



# *The Novice Cook*

by Pat Churchill

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By Pat Churchill



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*This ebook is dedicated to Don, Ben and James Churchill  
for their continuing enthusiasm at my dining table.*

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## The Basic Store Cupboard

One of the first things you will need to do is set up your store cupboard or pantry.

The things that you will want to keep on hand will depend a little on what type of cooking you plan to do. If you want to make your own cakes, cookies, fruit loaves and so on, then you will need to ensure you have various baking ingredients such as baking powder, icing (confectioner's) sugar, cocoa, nuts and so on. Even if you don't plan to bake, you will still need items such as flour for thickening sauces, coating meat, making gravy.

If you like various ethnic cuisines, then you will want to collect the necessary herbs, spices and ingredients.

You will also want to have items at hand so you can whip up a quick store cupboard meal - canned sauces, pasta, canned or dried beans. It pays to have something on hand if you are confined to the house for a few days and can't get out shopping. A couple of cans of soup, some crackers, powdered milk, a spare loaf of bread in the freezer - you'll be glad to have them if you're stuck at home with the flu.

If you have a bread machine and will be making your own bread, then you will want to have a variety of flours on hand.

While the list might look formidable you don't have to buy everything at once. For instance you might want to purchase white wine vinegar which will suit most dishes where vinegar is called for. Later you can add a red wine vinegar, cider vinegar, balsamic vinegar, malt vinegar and assorted herb vinegars..

Likewise with oil - a light olive oil or canola oil will suit most purposes. Later add extra virgin olive oil for dressings, sesame oil for flavouring Asian dishes.

Things like anchovies and capers can add a real zing to things like pasta sauces. Dried porcini mushrooms, while not cheap, are used in small quantities. Soak them in hot water then add to your regular fresh mushrooms for a real flavour boost.

You will want to look at expiry dates on various items. You may wish to mark the purchase date on items as you buy them. While an item may not be considered perishable, it may not have a long shelf-life. For example, herbs and spices lose their potency and flavour if kept for too long. They are best bought in small quantities and stored in a dark, sealed container, or at least in a sealed container in a dark place.

Consider your style of cooking when deciding quantities to buy. A 5kg bag of flour won't be a bargain if you use little flour. If you eat a lot of rice, then bulk buying will be cost effective.

Most of these items can go in your pantry or store cupboard, others need to be refrigerated and some should be stored in the freezer.

Go through the basic list and make your own shopping list of the items you will require immediately. You don't need to buy everything at once. Select the items you will use most often.

Write the date of purchase on items that don't have a long shelf life. Herbs and spices lose their oomph if they are stored for too long.

## The basic list

Anchovies  
Baking powder  
Baking soda  
Bread  
Breakfast cereal  
Butter or margarine  
Cake or muffin mix  
Canned corn - whole kernel and creamstyle  
Canned fish - tuna, salmon  
Canned fruit (for breakfast and desserts)  
Canned kidney beans and chickpeas  
Canned tomatoes  
Capers  
Cheese  
Chilli sauce  
Cocoa  
Coffee  
Cornflour or cornstarch  
Crackers  
Dried beans  
Dried breadcrumbs - for stuffings, toppings and coating food  
Dried fruit - apricots, raisins, sultanas, etc  
Dried herbs (sage, mixed herbs, oregano, marjoram, thyme, dill tips, etc)  
Eggs  
Flour - all purpose, plus bread flour if you make your own bread  
Fruit juice  
Garlic  
Gherkins  
Ginger, fresh (keep it in the freezer)  
Honey  
Jam  
Lemons or lemon juice  
Maple syrup  
Mayonnaise  
Nuts for baking and for snacking  
Oil (olive, canola)  
Onions  
Pasta and pasta sauce  
Peanut butter  
Peppercorns  
Pickles  
Porcini mushrooms  
Potatoes  
Powdered milk  
Rice - brown, white, long-grain, short-grain  
Salad dressing  
Salt - plain salt, rock salt and Maldon sea salt  
Soup - canned or packet  
Soy sauce  
Spices (cinnamon, nutmeg, cumin, chilli powder, mustard, cayenne, etc)  
Stock (chicken, beef - or make and freeze your own)  
Sugar - brown, white, castor  
Tea  
Tomato ketchup  
Tomato paste  
Vanilla extract (for baking and flavouring whipped cream)  
Vinegar - red wine, white wine, cider, malt  
Worcestershire sauce  
Yeast

## Non-food items

Aluminium foil  
Plastic wrap  
Freezer bags  
Paper towels  
Greaseproof paper  
Paper napkins  
String

## Basic equipment

Again, this will vary from person to person. If you are going to do baking, you will need to have an assortment of baking utensils and pans.

A basic set of pots and pans will do for starters. Heavy stainless steel pots with copper bottoms are a good investment. If you like pasta, then a large pasta pot with its own draining basket is a good investment. Some of these are also sold with a steaming basket, adding to their usefulness. And a pasta pot can double as a stock pot.

A wok is handy if you like a lot of stir-fries. But a deep non-stick frypan with a lid can also double as a wok, a frypan, a pan for browning and braising and for one-pot dishes. Make sure you buy a matching egg slice or spoon that is designed not to scratch non-stick ware.

If you can afford it, buy a really good quality chef's knife. It's an excellent investment and will last you for years. You will also need a paring knife and a couple of medium sized knives. Find ones that feel a comfortable weight and fit in your hand. A sharp knife has tiny microscopic teeth along the cutting edge. When the knife is used, these teeth gradually flatten out. A honing steel is used to draw those teeth back into shape so the edge is keen. The whet stone removes the metal from the cutting edge and remakes the edge. A knife block will protect your knives. If you store them cutting side up, they will stay sharp longer.

A wooden chopping board is indispensable. For preference have one board for meat, another for vegetables. Research has shown wood seems to have a mysterious antibiotic effect on food contaminating bacteria. And a wooden chopping board is kinder on your knives than plastic or glass ones.

A set of plastic measuring cups is handy if you're going to be baking. Otherwise buy glass measuring jugs. A collection of wooden spoons will serve you well and you'll need one or two whisks for making sauces and salad dressings. Other essential items include mixing bowls for food preparation and storage, a ladle and serving spoons, a couple of sieves and a colander.

Go through the list and check which items you already have. In some cases you can find substitutes among the items you already own - the draining basket in a pasta pan can double as a colander. A sieve can replace a flour sifter.

Shop around and compare prices. Buy the best quality you can afford and you'll have your utensils for many years. Often you will find high quality items discounted.

While there are all sorts of gadgets for individual tasks, ask yourself if a good sharp cook's knife won't do the job just as well.

Prioritise your purchases. You will probably find a potato peeler and a can opener a good deal more useful than a pastry crimper (use a fork) or an olive pitter.

When you're buying various items, check if they are dishwasher safe. Make sure anything you will use in the microwave is microwave-safe.

Check through the list at the left and select the appliances essential to your own needs.

Ask yourself how often you would use such an appliance.

If you really like homemade pasta, you may regard a pasta machine as essential.

When would you make pasta? At the weekends? After work? How often? Would it just be easier to buy fresh pasta?

Do you eat a lot of yoghurt? It might be cost effective to make your own.

If you enjoy eating freshly made bread, if you take your lunch to work each day, if you like to make pizzas, bread rolls, and other breads, a bread maker can be a good investment. You set it and forget it. Check out which bread maker best suits your purpose.

Do you eat a lot of rice? Maybe a rice steamer is for you.

Want to do your own baking? A standing mixer is an option. Or you can use a food processor for many recipes.

Prioritise according to your lifestyle and needs.

## **Basic utensils**

Baking sheets	Microwave-safe cooking dishes
Balloon whisks	Mixing bowls
Boning knife	Muffin pan
Bottle opener	Pepper and salt mills
Bulb baster	Pie plate
Cake tins (for baking)	Potato masher
Can opener	Potato peeler
Casserole dish	Roasting pans
Chef's knife (6 or 8inch)	Rolling pin
Corkscrew	Rotary egg beater
Colander	Rubber spatulas
Fire extinguisher	Salad bowls
Frying pan	Saucepans
Funnel	Scales
Garlic press	Scissors
Graters - fine and coarse	Serrated bread knife
Kitchen shears	Serving spoons
Knife sharpening steel	Sieves
Ladle	Slotted spoon
Lemon squeezer	Tongs
Loaf pan	Whet stone
Measuring spoons, cups and jugs	Wok
Meat fork	Wooden chopping boards
Meat mallet	Wooden spoons and stirrers
Metal spatula	

## Basic appliances

There are myriad appliances available these days and it's a matter of choosing those you will use most often and those that will be useful when you do need them. Remember they all take up space.

