice and onions to the avocados in a bowl. Add the Tabasco, and oil, then season to taste with salt and pepper. Cut the remaining lime into wedges.

4

Preheat the broiler (grill) and spread out the bread on a baking sheet. Toast until golden on both sides. Cut the garlic in half and rub the cut side over the toast. Drizzle with a little extra-virgin oil.

5

Top the toast with the avocado mixture, followed by the sizzling sausages and a spoonful of the cooking juices. Tear the cilantro (coriander) leaves over the top and serve with the extra lime wedges for squeezing.



3



4



5

Grilled Halloumi with Pomegranate Tabbouleh

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 5 minutes
Serves 4, easily doubled or more

Tabbouleh is a fresh, lively Middle Eastern salad of chopped herbs with plenty of lemon and bulgur wheat, and here I've added chickpeas to make it extra sustaining. The salad is also delicious with goat cheese, fish, grilled meat, and hummus, among other things.

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup (120 g) bulgur wheat
 $2\frac{2}{3}$ cups (400 ml) hot vegetable broth (stock)
2 organic (unwaxed) lemons
3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra to drizzle (optional)
1 large bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 large bunch fresh mint
1 bunch scallions (spring onions)
14 oz (400 g) canned chickpeas, drained
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (100 g) pomegranate seeds
1 lb 2 oz (500 g) halloumi cheese
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper



1 Put the bulgur wheat into a large bowl. Pour in the hot broth (stock), then cover the bowl and let stand for 15 minutes.

2 While you wait, finely grate the zest from the lemons, then squeeze the juice from 1 (about 3 tablespoons). Whisk the zest and juice with the olive oil and some salt and pepper.

3 Pick the parsley and mint leaves from the stems, then finely chop. Trim and thinly slice the scallions (spring onions).



BULGUR WHEAT
Bulgur wheat is part-ground, part-cooked wheat that's really healthy and quick to use and has a more interesting texture than couscous. If you can't find bulgur, use couscous instead, adding enough hot broth to just cover the surface. Alternatively, the salad could easily be made with cooked quinoa, rice, or any other grains.



4
Drain the bulgur in a strainer (sieve), then return to the bowl. Add the dressing, herbs, onions, chickpeas, and most of the pomegranate seeds. Stir well and season to taste with salt and pepper.



5
When you're ready to serve, heat a ridged grill pan (griddle). Cut the halloumi into slices about 1/2-inch (1-cm) thick. Cook the cheese for 2 minutes on each side, or until it comes away easily from the ridges of the pan. A frosting spatula (palette knife) will be handy to lift and turn the cheese. If you don't have a grill pan, just brown the halloumi in a dry skillet or frying pan instead.



6
Spoon the salad onto serving plates, top with the cheese, then sprinkle with the rest of the pomegranate seeds. Serve with a wedge of lemon and a drizzle more oil, if you like.



Salmon with Dill Pickle & New Potatoes

Preparation time: 25 minutes
Cooking time: 5 minutes
Serves 4, easily halved

A classic combination that is quick and light enough for every day and ideal for weeknight entertaining too. The sour cream on the potatoes is a naughty-but-nice finish, or just toss them with the mustard and a little olive oil if you'd prefer. Trout fillets also work well and will take just a few minutes to cook.

1 lb 10 oz (750 g) new potatoes
1 cucumber
½ red onion
1 bunch fresh dill
2 tbsp white wine vinegar
1 tsp superfine (caster) sugar
4 salmon fillets, skin on
1 tsp olive oil, vegetable or sunflower oil
4 tbsp sour cream, crème fraîche or mayonnaise, half- or reduced-fat is fine
1 tsp whole-grain mustard
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper



1
Cut any larger potatoes in half, then put them into a pan of cold, salted water and bring to a boil. Cook for 15–20 minutes, until tender in the middle.



2
Meanwhile peel the cucumber, then remove the seeds using a teaspoon. Discard the seeds, then chop the flesh into small pieces.



