

Greek Salad

Preparation time: 20 minutes
Serves 4

Save this classic salad for summer, when tomatoes are at their best. For a light meal, all that's needed is some crusty bread on the side. For a more filling option, drain and rinse a can of butterbeans and stir through at the end of step 3. It's also good as a side dish for barbecued lamb or chicken.

8 medium or 4 large vine-ripened tomatoes
1 small red onion
1 tbsp red-wine vinegar
80 ml (3 fl oz) extra-virgin olive oil
2 tsp dried oregano
1 cucumber
½ red pepper
1 handful fresh flat-leaf parsley
80 g (3 oz) pitted kalamata or black olives
200 g (7 oz) feta cheese
salt and pepper
crusty bread, to serve (optional)



1 Cut each tomato into 6 wedges and finely slice the red onion. Put into a large mixing bowl. Splash over the vinegar and 3 tablespoons of the oil, then add 1 teaspoon of the oregano and season with salt and pepper. Set aside for 10 minutes. This will soften the onion a little and draw some of the juices out of the tomatoes, which will help make a tasty dressing.

CHOOSING TOMATOES
A perfectly ripe tomato will be deep ruby red, yield a little to the touch and smell aromatic. Unless they're a special variety, avoid tomatoes that are still green around the top, or a pale orange-red, as their flavour will be disappointing.

2 Meanwhile, cut the cucumber in half, then halve each piece along its length. Peel off the skin using a peeler. Scoop out the seeds using a teaspoon, then discard them. This will stop the cucumber from becoming soggy. Cut the cucumber into half-moon slices.

3 Remove the seeds from the pepper then finely slice it. Roughly chop the parsley, then add this to the bowl along with the pepper, cucumber and olives. Stir. Crumble the cheese into rough cubes.

Spoon the salad onto plates or shallow bowls, then top each bowl with cheese. Scatter the remaining oregano over the cheese, then drizzle the remaining oil over and around. Serve with crusty bread.

Prawn & Mushroom Laksa

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 10 minutes

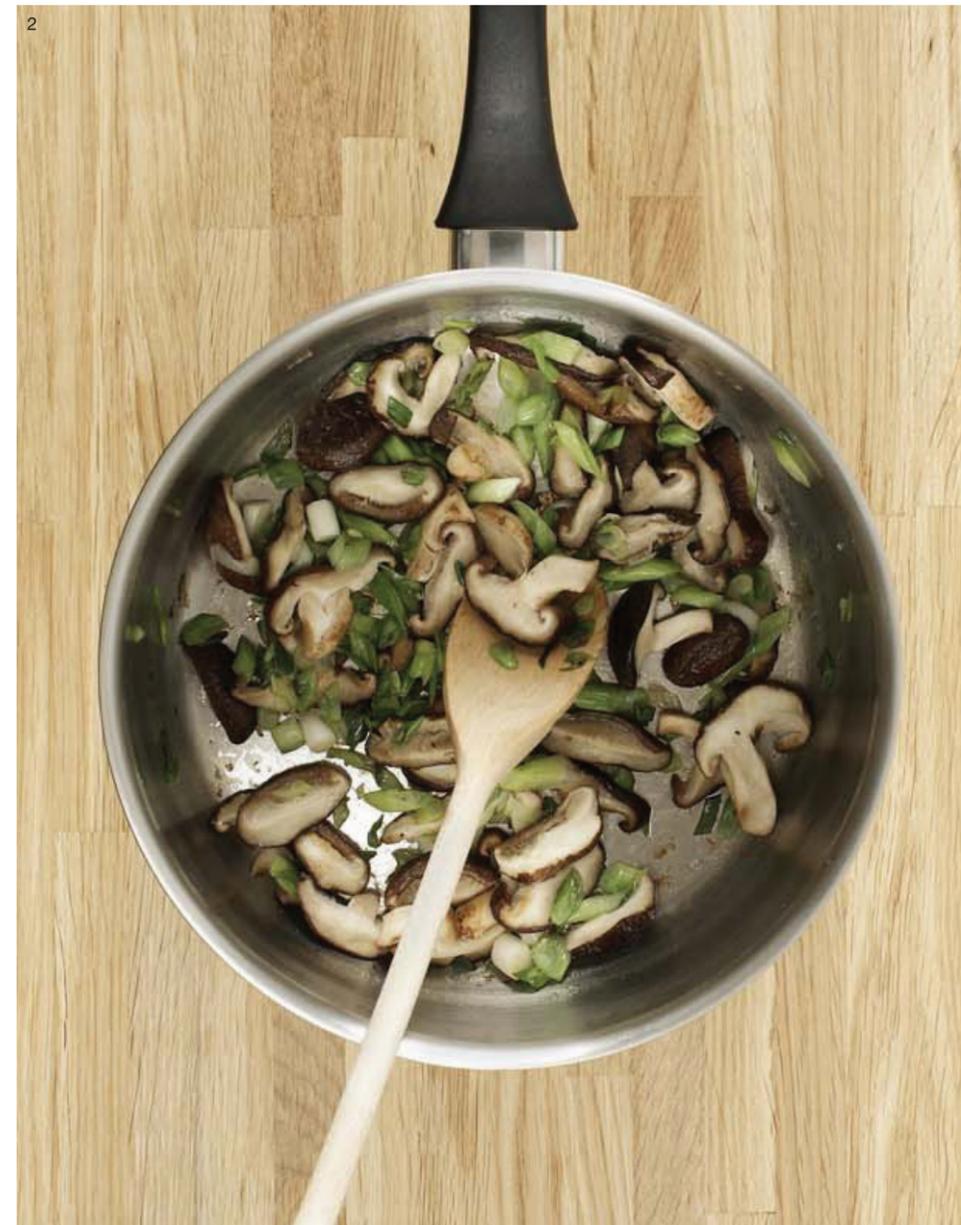
Serves 4 (easily halved)