Toaster  
Hand blender  
Food processor  
Microwave oven  
Electric jug  
Coffee maker

Some people will find they can't live without:  
Bread maker  
Toasted sandwich machine  
Waffle maker  
Rice cooker  
Electric wok  
Pasta machine  
Cake mixer (hand held or standing mixer)  
Ice cream maker  
Yoghurt maker  
Crock pot  
Electric frypan

## Other requirements

You will also need a few other kitchen items such as cleaning materials, dishwashing brushes, sponges, pot scourers, oven mitts, tea towels. Make sure you have appropriate pot scourers and cleaning products for your utensils. Don't use harsh scouring pads on non-stick pans.

You may want to invest in a couple of plant pots so you can buy living fresh herbs and keep them on your windowsill. Supermarkets often sell hydroponically grown herbs or herbs in little pots of growing compound which you can keep on the sill. Just remember to water them.

## Buying fresh ingredients and nutrition

While packaged, pre-prepared and convenience foods can make life easier, there's no substitute for using fresh ingredients. And you will find this is the most economical way of stocking your fridge and freezer each week.

If you're drawing up a shopping list, leave yourself scope to take advantage of seasonal specials. Don't decide to make asparagus soup for your dinner guest if asparagus is out of season and megabucks a kilo. Keep an open mind. You may well find they're practically giving the pumpkins away at the local market.

While pre-weighed bags of produce are convenient, and sometimes vegetables like carrots, onions and potatoes are cheaper packed this way, it's sometimes better to select your own as you can inspect each item. While this isn't so important for things like Brussels sprouts, it's wise to choose your own tomatoes so you don't end up with soft dsquishy ones.

Sometimes it's more economical to buy half a cabbage, or a small piece of pumpkin. Will the bundle of five leeks be such a bargain if you have to throw four of them out? Or could you make a batch of leek and potato soup and store it in the freezer? Will you have time?

If this is the first time you've taken responsibility for your own diet, there are a few nutritional basics you should know.

It's recommended that you have at least five servings of fresh fruit and vegetables each day. They contain lots of vitamins and minerals which help fight disease, and fibre which keeps the digestive tract healthy. They have few calories - with the exception of olives, coconut and avocados. They also contain anti-oxidants which help protect us from cancer. Brightly coloured fruit and vegetables like carrots, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes, capsicums, sweet potatoes, blueberries and strawberries are high in anti-oxidants. Vary your fruit and vegetable intake and avoid fruit juices.

Grains are also an important part of the recommended diet. Half of all grains consumed should be whole grains.

Protein food should be eaten in moderation. Eat lean cuts of meat, seafood and beans or pulses. Meat and chicken tend to be high in saturated fat. If you cook chicken with the skin on, to stop it from drying out, remove the skin before serving.

Most fish is low in calories and fat. It contains an oil called Omega-3 which keeps the arteries healthy. Be wary, though, of pre-prepared fish cakes, crumbed and battered fish which can contain a lot of fat. Fresh is best, cooked with a minimum of oil. Or it can be steamed or baked in foil.

Eat low fat or fat free dairy products.

Eat least of fats and sugar. Fats and oils are high in calories and sugars have little nutritional value and you should eat least of these.

Avoid frying food. Use a non-stick pan when cooking so you don't need to add a lot of oil. Spread butter and margarine thinly.

Cut down on salt and avoid salty foods like salami, anchovies, potato crisps, preserved meats, soy sauce. Beware of hidden sugar in cakes, pastries, soft drinks. Limit chocolate and confectionery and also limit alcohol.



### **Physical Activity**

- Find your balance between food and physical activity.
- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes most days of the week.

### **Grains**

- Make half your grains whole.
- Eat at least 90g of whole grain bread, cereal, crackers, rice or pasta every day.
- Look for "whole" before the grain name on the list of ingredients.

### **Vegetables**

- Vary your vegetables.
- Eat more dark green and orange vegetables.
- Eat more dry beans and peas.

### **Fruits**

- Choose fresh, frozen, canned or dry fruit.
- Go easy on fruit juices

### **Oils**

- Make most of your fat sources from fish, nuts, and vegetable oils.
- Limit solid fats like butter, stick margarine, shortening and lard.

### **Milk**

- Get your calcium-rich foods.
- Go low-fat or fat-free.
- If you don't or can't drink milk, choose lactose-free products or other calcium sources.

### **Meat & Beans**

- Go lean on protein.
- Choose low-fat or lean meats and poultry.
- Bake it, broil it or grill it.
- Vary your choices-with more fish, beans, peas, nuts and seeds.

Drink plenty of water. Don't overdo the tea or coffee. Both contain caffeine which acts as a diuretic and can cause your body to lose fluid. Don't drink too much fruit juice or carbonated beverages, either.

Make sure you get a good balance of foods each day and limit takeaways and pre-packaged food.

Keep a note of the food you eat for several days. How does it compare with the recommended food pyramid on the previous page?

Study the ingredients listed in packaged food. They are listed in the order in which they occur in the food. Be wary of foods that have fats and sugar high on the list.

Study the nutritional breakdown, too, avoiding high-fat foods.

Look at the additives. If you're allergic to monosodium glutamate, for example, you will often find only its food additive code number - 621.

Some food can carry a label "Cholesterol free" but still contain unhealthy fats that cause the body to make extra cholesterol.

It's not difficult to include fresh fruit and vegetables in your diet. Have a banana or strawberries with your breakfast. Make a fruit smoothie. Take an orange or a pear or an apple along to class or work. Have a salad or three vegetables with your dinner in the evening. The more colours on your plate, the healthier the meal.

Don't skip meals, particularly breakfast. If you're in a rush, make a fruit smoothie or have a pot of low-fat yoghurt.

If you're in the habit of buying your lunch, beware of the calories that can lurk in such food as muffins, which often contain considerable butter or oil. Forgo any extra butter on these.

Make a note of your regular bought lunch fare and see if it's as healthy as it should be - too many fries and burgers, or other takeaways? Too many cakes?

Try alternatives such as sushi, healthy salads.

## Commonsense and food hygiene

It's important to adopt good food hygiene in your kitchen if you want to avoid sudden, unwelcome attacks of food poisoning. Wash your hands thoroughly before preparing food. It's easy enough to forget that you've patted the cat, scratched your head, blown your nose, or picked something up in the garden since you last washed your hands.

When you buy food, bring it home and place any perishables in the fridge or freezer as quickly as possible.

Raw foods such as fish and meat can harbour germs which will be killed by cooking. But they can contaminate food which is to be eaten raw or has already been cooked. Store cooked food, covered, on a shelf above raw food in your refrigerator. Don't store it where uncooked food such as meat can drip on it.

If you have to defrost food, do it quickly in the microwave, or slowly in the refrigerator. Don't let food sit around on the bench thawing out.

Wash your chopping board with a scrubbing brush and detergent immediately after use. Keep a separate board for cutting meat and another for fruit and vegetables. Colour-coded plastic chopping boards are a good idea - red for meat, green for vegetables, etc.

Serve food immediately after it is cooked, or cool it down quickly in the fridge if you are going to eat it later, or eat it cold. Don't let it sit round on the bench cooling. Dishes containing cream, eggs, meat and rice can be a great breeding ground for bacteria. Be particularly careful in warmer weather when bacteria can multiply rapidly.

If you buy a cooked chicken from the supermarket, remove it from the insulated bag, chop it into smaller pieces and refrigerate until required. It can be reheated in the microwave until it is piping hot.

Check expiry dates on fresh food at the supermarket, particularly pre-prepared food. If the egg salad looks dry around the edges and unappetising, it's probably been sitting in the refrigerated cabinet too long. If the vacuum sealed bag bulges like a balloon, chances are the food inside has spoiled.

It's better to throw out any suspect food rather than take a chance. The doctor's bill will probably cost you more than replacing food that does turn out to be contaminated.

If you have leftovers, refrigerate them promptly or store them in a container, seal and label with the date, and place them in the freezer.

Don't keep too much frozen food. It doesn't keep indefinitely and can become spoiled and taste unpleasant if it's kept too long.

Take care of any sponges and cloths you use for wiping up in the kitchen. They can also spread germs around. Don't use a cloth on the floor and then later use it to wipe your chopping board. Paper kitchen towels make a good alternative.

To clean sponges and cloths, fill a non-metal bowl or jug with water and quarter of a cup of household bleach. Steep cloths and kitchen brushes in the bowl for a couple of hours.

Food hygiene is largely a matter of vigilance and commonsense.

## Recipe terms

As you work your way through a recipe book you will encounter various recipe terms and techniques. Some of these may be unfamiliar to you.

Here are a few of them explained.

**Al dente** - often used to describe pasta which is cooked until tender but still firm “to the tooth.”

**Antipasto** - a course served before pasta in Italian meals. Antipasti can be hot or cold - salami, olives, baked aubergine, artichoke hearts.

**Au gratin** - a dish prepared with a sauce and topped with breadcrumbs or cheese and browned under a grill or in a hot oven.

**Bake** - Cook covered or uncovered in the oven.

**Bake blind** - to place pastry in a pie dish, cover it with a circle of greaseproof paper, and weigh the paper down with dried beans or similar. This will stop the pastry puffing up too much. The beans and paper are removed, the filling added and cooking finished.