3
Finely chop the onion and most of the dill, then mix with the cucumber in a bowl. Pour the vinegar over the top, sprinkle in the sugar and season with salt and pepper. Set aside while you prepare the salmon.

4

Heat the broiler (grill). Set the salmon on a lightly-oiled baking sheet, season all over with salt and pepper, then top the flesh side with a sprig or two of dill.



4

5

When the potatoes are ready, drain them and set aside to cool a little. Now put the salmon under the broiler and cook for 5 minutes or until the fish is firm and pale pink all over, and just cooked through in the middle. If you're not sure, poke a knife carefully down between the flakes in the middle of one of the fillets: if they pull apart easily, then the fish is ready. You don't need to turn the salmon as it cooks.



5

COOKING OILY FISH

If you're new to cooking fish, then something naturally oily such as salmon, mackerel or sardines is a great place to start. The slightly fattier flesh is less quick to dry out, and tends not to stick to the pan. Remember that just like a piece of meat, a fillet of fish will continue to cook as it sits on the plate, so it's always best to undercook rather than overcook it.

6

Stir the warm potatoes, cream or mayonnaise, and mustard together until coated, then season to taste with salt and pepper.



6

7

Lift the salmon onto plates, then top with a spoonful of the pickled cucumber and serve with the potatoes.



7

Strawberry Cream Cake

Preparation time: 20 minutes,
plus cooling

Cooking time: 25–30 minutes

Serves 10

This classic strawberry cream cake has an almost all-in-one method, which is quick to put together. Sponge cakes are best enjoyed on the day they are made, but a vanilla syrup will help to keep them moist for a day or two, stored in an airtight container.

2 sticks (225 g) unsalted butter, very soft, plus extra for greasing
generous 1 cup (225 g) superfine (caster) sugar, plus 3 tbsp
4 eggs, at room temperature
2 tsp vanilla extract
¼ tsp fine salt
2 cups (225 g) all-purpose (plain) flour
2 tsp baking powder
1 tbsp milk, if needed
2¾ cups (300 g) strawberries
scant 1 cup (200 ml) whipping or heavy (double) cream
a little confectioners' (icing) sugar, to serve



1 Lightly butter two 8-inch (20-cm) shallow round cake pans, then line the bottoms with circles of parchment paper. Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C/Gas Mark 4).

2 Put the butter and sugar into a large bowl, then beat with an electric mixer until creamy and very pale.

3 Add the eggs, 1 teaspoon vanilla and the salt to the bowl. Mix the flour and baking powder together, then sift on top.

4 Mix again briefly until even and smooth. It's important not to overwork the batter here, so stop as soon as everything is incorporated. If the mixture seems very stiff, add the milk and mix it in.

HOW FLOURS DIFFER
Depending on the kind of wheat used, the climate where you live, or even the brand you buy, flours can be drier or more damp, and this can affect your baking. This kind of cake batter should normally be soft enough to drop from the spoon, without being too stiff or too sloppy (although I've never found the latter to be a problem). Add the extra milk to your batter if you think it looks a bit on the thick side.

5 Use a spatula to scoop the batter evenly into the prepared cake pans, even out the tops, then bake in the middle of the oven for 25–30 minutes. If the cakes are browning unevenly, they can be swapped around in the oven safely after 25 minutes or when evenly risen and firm. Open the door any earlier and the cakes may sink.

6 While you wait, make the vanilla syrup. Put 2 tablespoons sugar and 2 tablespoons water in a small pan and heat very gently until the sugar dissolves. Remove from the heat, then add ½ teaspoon vanilla extract and let cool.

7 When ready, the cakes will be evenly risen through to the middle, evenly golden, and slightly shrunken away from the sides of the pans. To be sure, insert a skewer or toothpick into the middle of one of the cakes. If it comes out clean or with a few damp crumbs, it's ready. If it comes out with any uncooked mixture, return to the oven for 5 minutes more.



8 Let the cakes cool in their pans for 15 minutes, then remove from the pans, peel away the parchment paper and turn them onto a cooling rack, top side down and resting on the upturned parchment paper. This will stop the wires from making marks in the tops of the cakes. Poke the upturned cakes all over with a skewer or something similar, then spoon over the cooled syrup.