Slurpable, spicy noodle soups like this one are staple quick dishes across southeast Asia. If laksa paste is hard to find, use a good-quality red or green Thai curry paste instead. Authentic Thai brands will have the best flavour. Laksa paste itself tends not to be spicy, so if you like your food hotter, add a little chopped chilli during step 2.

- 100 g (3½ oz) rice noodles, either thick or thin
- 150 g (5 oz) shiitake or oyster mushrooms
- 1 bunch spring onions
- 2 tsp vegetable or sunflower oil
- 2 tbsp laksa paste or Thai curry paste (red or green)
- 1 × 400-g (14-oz) can coconut milk (use reduced fat, if you like)
- 400 ml (14 fl oz) fish or chicken stock
- 200 g (7 oz) large, raw prawns
- 150 g (5 oz) beansprouts
- 1–2 tbsp fish sauce, to taste
- 1 lime
- ½ tsp sugar
- 1 handful fresh coriander, to serve



1 Boil the kettle. Put the noodles into a large bowl then pour over enough boiling water to cover. Leave to soak while you prepare the rest of the recipe. Stir the noodles a few times to separate any that have stuck together.



2 Meanwhile, slice the mushrooms thickly, and thinly slice the onions. Heat 1 teaspoon of the oil in a pan over a high heat. Add the mushrooms and spring onions and fry for 2 minutes, until just softened. Transfer to a plate.

3
Lower the heat under the pan, then add the remaining oil. Sizzle the laksa or Thai curry paste in the oil for 3 minutes, stirring frequently, until fragrant.

4
Stir in the coconut milk and stock, then simmer for 2 minutes. Add the prawns to the pan, then simmer for 3 minutes, or until the prawns have turned from grey to pink all over.

CHOOSING PRAWNS

Frozen prawns are just as good, if not better, than chilled prawns, as they are frozen at sea when very fresh. To defrost frozen raw prawns quickly, put them into a bowl and cover with cold water. Change the water a couple of times over a 10-minute period, after which time the prawns will be defrosted. Drain well.

5
Stir in the beansprouts and return the spring onions and mushrooms to the pan. Season the soup with the fish sauce, lime juice and sugar, then take it off the heat. The beansprouts should still have lots of texture.

6
Drain the noodles in a sieve, then put into 4 serving bowls. Ladle over the soup, then tear over the coriander to serve.



Sticky Barbecued Ribs

Preparation time: 10 minutes,
plus 1 hour for marinating
Cooking time: 2½ hours
Serves 6

Making a tasty barbecue marinade from scratch is as simple as opening a jar. Let the ribs and marinade cook slowly in the oven, and the sauce takes care of itself. Look for ribs surrounded with plenty of meat and fat around the bone.