**Baste** - to spoon sauce or juices over food e.g. basting roasting lamb with the fat which collects in the pan.

**Batter** - uncooked mixed ingredients for cakes, muffins, batter, pancakes.

**Beat** - mix rapidly and thoroughly with a fork or spoon, with a rotary hand beater, or electric beater.

**Béchamel** - a white sauce made with a butter and flour roux (see below) and milk.

**Blanch** - place food in boiling water for a few seconds to a few minutes. Tomatoes can be blanched for a few seconds to make the skins easy to remove. Vegetables can be blanched before adding to dish - e.g. cauliflower is blanched prior to covering it with cheese sauce and baking it for cauliflower au gratin.

**Bind** - add an ingredient such as egg to hold a mixture together.

**Blend** - to mix ingredients thoroughly together. This can be done by hand or with a food processor. The recipe will generally indicate which to use.

**Boil** - to cook in a liquid that has reached boiling point and has bubbles breaking on the surface.

**Braise** - cook slowly in a little liquid in a container with a tight lid. This can be done on the stove-top or in the oven.

**Chill** - place in a refrigerator to rapidly lower the temperature.

**Chop** - cut into small pieces.

**Coulis** - smooth sauce, gravy or puree.

**Cream** - to beat softened butter and sugar together until light and fluffy.

**Cut [butter etc] into** - to blend fat into flour with a pastry blender or fork.

**Dice** - chop into cubes.

**Drain** - Remove liquid from food. Sometimes the cooking liquid is retained for use in a sauce.

**Dredge** - to sprinkle with flour, for example, to sprinkle flour over meat when preparing a casserole.

**Emulsion** - oil or fat suspended in liquid - e.g. when an oil and vinegar salad dressing is shaken, it forms an emulsion.

**Flake** - to separate cooked fish into “flakes” prior to adding it to a sauce or other ingredients.

**Flambé** - to flame in alcohol. Crepes can be flamed in brandy prior to serving.

**Floret** - a head of broccoli or cauliflower can be broken down into smaller “florets” before cooking.

**Fold** - to lightly cut a fluffy mixture such as whipped egg whites into a heavier mix so the lightness is retained. Done with a spoon or spatula in a cutting motion through the mix to the bottom of the pan, then “folding” the bottom mix into the top.

**Fry** - cook in hot oil or fat. Shallow frying involves using a little fat whereas deep frying involves immersing completely in a deep pan of hot oil.

**Grate** - to scrape over the surface of a grater. Used for items like cheese, chocolate, citrus rind.

**Grind** - crush in a grinder or in a mortar, using a pestle.

**Infuse** - steep in hot liquid. Used for tea, herbs, dried mushroom, for example.

**Julienne** - to cut a vegetable into matchsticks.

**Knead** - to roll, press and fold bread dough to produce a springy, elastic texture.

**Line** - to line a cake tin with greaseproof paper, baking paper or foil. Sometimes the lining is greased.

**Marinate** - to place meat or fish in a flavouring medium (a marinade) for several hours prior to cooking. This can also serve to tenderise the meat.

**Microwave proof** - a dish that can withstand microwaving. Some dishes have metallic decorations that spark when microwaved.

**Mince** - chop finely with a mincer or food processor.

**Ovenproof** - a dish that can withstand high oven temperatures.

**Pan fry** - cook quickly in a heavy pan with a little fat.

**Parboil** - partly boil. To partly cook something before processing further.

**Poach** - cook gently in simmering liquid.

**Preheat** - to bring the oven to cooking temperature before placing in the dish to be cooked. Preheating an oven takes around 10 minutes.

**Puree** - to sieve or mash items like cooked vegetables into a smooth mix.

**Reduce** - to boil a liquid briskly until much of it evaporates and leaves a smaller, thicker residue. This concentrates the flavour.

**Refresh** - to drain and plunge into iced water and thus stop cooking.

**Roast** - cook in an oven in an uncovered dish.

**Roux** - a mix of melted butter and flour cooked together. Often the basis of a sauce - e.g. white sauce where milk is added to the roux.

**Rub in** - to rub butter into flour with your finger tips or with a pastry blender until the mix looks like fine breadcrumbs. Best done with chilled butter.

**Sauté** - To cook food in a small amount of oil over a medium to high heat. Stir as you cook.

**Scald** - to heat milk just below boiling point

**Sear** - to brown meat quickly in hot oil, sealing in the juices. Don't overcrowd the pan. It's best to do a few bits at a time.

**Shred** - cut into fine strips or grate.

**Sieve** - to strain through a sieve to remove any lumpy particles.

**Sift** - to pass dry ingredients through a flour sifter or sieve to aerate and mix evenly.

**Simmer** - to cook just below boiling point - the surface of the liquid will just quiver

**Skim** - remove scum or fat from a cooking liquid.

**Steam** - cook over boiling water, usually in a steamer basket. The food should not touch the water.

**Stew** - to cook slowly in a simmering liquid, usually in the oven.

**Stir** - to blend ingredients in a circular motion with a spoon or whisk

**Stirfry** - cook quickly in a little oil over high heat. The ingredients are stirred and tossed as they cook.

**Sweat** - to soften in a little oil over a medium heat until the juices run

**Truss** - to tie poultry so it holds its shape during cooking

**Whip** - Beat with an egg beater until thick and well aerated.

**Whisk** - beat with a wire whisk till light and frothy.

## Measurements

- 1 teaspoon - 5mls
- 1 dessertspoon - 10mls
- 1 tablespoon - 15mls
- 16 tablespoons - 1 cup (approx)
- 1 cup - 250mls

## Temperatures

°C	°F	Gas #
110	225	1/4
120	250	1/2
140	275	1
150	300	2
160	325	3
180	350	4
190	375	5
200	400	6
220	425	7
230	450	8
250	475	9
260	500	10

## General

Read through the material above and familiarise yourself with the various cooking terms. You will encounter these in most recipe books. Food writers generally assume that those using their recipes are familiar with these terms and so they won't necessarily spell everything out for the novice cook. However, once you know the jargon, cooking is a breeze.

Some people are very organised and like to plan menus a week ahead, do a weekend shop for the ingredients, and maybe make and freeze a couple of dishes for their busier days. Others like to wing it, and call in at the supermarket on the way home, deciding then what they'll have for dinner at night.

There's a certainly psychology to supermarketing and the general recommendation is don't shop on an empty stomach or you'll end up with a lot more than you really need because everything looks good when you're hungry. I say shopping on an empty stomach is OK as long as you have a list and stick to it. Once you get in a rhythm, you should be able to compile your own shopping checklist and use that as a prompt. But be flexible when it comes to fresh produce so you can take advantage of seasonal and supermarket specials. If you have a fresh food market nearby, you'll probably pick up some bargains.

You've stocked up your pantry, started buying your equipment and been shopping for fresh ingredients, now it's time to start cooking. The main thing is to enjoy yourself. These recipes will get you started. There are many further recipes at my website <http://www.cookingdownunder.com>.

## Soups

### Vegetable Soup

*1 large onion*  
*2 sticks celery*  
*2 carrots*  
*2 parsnips*  
*1 potato*  
*1 swede*  
*1 piece pumpkin*  
*1 cup shredded cabbage*  
*a few florets of cauliflower or broccoli*  
*2 litres beef stock*  
*1/2 cup risone (rice sized pasta)*

Put the beef stock in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Meanwhile prepare the vegetables. Peel where necessary and dice finely, grate or chop in a food processor. Add to the pan as you prepare.

Bring to the boil, skimming off any frothy scum, turn down heat and simmer for about 45 minutes, adding the risone during the last 15 minutes. Check the seasoning at this stage, adding salt if necessary.

This soup can be made ahead and reheated when you want it. Serve it with crusty bread or garlic bread (heated for 10 minutes in a pre-heated 180C oven).

### Notes

You can make your own stock but these days it's just as easy to pick up a pack of readymade stock, or you can use the equivalent amount of water and some beef stock cubes or stock powder.

The vegetables here are listed as a guide only. Choose some of these and whatever you happen to have in the refrigerator. If you're planning to make soup at the weekend, set aside cauliflower stalks, celery tops, leftover Brussels sprouts etc and use these.

If you like a thicker soup, you can add half a cup of small red lentils, or soak some split peas or brown lentils for a few hours and add them too. The red lentils don't need pre-soaking. However, the soup will take longer to cook if you add split peas and lentils - probably at least an hour.

You can buy pre-packaged soup mix which contains things like lentils, barley, split peas, tiny pasta, dried onions and assorted flavourings and use this as a basis for your vegetable soup. Check the label, though, as sometimes these mixes often contain monosodium glutamate, food additive 621, as do some stock powders.

## **French Onion Soup**

*6 large brown onions  
60g butter  
1/3 teaspoon sugar  
2 tablespoons flour  
1 cup dry white wine or 1/2cup dry sherry  
2 litres beef stock  
French bread  
1 cup grated cheese*

Finely dice the onions. Melt the butter in a large saucepan and add the sugar and onions. Allow them to “sweat” for about 20 minutes until golden. Don’t let them burn. Give them a stir from time to time.