9 While you wait for the cakes to cool fully, roughly chop half of the strawberries. Thinly slice the rest.

10

Pour the cream into a large bowl and add the rest of the vanilla and the remaining 1 tablespoon sugar. Whip until thickened but not stiff.



11

Stir the chopped strawberries into the cream. Put 1 cake onto a serving plate, then spread with the strawberry cream.



12

Put the second cake on top, press it down a little, then top with the sliced strawberries. Dust with confectioners' (icing) sugar to serve.

12

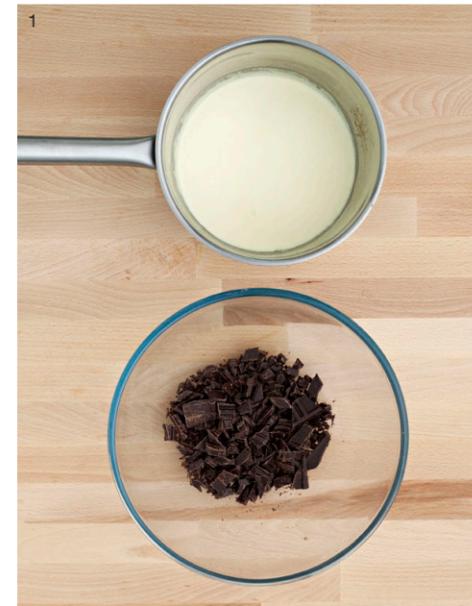
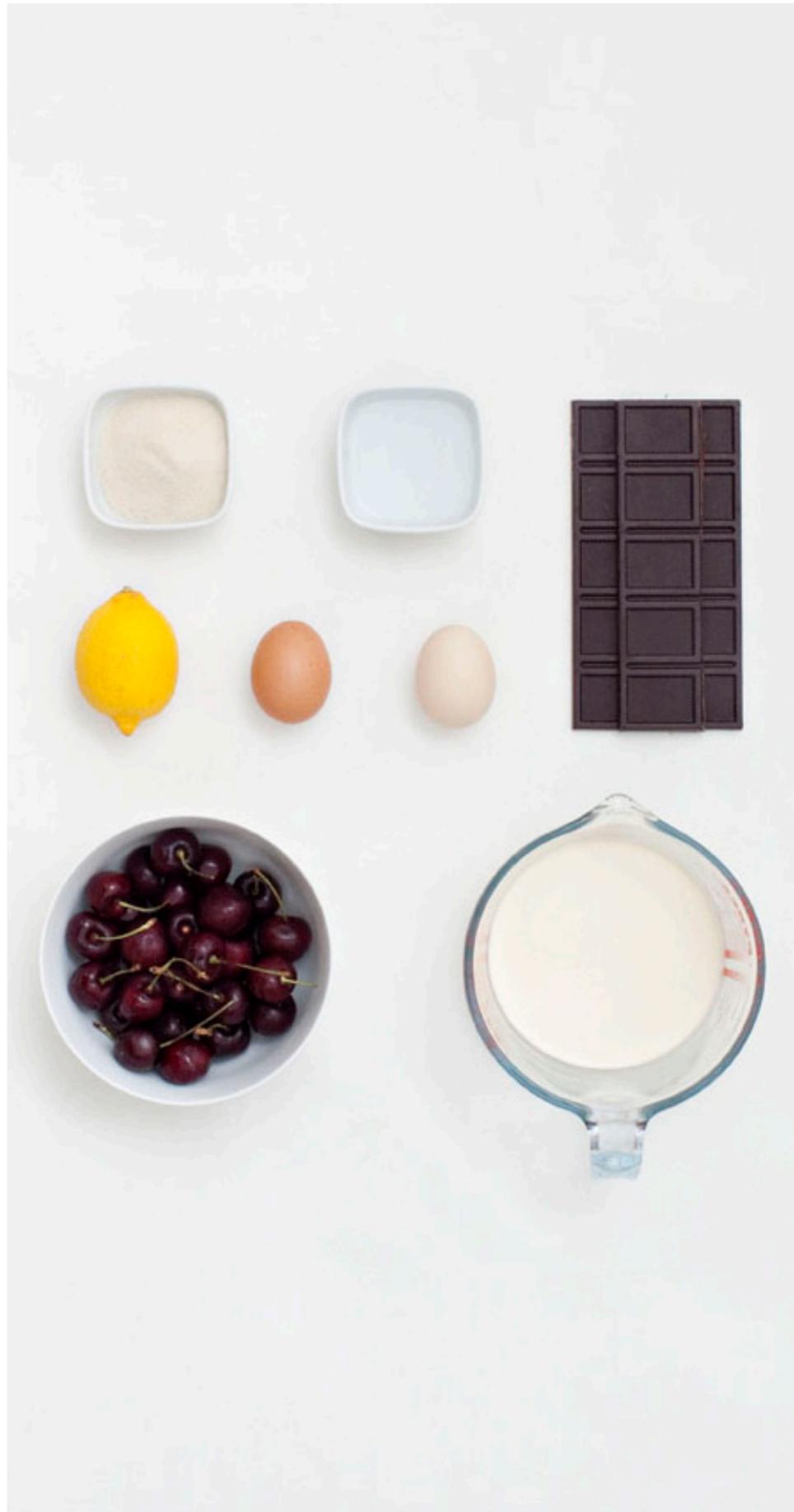