- 1 clove garlic
- 3 tbsp tomato purée
- 6 tbsp soy sauce
- 3 tbsp honey
- 2 tbsp red-wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp dark brown sugar
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- ½ tsp pepper
- ½ tsp paprika
- ½ tsp Tabasco sauce
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 18 meaty pork spare ribs,
about 4½ lb



1
Crush the garlic, then put it into a large bowl. Add all of the other ingredients except for the ribs, then stir together. Now add the ribs, and toss them well in the marinade. Let stand for at least 1 hour at room temperature, or up to 24 hours in the refrigerator.

2
Preheat the oven to 350°F. Transfer the ribs and all of their marinade into a large roasting pan, spreading them out evenly. Cover the pan tightly with foil, then bake the ribs for 1½ hours. Remove the foil, then return the ribs to the oven for 1 hour more, turning them in the sauce every 20 minutes or so with a pair of tongs.

3
When they're cooked, the ribs will be meltingly tender and coated with a dark, sticky sauce. Serve them on their own, with finger bowls if desired, and napkins.

Roast Chicken with Lemon & Leek Stuffing

Preparation time: 1 hour
Cooking time: 1 hour 50 minutes
Serves 4–6

A good roast chicken is hard to beat, especially when served with crisp stuffing balls and rich gravy. For a traditional roast dinner, serve with Roast Potatoes (page 306) and a bowl of Glazed Carrots (page 314). This recipe can easily be adapted for turkey – see the note on page 256.

- 1 large free-range chicken, about 1.8 kg (4 lb)
- 2 unwaxed lemons
- 1 bulb garlic
- several sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 tbsp butter
- 2 onions
- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for oiling
- 2 slim leeks
- 150 g (5 oz) crustless white bread (about 5 slices)
- 1 handful fresh flat-leaf or curly parsley
- 1 handful fresh sage
- 1 medium egg
- 6 rashers dry-cured smoked streaky bacon
- 1 tbsp plain flour
- 100 ml (3½ fl oz) dry white wine
- 300 ml (½ pint) chicken stock
- salt and pepper



1 Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/ Gas Mark 6. If the chicken has an elasticated string around it, snip it off and throw it away. Sit the bird in a heavy-based roasting tin so that it fits fairly snugly. Finely grate the zest from the lemons, then set the zest aside. Halve one of the lemons and put one half inside the chicken cavity (the big hole between the legs). Cut the garlic bulb in half through the middle. Put one half of the garlic, plus a couple of the thyme sprigs, inside the chicken.

2 Re-tie the chicken's legs together: draw a long piece of string under the breast meat then around to the legs, then tie with a bow. Smear the butter over the breast and legs, sprinkle with salt and pepper and a few thyme leaves. Finally, cut 1 onion into chunky slices and scatter around the bird. Drizzle the whole lot with 1 tablespoon of the oil. Put the chicken into the oven and roast for 1½ hours. Drizzle the second half of the garlic with a little oil and add it to the tin halfway through cooking.

3 While the chicken cooks, make the stuffing. Trim off and discard any tough green leaves from the leeks. Slice the white and pale green part thinly into rounds, then thinly slice the second onion. Put a frying pan over a low heat, add the remaining oil, then the onion and leeks. Cover and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until softened.

4 Tear the bread into big chunks and put into the bowl of a food processor with the parsley and sage. Strip the leaves from the stalks of the remaining thyme, then add to the bowl.

5 Pulse the blades to make fine, herby breadcrumbs.

6 Squeeze the juice from the remaining lemon half and lightly beat the egg. Stir the breadcrumb mixture, lemon zest and juice, and the egg into the cooked leeks and onions, and season with salt and pepper. Allow to cool for a few minutes.



7 Stretch each bacon rasher a little. To do this, hold one end of a rasher, then run the edge of a knife along its length. It will increase in size by about 50 per cent. Repeat with each rasher, then cut them in half to make 12 pieces.

8 Lightly oil a baking tray or sheet. Shape the stuffing into golfball-sized balls, then wrap each one in a piece of bacon. Put the balls onto the tray with the loose bacon ends facing downwards so that they don't unravel as the stuffing cooks.

9 When the chicken is ready, the onions and garlic will have caramelized into the fat and juices in the tin, creating the basis of a tasty gravy. Lift the bird out of the tin and onto a serving board or platter. Two wooden spoons are useful here. Put 1 spoon up into the cavity of the chicken to lift it from the tin, and use the other to support its weight. Catch any juices that come out of the chicken in the tin below as you tilt it. Leave the chicken to rest for 20–30 minutes. Don't cover the chicken, or the skin will go soggy. Don't worry, it will stay hot. Increase the oven temperature to 220°C/425°F/Gas Mark 7. Put the stuffing balls in the oven to cook for 20 minutes.