Stir in the flour and cook for another couple of minutes then add the wine or sherry and the stock and bring the soup to the boil. Turn back the heat and let the soup simmer for about 30 minutes. Check the seasoning, adding salt as necessary.

French onion soup is traditionally served with toasted sliced of french bread topped with melted cheese. This is easiest achieved if you toast the bread on one side under the griller, turn, top with the cheese and grill again till the cheese bubbles. Float this on the bowl of soup.

The wine or sherry isn’t absolutely essential, but it makes the soup taste wonderful. This soup is even better if it’s made a day ahead and given a chance to mature. Refrigerate it if you plan to do this.

## **Leek and Potato Soup**

*2 large leeks  
3 tablespoon light olive oil  
2 large or 3 medium potatoes  
1 teaspoon ground coriander  
1/2 teaspoon dried dill tips  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley  
1 litre chicken stock  
1/2 cup dry white wine  
1/4 cup cream  
salt*

Slice the leeks crosswise using both the white and green parts. Be sure you wash out any soil from the top section. Heat the oil in a large saucepan and sauté the leeks until they are soft. Add the peeled, diced potatoes and the herbs and toss for three or four minutes then add the stock and wine, bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 30 minutes or until the potatoes are tender. Season to taste.

At this stage you can decide if you want to leave your soup chunky or if you are going to put it in a blender and smooth it out. Those handheld wand-like blender gadgets are ideal for this sort of job.

Reheat, adding the cream (optional but good)

## **Carrot and Coriander Soup**

*4 large carrots, peeled  
1 medium onion  
1 small knob of ginger  
2 tablespoons butter  
1 small bunch fresh coriander  
1 litre chicken stock  
1 teaspoon ground coriander  
salt and freshly ground pepper  
yoghurt (optional)*

Dice the carrots and finely chop the onion. Wash the coriander and finely chop, including the roots. Peel and finely chop the ginger, or push it through a garlic press.

Sauté the onion for five minutes in the butter then add the carrots, ginger, coriander, chicken stock and ground coriander and simmer until the carrots are tender.

Process the soup in a blender until smooth. Reheat and season to taste. Garnish with a few coriander leaves and a spoonful of plain unsweetened yoghurt.

## **Watercress and Parsnip Soup**

*2 large onions  
2 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 tablespoon butter  
1 large bunch watercress  
4 medium parsnips  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 tablespoon sugar  
1 litre chicken stock  
salt*

Finely dice the onions and place in a large pot with the garlic, oil and butter. Sauté over a medium heat until the onions soften - about 8 minutes. Sprinkle in the cumin and sugar and cook for a further minute.

Meanwhile wash the watercress, removing any large or fibrous stalks. Remaining stalks should be cut into fairly short lengths or you will end up with stringy bits in the soup.

Add the watercress and the peeled diced parsnips, along with the chicken stock.

Bring to the boil and simmer until the parsnips are tender. You can add more stock or water as required. Season to taste.

When the soup is cooked, process in a blender or push it through a sieve.

Reheat and serve with a dollop of crème fraîche or sour cream and garnish with snipped chives.

## **Poultry and Meat**

### **Spiced Chicken**

*1/4 cup chopped fresh coriander*  
*1 tablespoon paprika*  
*2 teaspoons ground cumin*  
*1 teaspoon salt*  
*1/2 teaspoon chilli powder*  
*1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric*  
*1/2 teaspoon ground ginger*  
*2 cloves garlic, finely chopped*  
*8-10 boneless, skinless chicken thighs*  
*plain flour*  
*1/2 cup chicken stock (use stock powder dissolved in hot water)*  
*1/4 cup lemon juice*  
*12 black olives*  
*1 lime, thinly sliced*

Mix together the coriander, spices, salt and garlic and spoon mixture onto the chicken. Sprinkle the chicken with flour and place in a shallow baking dish. Stir together stock and lemon juice and pour over chicken. Add the lime slices and olives.

Bake uncovered about 1 hour, at 180C, spooning liquid over chicken occasionally until the chicken is cooked and tender. The liquid and spices will form a tasty gravy.

Serve with rice and a green vegetable.

### **Notes**

You can use all of the coriander, including the roots, when you buy it fresh. The best way to keep fresh coriander is to place it in a plastic bag, seal it well (if you have one of those bag sealers with the hot wire element, it's ideal to use. Otherwise use a zip-lock bag. Refrigerate. Coriander can be kept in water but I don't find this very satisfactory.

The coriander, garlic and spice mix will form a paste - just spread this over the meat with the bottom of a teaspoon.

I've suggested boneless, skinless chicken, but you can use other chicken pieces if you prefer. But remove any flaps of fat or you will get a greasy sauce.

For sprinkling on the flour you can use a flour dredger which is like a cup with a perforated screw-on lid. The flour will then sprinkle on like talcum powder.

To spoon the liquid on the cooking dish, protect your hand with an oven cloth, tilt the dish and spoon up the juices then pour them back over the chicken pieces.

## Chicken Aloha

*500g chicken fillets  
cornflour  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter  
1 medium onion  
2cm piece ginger thinly pared  
a few slivers of lemon (or lime) peel  
1 cup canned coconut cream  
salt and freshly ground pepper  
a pinch of cayenne pepper  
1/4 teaspoon turmeric*

Shake the chicken fillets in cornflour (cornstarch). Heat the butter and sauté the chicken for a few minutes until almost cooked. Add the finely chopped onion, lemon peel and ginger and sauté until the onion is tender. Pour on the coconut cream, stirring gently to combine. Add the cayenne and turmeric and season to taste with the salt. Heat through.

Try this with fluffy white rice, sliced bananas and a salad made of grated carrot mixed with a little chopped pineapple and french dressing.

### Notes

This is a tropical-flavoured chicken dish.

The easiest way to shake the chicken in cornflour is to pat dry the meat with a paper towel then place it in a plastic bag containing a couple of tablespoons of cornflour. Gather in the top of the bag in your fist, ensuring there is plenty of air in it. Shake. The pieces of meat will jump round in the bag and get well coated.

Fresh ginger can be kept in the freezer and used as required. It's usually easy to break off a knob and peel with a potato peeler. It slices easily when semi-frozen. The peel can be removed from the lemon or lime with a potato peeler or a citrus zester.

Coconut cream is available by the can, or in powdered form. Follow the direction on the pack for the powdered variety.

The cayenne give a little heat and the turmeric adds colour but you can omit these if you don't have them.

## **Chicken Cacciatore**

*1.5kg chicken pieces  
1 large onion, diced  
1 clove garlic, finely chopped  
1/2 green pepper, finely sliced  
100g button mushrooms, sliced  
1/4 cup tomato paste  
1/4 cup water  
1/4 cup dry white wine  
salt and freshly ground pepper  
2 tablespoons fresh marjoram, chopped*

Skin the chicken and place the pieces in a large, shallow microwave dish. Sprinkle with the onion, garlic, pepper and mushrooms. Mix together the white wine, water and tomato paste and add the herbs and seasoning. Pour over the chicken.

Cover and microwave on medium high for 30-35 minutes. Turn the chicken a couple of times during cooking. Remove the chicken and stir the sauce well before serving. A little cornflour and water can be used to thicken the sauce if required.

### **Notes**

I've given microwave instruction for this dish, but it can also be made in a covered casserole dish in an ordinary oven. It will take around an hour to cook in a pre-heated 180C oven.

You will need about a level teaspoon of salt to season this dish. You can check later in the cooking to see if this is sufficient.

To thicken the sauce, place a couple of tablespoons of cornflour in a cup and gradually add a little water, stirring as you go, until it is a thick cream consistency. Stir into the sauce, combining well, and cook a further couple of minutes.

## Coriander Chicken

*8 boned, skinless chicken thighs*  
*2 tablespoons olive oil*  
*2 tablespoons lemon juice*  
*2 teaspoon ground cumin*  
*2 cloves garlic, crushed*  
*1 teaspoon chilli paste or 1 small chilli*  
*small bunch coriander*

Halve each piece of chicken.

Place the remaining ingredients in a small blender and whiz till it forms a paste. If you have no blender, crush the garlic, finely chop the coriander and mix with the oil juice and spices.

Spread the paste over both sides of the chicken and set aside for at least half an hour.

Grill for 10 minutes each side or bake in a pre-heated 200C oven for 30 minutes.

Serve with a tossed salad and a heated loaf of chewy ciabatta bread.

### Notes

If you're using a whole chilli (or two), split it lengthwise and flick out the seeds with the tip of a sharp knife. Chop the chilli. Never rub your eyes after handling chillis as the juice can stick to your fingers and burn your eyes - even if you think you've washed your hands well. Disposable plastic gloves will help prevent this happening.

You can use the roots and stalks of the coriander as well as the leaves - just make sure they're well washed and patted dry with a kitchen towel before chopping or blending.

You can use the chopped coriander that comes in jars if you wish, though the flavour is not as intense.