Chocolate Mousse with Cherries

Preparation time: 20 minutes, plus chilling
Makes 6 large or 8 smaller portions

What better excuse to eat chocolate mousse than the arrival of the cherry season? The slightly retro combination is well worth revisiting—good chocolate and a splash of kirsch (clear brandy made with cherries) will really make the fruit taste pop.

5 oz (150 g) semisweet (dark) chocolate, 70% cocoa
1½ cups (350 ml) heavy (double) cream
2 eggs, at room temperature
1 tbsp kirsch, brandy or water
4 tbsp superfine (caster) sugar
12 oz (350 g) ripe cherries
1 lemon



1 Chop the chocolate into small pieces, then put into a large heatproof bowl. Pour $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (150 ml) of the cream into a small pan, then bring just to a boil.

2 When the cream has bubbles appearing at the sides and the surface is shimmering, it's ready. Pour the hot cream onto the chocolate and let melt for about 3 minutes.

3 While you wait, separate the eggs (see page 321), and put the whites into a clean, grease-free bowl. Beat the yolks with the kirsch, brandy or water. Stir the now-melted chocolate and cream together until thoroughly blended, then add the yolk mixture and 2 tablespoons of the sugar. Stir until smooth and blended.

4 Pour another $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (150 ml) cream into a bowl. Using an electric hand mixer, first beat the egg whites until thick and foamy, but not stiff. Then whisk the cream until thick but not stiff. Do it this way around and you won't need to wash the beaters in between (cream on the beaters would prevent the whites from whipping).

5 Fold the cream into the chocolate mixture using a large metal spoon or a rubber spatula.

6
Now add a quarter of the whites and stir them in. This will loosen the mixture and get it ready for the rest of the whites. Spoon in the remainder, then fold in gently until the mixture is thoroughly blended, with no traces of white.

FOLDING
Using a figure-eight motion, cut and fold rather than stir the egg whites into the creamy chocolate mix. Try to conserve as much air as you can.

7
Spoon the mousse into 6 large or 8 small serving glasses or cups and chill for at least 2 hours or until firm.

8
To prepare the cherries, first cut them in half and remove the pits (stones).

9
Put the cherries into a skillet or frying pan with the remaining sugar and 2 teaspoons lemon juice. Cook the cherries over high heat for 1 minute or so, until the sugar melts and bubbles around the cherries. Let cool.

10
Whip the remaining cream, then spoon it on top of the mousses. Serve with the cherries.

TRY THIS
For cute little Black Forest gateaux pots, why not layer the cherries, mousse, and some ready-made chocolate cake in glasses, then top with whipped cream and a few more cherries.



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