IS IT COOKED?

To check whether the chicken is cooked, wiggle the legs a little – if they feel loose, this means that the meat around the joints has cooked. Next, insert a skewer into the thickest part of the thigh. Pull it out and look at the juices; if they're clear, the chicken is ready. If they're pink, return to the oven for 15 minutes and test again.

10

Meanwhile, start the gravy. Spoon away any excess fat from the roasting tin, then set it over a low heat. Sprinkle over the flour and cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly, to make a thick paste, then add the wine, stirring constantly. Let it come to the boil as you stir, until you have a thickish, smooth mix and the raw wine smell has faded.



11

Add the stock gradually, stirring constantly, until you have a thin, lump-free gravy. Keep stirring and simmering until the gravy thickens.



12

If you like, strain the gravy through a sieve into a warmed jug and cover the top to keep in the heat. Press the onion against the mesh of the sieve, to extract as much of its flavour as you can. Add any resting juices that have collected under the chicken, too.

13

Serve the chicken with the stuffing and gravy, along with the soft roasted garlic, ready to squeeze onto your plate and mash into the juices.



TO ROAST A TURKEY

To use this recipe for a 4.5–5.6-kg (10–12-lb) turkey (enough to serve 8 with leftovers), coat the turkey with 4 tablespoons butter and roast, covered with foil, at 190°C/375°F/Gas Mark 5 for 20 minutes per 450 g (1 lb), plus an additional 20 minutes. Uncover the turkey for the last 90 minutes of cooking. Double the stuffing recipe and cook it while the turkey rests. Double the gravy quantities, and be sure to add all of the resting juices to the gravy. Serve with cranberry sauce and your favourite vegetables.

13



Butterscotch Banana Bread

Preparation time: 20 minutes,
plus cooling time
Cooking time: 1 hour 10 minutes
Makes 8 slices

This moist, filling cake is the perfect use for bananas going spotty in the fruit bowl. The frosting isn't essential, as the bread is also delicious sliced and buttered, but its smooth toffee taste is worth trying at least once.

3 medium, very ripe bananas, total
peeled weight about 300 g (11 oz)
175 g (6 oz) softened unsalted butter,
plus extra for greasing
175 g (6 oz) light muscovado sugar
½ tsp flaky sea salt
3 medium eggs
1 tsp vanilla extract
100 g (3½ oz) plain flour
120 g (4 oz) plain wholemeal flour
2 tsp baking powder
50 g (2 oz) chopped walnuts,
plus extra to decorate if you like
100 g (3½ oz) cream cheese



1 Rub a little butter over the inside of a 900-g (2-lb) loaf tin, then line it with a strip of baking parchment, leaving some overhang at either end. Preheat oven to 160°C/325°F/ Gas Mark 3.

2 Peel the bananas and put them in a bowl. Use a fork to mash the fruit to a lumpy pulp.

3 Put the bananas, 120 g (4 oz) of the butter, 120 g (4 oz) of the sugar, the salt, eggs, vanilla, flours and baking powder into a large bowl, then use hand-held electric beaters or a stand mixer to beat the ingredients until smooth.

WHOLEMEAL FLOUR
This will add a little extra nuttiness and texture to your loaf. If you'd rather use all white flour, that's fine.

4 Stir in the walnuts, then turn the mixture into the prepared tin.

6 Bake the loaf for 1 hour 10 minutes, or until risen, golden and springy to the touch. Test if the cake is done by inserting a skewer into the middle of the thickest part. If it comes out clean, the cake is ready. If there are traces of batter on the skewer, bake for 10 minutes longer, then check again. Cool in the tin for 10 minutes, then transfer the loaf to a cooling rack and leave to cool completely.



7 While it cools, make the icing. Put the remaining butter and sugar into a pan with 1 tablespoon water. Put it over a very gentle heat, then wait until the sugar has dissolved. Let the mixture simmer for 3 minutes, until it looks like a silky caramel. Remove from the heat and leave to cool.



8 Put the cream cheese into a bowl, then add the caramel. Beat or whisk the two together to make a smooth, coffee-coloured icing.



9 Spread the icing over the cake, then scatter with a few more nuts to decorate, if you like.



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