When grilling or baking, place the chicken pieces on a rack over a pan. The chicken can also be cooked in a little oil in a frypan, or done on the barbecue.

## Herbed Chicken Fillets

*500g bag chicken fillets*

*flour*

*salt and pepper*

*2 tablespoons each clarified butter and oil*

*50ml dry white wine*

*2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh herbs*

*1 spring onion, finely chopped*

Thaw the chicken and cut the larger pieces into two or three bits. Pat dry then toss in seasoned flour.

Heat the oil and butter in a large pan then add the chicken. Toss several times during cooking. It won't take more than five minutes to cook. When the chicken is springy when pressed, it is cooked.

Pour in the wine, toss in the herbs and onion, stir to combine and cook for a further couple of minutes and remove to a hot serving dish. Try this with your salad and maybe a slice or two of crusty French bread.

### Notes

You can use fresh chicken fillets, also. Or buy 500g of skinned, boneless chicken breast and chop into chunks.

For ease of service you can make up a salad on each person's dinner plate. A mixture of salad greens is good - look for mesclun in your supermarket greengrocery section.

Add some cherry tomatoes, cucumber chunks and a few olives and you've got an impressive lunch for little effort.

## Saucy Chicken

*2-3 chicken pieces per serving*  
*1 medium onion*  
*1 cup dry white wine*  
*1 jar tomato-based pasta sauce*  
*300g button mushrooms*

Skin the chicken pieces and remove any fat. Brown in a little hot oil then remove and place in a large ovenproof casserole dish.

Dice the onions and sauté them until just cooked. Pour in the white wine, scrape down the pan and simmer for 4 or 5 minutes. Pour over the chicken. Add the jar of sauce and bake at 180C for 75 minutes, or until chicken is tender.

Season to taste and add the cleaned, whole mushrooms. Cover and cook a further 10 minutes. Serve with jacket-baked potatoes topped with sour cream and chopped chives or very finely chopped spring onions, and a green vegetable.

### Notes

You can use frozen chicken pieces with the bone in for this dish.

You will probably need to brown the chicken in three or four batches. Don't overcrowd the pan and reheat between batches.

There are plenty of good pasta sauces to choose from these days - ones with olives and herbs, mushrooms, extra garlic, chilli, basil, and so on.

If you're doing jacket-baked potatoes, they can cook at the same time as the chicken casserole. They will take about an hour.

Scrub the potatoes, leaving the skin on, prick a couple of times with a fork (occasionally they can explode in the oven otherwise) and roll in a little oil then sprinkle with salt.

They're cooked when a knife pushed into them meets no resistance.

Three-quarters fill a large saucepan or pasta pan with water and add 4 teaspoons salt.

## **Rabbit casserole**

*1kg boned rabbit meat  
1/2 cup red wine  
1/2 cup dry white wine  
three tablespoons chopped fresh herbs - marjoram, thyme, oregano, rosemary, sage  
1 bay leaf  
3 small onions  
water  
salt and freshly ground pepper  
1/2 green pepper, sliced  
100g button mushrooms  
2 tablespoons light sour cream*

Cut the meat into bite-sized pieces and place in a casserole dish. Peel the onion, removing any roots but otherwise leaving the root end attached. Quarter. Add to the casserole with the herbs and wine and set aside in the refrigerator to marinate for 24 hours.

Before cooking add sufficient water (or stock) to just cover the meat. Season and bake at 180C for 90 minutes or until the meat is tender. During the last 10 minutes add the capsicum and mushrooms. Thicken as desired with flour and water, then stir in the sour cream and reheat. Remove the bayleaf before serving.

Serve with buttered new potatoes, carrots and a green vegetable.

## **Notes**

You will sometimes come across rabbit in the supermarket or butcher's. It can be used as a substitute for chicken in most dishes.

You can leave the bone in, if you wish.

Marinating the meat for a day contributes quite a bit of extra flavour.. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate during this time.

To thicken with flour and water, place three or four tablespoons of flour in a bowl and add up to half a cup of cold water, stirring well with a fork or whisk so you don't get any lumps. Pour this into the casserole gradually, stirring as you go - don't pour it all in in one rush or you could get a lump of dough!

After you've done this, and stirred in the sour cream, return to the oven for five minutes to heat through. This is a good time to place your dinner plates in the oven to get hot.

## **Chili Con Carne**

*1 cup dried kidney beans (or mixed dried beans)*  
*oil*  
*800g lean minced beef*  
*1 large onion, chopped*  
*1 green pepper, chopped*  
*6 skinned, deseeded tomatoes (or one can peeled tomatoes in juice)*  
*1 bayleaf*  
*150ml red wine*  
*salt and pepper*  
*chilli powder*

Soak the beans in plenty cold water overnight. Next day drain, add fresh water and simmer until tender - about an hour, adding salt during the last 15 minutes. Meanwhile brown the beef in oil then add the onion and pepper and sauté until soft.

Add the tomatoes, bayleaf and wine. Season with salt and pepper and add chilli powder. The amount of chilli you put in will depend on whether or not you have an asbestos mouth. I prefer to work on a mild heat and pass round bottled chilli sauce for those who like it skin blistering hot.

Simmer for around 45 minutes then add the cooked beans and simmer another 10 minutes. If you want to prepare the dish ahead, do it up to the stage before the beans are added. If you prefer, canned kidney beans can be substituted. Remove the bayleaf before serving.

## **Fruity Lamb**

*Lamb schnitzels or thinly sliced lamb rump*  
*1 medium onion, finely chopped*  
*1 green pepper, diced*  
*2 tablespoons apple jelly (or use cranberry jelly, quince or blackcurrant jelly)*  
*50ml medium white wine*  
*50ml beef stock*  
*2 tablespoons light sour cream*

Pat the meat dry with a paper towel. Heat the pan till very hot and cook the schnitzels quickly, turning once. Remove from the pan and keep warm. Add a little oil or clarified butter to the pan and gently sauté the onion and green pepper then stir in the apple jelly, add the wine and stock and simmer until all are well combined. Stir in the sour cream, blend well then serve immediately.

## **Skewered Lamb**

*750g lamb fillets  
6 tablespoons olive oil  
1 small onion  
juice of 1 lemon  
6 tablespoon dry white wine  
several sprigs fresh marjoram, oregano, parsley*

Cube the lamb fillets and place in a large bowl. Peel and quarter the onion and place in a food processor with the olive oil, lemon juice, wine and herbs. Blend until the onion is well chopped. Pour the mixture over the lamb cubes and stir to coat.

Cover the bowl and refrigerate for several hours - a whole day if possible. Remove the meat from the marinade and place on bamboo skewers which have been soaked in water for 10 minutes. (This stops the skewers from burning.) Barbecue or grill until the meat is tender.

## **Hoisin Pork**

*750g lean pork mince  
1 large onion, finely chopped  
1/2 cup chicken stock  
2 tablespoons Hoisin sauce (buy readymade from the supermarket)  
1 green pepper, sliced  
1 red pepper, sliced  
2 sticks celery, chopped diagonally*

Brown the pork mince in a large, non-stick frypan then add the onion and cook a further five minutes. Stir in the Hoisin sauce and chicken stock and simmer for 10 minutes then add remaining ingredients and simmer until the celery is just cooked through but retains some crunch.

Adjust the seasoning, thicken the sauce with a little cornflour and water if desired, and serve immediately over boiled noodles.

This dish can be accompanied with some stir-fried vegetables.

## **Lamb and Yoghurt Curry**

*500g lamb fillets, diced*  
*oil or clarified butter*  
*1 medium onion*  
*3 cloves garlic, crushed*  
*2 teaspoons garam masala*  
*1 teaspoon ground cumin*  
*1 teaspoon ground coriander*  
*1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper*  
*salt*  
*1/2 cup water*  
*1 cup yoghurt*

Heat the clarified butter or oil and brown the diced lamb. Remove from the pan and set aside. Reheat the pan and sauté the garlic and onion until tender then stir in the assorted spices and cook for a further minute. Add the meat and sufficient water to just cover and simmer for 30 minutes or until the meat is almost cooked, checking the water from time to time. Add the yoghurt and simmer for a further 10 minutes. Don't let it boil or the yoghurt may curdle.

## **Pork and Orange Casserole**

*500g pork leg steak*  
*1/3 cup seasoned flour*  
*4 shallots or 1 medium onion*  
*2 tablespoons butter*  
*oil*  
*1 teaspoon dried mustard*  
*1 sprig fresh rosemary, chopped*  
*1 teaspoon chicken stock powder*  
*60 mls white wine*  
*60 mls water*  
*juice of two oranges*  
*1 extra orange*  
*2 large tablespoons of light sour cream*

Cut the pork into thin strips and toss in the seasoned flour. Finely chop the shallot or onion and sauté in butter until translucent. Remove from the pan, add a little oil and brown the pork pieces. You may need to do this in a couple of batches. Place the onion and pork in an ovenproof casserole with the rosemary. Mix the mustard and stock powder with the water then add to the casserole with the wine and orange juice.

Bake at 180C until meat is tender. About 90 minutes. Stir in the sour cream and allow the casserole to stand for two or three minutes before serving. Halve and thinly slice the extra orange and use as a garnish, along with a dusting of freshly chopped parsley. Serve with noodles and fresh vegetables. Some crisp stir-fried Florence fennel makes a change.

## **Pork and Noodles**

*750g lean pork, cubed  
2 cloves garlic, crushed  
2 large onion, finely chopped  
3 sticks celery, diagonally sliced  
half cup dry white wine  
medium can condensed mushroom soup (or a packet of mushroom soup mix and a cup of water)  
2 tablespoons soy sauce*

Brown the cubed pork in a little oil and transfer to a casserole dish. Sauté the onions with the garlic until tender. Add to the casserole with the remaining ingredients. Cover and cook at 180C for 90 minutes or until the pork is tender. Serve with ribbon noodles and stir-fried vegetables or a green salad.

## **Pork and Sage**

*500g minced pork  
1 large onion  
2 sticks celery  
100g mushrooms  
1 or 2 cups additional vegetables (eg broccoli or cauliflower flowerets, carrot matchsticks, sliced cabbage, quartered Brussels sprouts, frozen peas or beans alone or in combination)  
1 teaspoon onion stock powder  
200ml water  
1 teaspoon dried sage  
seasoning*

Heat a large non-stick frypan and brown the pork mince. Add the onion and celery and cook until they have softened a little then add the mushrooms, other vegetables, stock powder, sage and water. Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Thicken the sauce with a little flour and water and adjust seasoning to taste, adding plenty of freshly ground pepper.

While the pork is cooking bring a large pan of water to the boil, add salt and cook two cups of pasta - tortellini is a good choice, or pasta spirals - according to directions. Drain the pasta and stir it into the meat mix. Serve immediately.

## Winter Hotpot

*750g blade steak*  
*1 large onion*  
*1 packet tomato soup powder*  
*1 teaspoon paprika*  
*1 teaspoon dried mixed herbs*  
*100ml red wine*  
*water*  
*2 sticks celery*  
*3 carrots*

Dice the meat and place in a large casserole dish. Finely chop the onion and add with the peeled diced carrots and the sliced celery. Mix the tomato soup with the wine, paprika, herbs and a little hot water. Pour over the meat then add sufficient extra water to just cover the meat. Cook in the oven for 90 minutes to 2 hours or until the meat is tender. Check the seasoning, adding salt if necessary. A few cleaned button mushrooms can be added 10 minutes before serving.

If you are accompanying the dish with jacket baked potatoes, these can be cooked in the oven for an hour at the same time as the casserole. Serve the potatoes with light sour cream. Alternatively the dish can be served with noodles or rice, in which case I would stir a couple of tablespoons of sour cream into the casserole before serving.

## Irish Stew

*8 shoulder lamb chops*  
*500ml chicken stock (or water)*  
*2 leeks*  
*2 carrots*  
*4 medium potatoes*  
*1 parsnip*

Remove any visible fat from the chops and cut each one in half. Place in a large casserole dish with the chicken stock. Trim the leeks to below the level where the dirt goes between the layers - the cleaned tops can be used for soup. Cut the whole leeks into 2.5cm lengths. Peel the carrots and parsnips and cut into chunks. Peel the potatoes, if necessary, and cut into halves then quarters.

Add the vegetables to the casserole. Cover with a lid and bake at 160C for 2-3 hours until the meat falls away from the bone. Check the seasoning, adding salt if necessary. Before serving, skim off any fat and then thicken the gravy with a little flour mixed with cold water. Reheat.

Sprinkle the finished dish with some chopped fresh herbs like parsley. Serve with a green vegetable.

## **Braised Lamb Shanks**

*4-8 lamb shanks*  
*2 medium onions, sliced*  
*4 cloves garlic, crushed*  
*1 can peeled tomatoes in juice*  
*1/2 cup beef stock or water and beef bouillon cubes*  
*1/2 cup red wine*  
*2 teaspoons salt*  
*1 teaspoon dill seeds*  
*1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper*  
*2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce*  
*1 teaspoon ground cumin*

Place all the ingredients in an ovenproof dish and cover. If you don't have a large enough casserole, then use a large, shallow pan and cover it with Aluminium foil. Bake at 150C for about 3 hours until the meat is falling off the bone. Set aside for a day, removing any fat, thicken with flour and water and reheat before serving. Or, if you wish to use immediately, skim off the fat and thicken the gravy with a couple of tablespoons of flour blended with a little water.

Serve with mashed potatoes, or a mash of carrots and parsnips. Blend either with a couple of tablespoons of butter.

Accompany with a green vegetable, or a side salad.

## **Vegetables and salads**

### **Eggplant Casserole**

*1 medium onion  
3 cloves garlic, crushed  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
750g ripe tomatoes, peeled  
1/2 teaspoon dried basil or 1 tablespoons fresh basil  
3 tablespoons tomato paste  
salt and pepper  
1 cup dry breadcrumbs  
1 teaspoon dried oregano  
3 tablespoons parmesan cheese  
2 medium eggplants, cut into 1cm slices  
2 eggs  
around 250g mozzarella cheese, sliced or grated*

Brown the garlic in olive oil then add the onions and sauté until tender. Add the peeled tomatoes, tomato paste, salt, pepper and basil and simmer gently for 20 minutes.

Combine the breadcrumbs, oregano and parmesan. Beat the eggs. Dip the eggplant slices in egg then in breadcrumbs. Allow to set for a few minutes then fry in oil until golden.

Place a layer of tomato sauce in an ovenproof dish, then a layer of eggplant and another of mozzarella. Repeat, finishing with a layer of cheese. Bake at 180C for around 25 minutes.

Try this as a luncheon dish, or with steak or lamb chops.

## **Savoury Baked Potatoes**

*6 to 8 large potatoes*  
*oil*  
*salt*  
*1 large onion*  
*4 rashers bacon*  
*1 small stick celery (optional)*  
*pinch cayenne pepper*  
*1/2 punnet cream cheese*  
*milk*  
*1 cup grated tasty cheese*

Scrub the potatoes well and dry them. Brush with oil and sprinkle with salt. Prick with a fork. Place on a rack and bake at 200C for 45-60 minutes. Time will depend on size and thickness of potatoes - test with a skewer. Remove the potatoes from the oven and, holding them in a tea towel, slice in half lengthwise. Scoop out the potato flesh into a bowl with a dessertspoon, leaving behind sufficient to make a firm shell. Set aside the shells. Mash the potato well then add the finely chopped onion and celery and the cream cheese. Add enough milk to make the potato moist - but not wet. Season as required with salt and cayenne pepper.

Grill or microwave the bacon and dice. Add to the potato mixture, leaving a little to top each potato. Spoon the potato back into the shells, top with the reserved bacon and sprinkle with the grated cheese.

Return the potatoes to the oven and reheat until the cheese bubbles and turns golden brown. Serve with a tossed salad.

## **Harvard Beets**

*beetroot - baby ones if you can find them, otherwise smallish ones*  
*1 tablespoon cornflour or arrowroot*  
*45ml vinegar*  
*2 tablespoons sugar*  
*salt and freshly ground pepper*  
*pinch nutmeg*  
*1 tablespoon butter*

Wash and cook the beetroot until tender. Strain off a little over half a cup of the cooking liquid and cool. Rub the skins off the beetroot.

Mix the cornflour or arrowroot with the reserved liquid then stir in the vinegar, sugar and seasoning. Heat, stirring, until the sauce thickens, add the beetroot and heat through, stirring in the butter just before serving.

You can substitute lemon juice for the vinegar, or you might like to try some orange juice and a little grated orange rind in the sauce.

## **Courgettes with Lovage**

*3-4 courgettes  
100g button mushrooms  
2 teaspoons finely chopped lovage leaves  
teaspoon butter  
seasoning*

Clean and slice the courgettes and mushrooms and place them in a microwave-suitable dish. Sprinkle with the chopped lovage. Add a teaspoon of water and cover with plastic film. Microwave on high for three minutes and allow to stand a further two minutes. Drain off the liquid and add the butter. Mix well through the vegetables. Season with a little salt if desired - although microwaved vegetables rarely need much - and freshly ground pepper

### **Note**

Lovage is a celery-flavoured herb.

## **Artichoke Salad**

*several Jerusalem artichokes  
4 radishes  
1 orange*

Peel and thinly slice the artichokes. Wash and slice the radishes and peel and chop the orange. Place all ingredients together in a bowl. Whisk together:

*juice 1 lemon  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
pinch salt  
a little freshly ground pepper*

Pour over the salad ingredients, turn to cover, sprinkle with finely chopped chives and chill.

## **Witloof Salad**

*2 heads witloof  
50g button mushrooms  
1/2 green pepper  
1 cup coarsely grated carrot  
alfalfa sprouts*

Separate the witloof leaves, and place on a round serving plate in daisy petal fashion. Thinly slice the cleaned mushrooms thinly and do the same with the pepper. Put the mushrooms in the centre of the witloof then a ring of pepper with an outer ring of carrot. Garnish with the alfalfa sprouts. Just before serving drizzle over some french dressing, or a dressing made from equal quantities of orange juice and salad oil.

## **Spinach Salad**

*Bunch spinach*  
*1 cup bean sprouts*  
*2 sticks celery cut into pieces*

Blanch spinach quickly in boiling water. Pat the leaves dry and shred. Place in a bowl with the bean sprouts and celery. Just before serving toss with the following dressing ingredients all whisked together:

*2 tablespoons light soy sauce*  
*1 tablespoon white vinegar*  
*1 tablespoon orange juice*  
*1/2 teaspoon sesame seed oil*

## **Spiral Salad**

*2 cups pasta spirals*  
*1 large carrot cut into matchsticks*  
*1 green pepper, thinly sliced*  
*2 spring onions*  
*1/4 cup white vinegar*  
*1/4 cup oil*  
*1 tablespoons finely chopped fresh herbs such as thyme and marjoram*  
*pinch salt, freshly ground pepper*

Cook the pasta spirals in boiling salted water for six minutes, adding the carrot and green pepper during the last two minutes. Drain and refresh immediately with cold water and place in a salad bowl. Add the chopped spring onions. Whisk together the oil, vinegar, herbs and seasonings and pour over the pasta. Serve lightly chilled.

## **Mushroom and Zucchini Salad**

*250g button mushrooms*  
*2-3 medium zucchini*  
*1/2 cup water*  
*1 tablespoon oil*  
*2 tablespoons vinegar*  
*1/2 teaspoon salt*  
*1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill*  
*3 tomatoes*  
*Chives*

Slice the mushrooms finely and the zucchini a little chunkier. Place in a saucepan with all the remain ingredients except the tomatoes and chives.

Simmer for 10 minutes then drain and place in a serving bowl. Reduce the cooking liquid by boiling until there is about 1/4 cup left. Pour over the mushrooms. Allow to cool then add the skinned and deseeded chopped tomatoes.

Mix well then sprinkle with finely chopped chives before serving.

## **Red Lettuce Salad**

*any variety of red lettuce  
green pepper  
half rock melon  
avocado*

Break the washed lettuce into a serving bowl. Add the sliced green pepper. Remove the skin from the melon and the avocado. Slice both and toss in lemon juice before adding to the lettuce.

Just before serving toss with a lemon and oil dressing.

## **Cucumber Salad**

*1 cucumber  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 cup yoghurt  
1 spring onion  
1 tablespoon chopped mint or fresh coriander leaves*

Peel the cucumber if necessary. Telegraph cucumbers can be left unpeeled. Chop or grate. Place in a sieve and sprinkle with salt. Stir through. Leave for 10 minutes or so over a bowl to drain off excess moisture. Place in a bowl. Add the yoghurt, finely chopped spring onion and mint or coriander. Stir to mix. Some finely chopped red capsicum can be added for colour contrast

## **Minted Cole Slaw**

*1/2 cabbage  
3 carrots  
1 small onion  
1/2 cup mayonnaise  
1/2 cup plain unsweetened yoghurt  
4 sprigs apple mint*

Shred the cabbage and grate the carrots and place in a large bowl. Place the peeled, quartered onion and washed mint in a food processor and chop. Add the mayonnaise, yoghurt and quarter of a teaspoon of salt (optional) and blend well. Pour over the cabbage and carrot and toss.

Refrigerate until required.

Apple mint has a milder flavour than regular mint. If you use an ordinary mint, cut down the quantity.

## **Gado Gado**

*1 small cabbage, shredded  
4 carrots, peeled and sliced  
1 cup sliced beans  
2 large scrubbed potatoes  
4 hardboiled eggs  
2 large tomatoes  
1 sliced cucumber  
lettuce  
2 chopped onions  
2 cloves garlic, crushed  
1 jar peanut butter  
1 tablespoon vinegar  
2 tablespoons soy sauce  
sugar and salt to taste*

Cook the cabbage, carrots and beans separately until lightly cooked but still crunchy. Cook and slice the potatoes.

Fry half the onions with the clove of garlic until golden then add the peanut butter and enough water to bring to a creamy consistency. Add the vinegar, soy sauce, sugar and salt to taste. Fry the remaining onion for garnish.

Place some lettuce leaves on a dish and pile on the cooked vegetables. Pour over the peanut sauce and garnish with the onions, chopped tomatoes, cucumber and sliced eggs.

### **Notes**

Gado gado comes from Indonesia and is a meal in itself.

Cook the cabbage and beans in a little salted water. Boil the potatoes until tender.

Remove the pan from the heat when you add the peanut butter and stir in the water as the peanut butter might burn otherwise. A whisk will help you to mix in the ingredients. No need for further cooking.

Serve this dish at room temperature.

## **Fish**

### **Thai Fish Cakes**

*750g boneless fresh soft fish fillets (something like hake)  
3 tablespoons commercially prepared red Thai curry paste  
3 small chillies, deseeded and finely chopped  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
3 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander  
3 dried kaffir lime leaves, soaked and very finely shredded  
2 tablespoons fish sauce  
1 egg  
250g small green beans, topped and tailed and cut into 1cm pieces*

Cut the fish into chunks and process until smooth in a food processor with the curry paste. You may want to do this in three or four batches. Turn out into a bowl and mix with the remaining ingredients.

Wet your hands and take a small handful of the fish mixture and form into a round patty about 6cm in diameter. Repeat until the mixture is used up, putting the patties on a dish as you go. Set aside for at least half an hour.

Heat a little oil in a pan or on the barbecue griddle and when hot cook the patties for about three or four minutes each side until cooked through. They will brown a little as you cook them.

Serve with rock melon or mango salsa and a tossed salad.

### **Steamed Oriental Salmon**

*2 salmon steaks, about 10cm long, skin on  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger  
1 tablespoon tamari sauce  
1 teaspoon sugar  
1 spring onion cut into 1cm slices, diagonally*

Remove any bones from the salmon with a pair of tweezers.

Mix together the lemon juice, ginger, tamari sauce and sugar and sprinkle over the salmon. Set aside for 30 minutes.

Bring a large pot of water to the boil. A large steamer or a pasta saucepan are ideal. Place the salmon on a plate and put the plate in the steaming basket. Cover with a lid and steam for 10 minutes, adding the chopped spring onion for the last two minutes.

Lift onto a serving plate and serve with a salad made of blanched green beans and cherry tomatoes tossed in a dressing of equal quantities of oil, lemon juice and tamari sauce, a teaspoon of sugar and a dash of sesame oil. Sprinkle with a few shredded basil leaves.

## **Smoked Salmon Pate**

*150g smoked salmon  
120g cream cheese  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
grated zest of 1 lemon  
1/4 teaspoon dried dill tips*

Place all ingredients in a food processor and blend until smooth. Spoon into a serving bowl and garnish with a few capers. Serve with Melba toast.

Melba toast is easy to make and worth the effort. Remove the crusts and toast several slices of white bread. Place flat on your breadboard and slide a knife through the middle, horizontally, to cut each slice in half. Cut into triangles and bake in a pre-heated oven at 170C for 5-10 minutes until crisp and golden.

## **Scallops with Mushrooms**

*Serves 2  
300g fresh scallops, including coral  
1 or 2 shallots, finely sliced  
200g small brown mushrooms, quartered  
1 tablespoon butter  
1 tablespoon light olive oil  
1/4 cup white wine (chardonnay is ideal)  
1/2 cup light sour cream*

Heat the oil and butter in a pan and add the shallots and mushrooms, tossing from time to time over a medium heat until the mushrooms are cooked. Add the wine and let the liquid reduce by half. Add the scallops, cover the pan and cook for a couple of minutes then stir in the light sour cream and heat until it starts to bubble.

Serve immediately. Nice accompanied by fluffy white rice and asparagus with a squeeze of lemon juice.

## **Pan Fried Fish**

*1kg fresh fish fillets  
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh oregano  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
freshly ground black pepper  
1/2 – 1 cup flour  
2 tablespoons butter  
2 tablespoons light olive oil*

Pat the fish fillets with a paper towel to remove excess moisture. Cut into even pieces. Sprinkle both sides with the herbs. Add the salt and pepper to the flour and coat both sides of the fish with the flour mix. You can either put the flour on a plate and press the fish into it, or – as I do – place the seasoned flour in a dredger and sprinkle over the fish.

A dredger is a cup with a screw-on perforated lid. You can make your own by using a jam jar and punching some holes in the lid with a carpet tack (from the inside).

Heat the oil and butter together then place in the fish and cook over a moderate to high heat for about 3 minutes until the flour coating is brown. Sprinkle a little more flour on the uncooked side if necessary, then turn the pieces and cook on the second side until the fish is done – about 5-6 minutes total cooking time depending on the thickness of the fish.

Serve with wedges of lemon, some buttered new potatoes and a tossed salad.

## **Pasta**

### **Smoked Salmon Pasta**

*200g hot smoked salmon  
1 packet dried pasta (spirals or shells)  
1 large red onion  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
oil  
1 can anchovies  
200g mushrooms 1 green pepper  
1 can peeled tomatoes  
2-3 ripe tomatoes  
shaved parmesan cheese*

Fill a large pot with water and cook pasta as per directions on packet.

Slice the onion and sauté in the oil in a deep frying pan until soft. Add the drained anchovies, chopped green pepper and sliced mushrooms and sauté for a further five minutes then add the drained canned tomatoes, chopped fresh tomatoes, and the salmon which has been broken into small pieces. Cover and simmer until the pasta is cooked.

Drain the pasta and place in a large heated pasta bowl and pour over the sauce. Mix to combine. Serve with shaved parmesan cheese.

### **Smoked Chicken Pasta**

*1 smoked chicken breast, diced  
1 packet dried pasta  
200g mushrooms  
1 red pepper  
2 tablespoons capers  
1 jar creamy mushroom and herb pasta sauce*

Cook the pasta following the instructions on the packet.

Heat a little oil in a saucepan and sauté the mushrooms and sliced red pepper for about four minutes then add the pasta sauce and the diced chicken. Bring to the boil and simmer gently until the pasta is cook.

Combine the drained pasta and sauce in a large heated pasta bowl.

### **Macaroni Cheese**

*1 cup macaroni or other pasta per person  
1 large onion, peeled and diced  
2 rashers bacon, chopped  
2-3 tablespoons oil  
1/2 cup all purpose flour  
400mls milk  
2 cups grated tasty cheese  
1/2 teaspoon salt*

*pinch cayenne pepper*  
*3 large tomatoes, sliced*  
*1/2 cup dry breadcrumbs*

Bring a large pot of water to the boil and add the pasta. Stir at first so it doesn't stick to the bottom of the pan. Cook for the time indicated on the pasta packet.

Meanwhile heat the oil in a large saucepan and add the onion and diced bacon. Sauté over a medium heat until the onion is translucent. Sprinkle in the flour and stir well to blend the flour into the bacon fat and oil. Remove from the heat and slowly add the milk, whisking with a wire whisk. Return to the heat and keep stirring with the whisk and bring to the boil, turning back the heat when the sauce begins to bubble. Add a cup of the grated cheese and keep stirring until the sauce thickens and the cheese is integrated into the sauce. Add the salt and cayenne pepper and check the seasoning, adding more salt if required.

When the pasta is cooked, drain and mix in with the sauce (use whichever is the larger pot for this operation). Pour into a large shallow ovenproof dish and cover with the tomato slices. Mix together the remaining cheese and breadcrumbs and sprinkle over the top.

Bake in a pre-heated oven 200C (400F) for about 25 minutes until the cheese browns and the dish is hot and bubbling round the edges.

## **Notes**

Pasta doubles in size during cooking. One cup of dried pasta will yield about 2 cups of cooked pasta.

You can grate your own cheese or buy pre-packaged grated cheese. It's slightly more expensive but is very convenient.

When you add the flour to the onion/bacon mix, it needs to be well integrated. If you remove the pan from the heat while you add the first measure of milk, you will have greater control over mixing everything together. You are pausing the cooking momentarily. Add approximately a third of the milk and start whisking, then pour in the next third, whisk again, add the remainder and return to the heat.

By using a whisk instead of a spoon, you will get a smoother sauce. You need to keep stirring the sauce so it does not stick to the bottom of the pan and start burning.

If you get interrupted at any stage, just pull the pan off the heat.

Check the pasta just before it reaches the end of cooking time. It should be "al dente" that is slightly resistant to the bite. If it is still hard in the centre, cook it a little longer. But don't let it get soft and flabby - it will continue cooking in the oven.

Combining the cheese with breadcrumbs will give a crispy topping.

Let the cooked dish stand a few minutes before serving.

The bacon can be omitted from the dish if you wish. You can add finely sliced celery if desired - cook it with the onion. You can also add several florets of cauliflower to the boiling pasta for the last 4 minutes of cooking.

Serve with a tossed salad, or a well-flavoured coleslaw.

## Desserts

### Brandied Apple Pie

#### Pastry

*120g chilled butter*

*180g flour*

*1/2 teaspoon salt*

*iced water*

Sift the flour and salt. Cut in the butter or process in a food processor until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs then gradually add sufficient iced water, a little at a time, until the mix starts to stick together. Sprinkle with flour, roll out and line a 23cm pie dish. Chill until required.

#### Filling:

*2 eggs*

*200g castor sugar*

*60g flour*

*1 teaspoon mixed spice*

*120g melted butter*

*2 tablespoons brandy*

*50g chopped walnuts*

*3 large apples*

*6 cloves*

With an electric mixer, or a whisk or egg beater and bowl, beat the eggs for two or three minutes. Gradually beat in the sugar. Fold in the sifted flour and mixed spice and add the melted butter, brandy and chopped nuts. Peel and core the apples and slice them onto the pie base. Throw on the cloves then spoon on the other mixture. Bake at 180C for 40 minutes and serve warm with cream or ice cream.

#### Notes

Making your own pastry is relatively simple - more so in a food processor. It's best to work with chilled butter - room temperature butter will give you an oily pastry.

Don't add too much water at a time to the food processor. You want to stop short of the mix actually forming into a solid ball and whirling round the bowl. Check as you go, removing the lid and pressing some of the mix between your fingers and thumb. When it sticks together, it's ready.

Roll out the pastry, line the dish and then set the pastry aside in the fridge to relax and hold its shape.

When you make the pie filling aim for a cream egg mixture with the sugar well incorporated and dissolved. Fold the flour in gently with a spatula. Don't over-mix.

The pie can be baked ahead and rewarmed in the microwave before serving.

## **Rhubarb Sponge**

*4-6 stalks of rhubarb  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 cup sugar  
1/2 cup water*

### **Topping**

*50g butter  
2 tablespoons golden syrup  
1/4 cup sugar  
1 large egg  
1/2 cup flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
2 tablespoons milk*

Preheat the oven to 180degC.

Remove the bottom of the stalks and any leaves from the rhubarb. Cut the stalks into 2cm chunks. Place in a saucepan with the water, salt and sugar. Bring to the boil then turn down the heat and simmer for about five minutes.

Meanwhile place the butter and golden syrup into a bowl and heat in the microwave until the butter melts. Whisk together then add the sugar and the egg and beat. Add the flour, baking powder and milk and beat again with a whisk. Add a little more milk if the mixture is too thick. Spoon the hot fruit into an ovenproof dish and spoon over the batter.

Bake for 30 minutes or until the topping has set and springs back when you press it with your finger.

Serve warm with lightly whipped cream or crème fraiche, or vanilla ice cream.

## **Pears in Red Wine**

*12 ripe pears  
1 1/2 cups good red wine  
1/2 cup sugar  
1/2 cup water  
1 stick cinnamon  
1/4 teaspoon salt*

Peel the pears, leaving the stalk in place. Put in a deep casserole. Place the pears, water, cinnamon and wine in a pot and simmer until the sugar is dissolved. Pour over the pears, and add the cinnamon quill. Bake at 150C for 1 hour. Remove and serve. Top with cold whipped cream.

## **Plum Clafoutis**

*750g dark red plums, halved and pitted  
2 tablespoons Slivovitz (plum brandy) or black rum  
75g sugar  
1/2 cup milk  
1/2 cup plain yoghurt  
3 eggs  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
pinch of salt  
2/3 cup flour  
1/2 teaspoon baking powder  
icing (confectioners) sugar*

Place the plums with the plum brandy or kirsch and a couple of tablespoons of the sugar in a bowl and set aside for 30 minutes, tossing from time to time.

Pre-heat oven to 180C.

Beat the eggs with the vanilla and then add the sugar. Beat together. Drain the plums and add the liquid to the milk and yoghurt. Beat the flour into the eggs, alternating with the milk mix. This can be done in a food processor.

Grease a 25cm-28cm ceramic flan dish and arrange the plums, skin side up. Carefully pour over the batter.

Bake in the preheated oven for 40 to 45 minutes, until the top is browned. Check that the topping is cooked by pressing with your fingers (it should be firm) or inserting a toothpick which should come out clean.

Serve warm, sprinkled with icing sugar. Accompany with vanilla ice cream or sweetened whipped cream.

## **Hot Strawberries And Ice Cream**

*500g fresh strawberries  
1/4 cup sugar  
juice and grated rind of two orange  
3 tablespoon brandy*

Remove the stalks and cut the strawberries in half.

Place the orange juice, rind and sugar in a saucepan and simmer until the sugar dissolves. Add the strawberries, turn down the heat, cover and cook gently until the strawberries are well heated and exuding their juice.

Warm the brandy, ignite it with a match and pour over the strawberries. Remove from the heat and serve immediately over scoops of vanilla ice cream.

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