

# Let's Get Cooking

With Mike Spackman

Let's Get **CREATIVE**

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# Starters

Having a repertoire of soups up your sleeve can lead to what I often refer to as a 'meal in a bowl'. This minestrone takes three base ingredients: onion, celery and carrot that are used over and over again in so many dishes and bulks it out with pasta.

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# Minestrone soup

## Ingredients:

- 1 clove of garlic
- 1 red onion (brown is fine if that's all you have)
- 2 carrots
- 2 sticks of celery
- 1 courgette
- 1 small leek
- 1 large potato
- 1 x 400 g tin of cannellini or butterbeans beans
- 2 rashers of smoked streaky bacon
- olive oil
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 dried bay leaf
- 2 x 400 g tins of plum tomatoes
- 1 litre vegetable stock
- 1-2 large handfuls of seasonal greens, such as savoy cabbage, curly kale, chard
- 100 g wholemeal pasta (or regular pasta which will reduce cooking time)
- ½ a bunch of fresh basil, optional
- Parmesan cheese

## Method:

1. Peel and finely chop the garlic and onion. Trim and roughly chop the carrots, celery and courgette, then add the vegetables to a large bowl.
2. Cut the ends off the leek, quarter it lengthways, wash it under running water, then cut into 1cm slices. Add to the bowl.
3. Scrub and dice the potato. Drain the cannellini beans, then set aside. Finely slice the bacon.
4. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the bacon and fry gently for 2 minutes, or until golden.
5. Add the garlic, onion, carrots, celery, courgette, leek, oregano and bay and cook slowly for about 15 minutes, or until the vegetables have softened, stirring occasionally.
6. Add the potato, cannellini beans and plum tomatoes, then pour in the vegetable stock. Stir well, breaking up the tomatoes with the back of a spoon.
7. Cover with a lid and bring everything slowly to the boil, then simmer for about 30 minutes, or until the potato is cooked through. Meanwhile...
8. Remove and discard any tough stalks bits from the greens, then roughly chop.
9. Using a rolling pin, bash the pasta into pieces while it is still in the packet or wrap in a clean tea towel. ***(This is a good opportunity to gather together your 'bits & pieces' pasta rather than buy or open up a new packet)***
10. To check the potato is cooked, pierce a chunk of it with a sharp knife – if it pierces easily, it's done.
11. Add the greens and pasta to the pan, and cook for a further 10 minutes, or until the pasta is al dente. This translates as 'to the tooth' and means that it should be soft enough to eat, but still have a bit of a bite and firmness to it. Try some just before the time is up to make sure you cook it perfectly.
12. Add a splash more stock or water to loosen, if needed.
13. Pick over the basil leaves (if using) and stir through. Season to taste with sea salt and black pepper, then serve with a grating of Parmesan and a slice of wholemeal bread, if you like.

NB: stocks: *There are numerous stocks sold in a variety of ways (cubes, gels, powders etc). Where possible opt for the lower salt versions.*

*For a single stock cube, the normal ratio is 1 cube to 1 pint (600ml) of boiling water. If a soup or stew requires more stock during cooking, it is healthier to add more boiling water without the addition of another cube. My preferred type is the powdered version especially if the recipe requires a smaller amount of stock*

# Indian Chickpea & Vegetable Soup

## Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 large onion , chopped
- 1 tsp finely grated fresh root ginger
- 1 garlic clove , chopped
- 1 tbsp garam masala
- 850ml vegetable stock
- 2 large carrots , quartered lengthways and chopped
- 400g can chickpeas , drained
- 100g green beans , chopped

## Method:

1. Heat the oil in a medium saucepan, then add the onion, ginger and garlic.
  2. Fry for 2 mins, then add the garam masala, give it 1 min more, then add the stock and carrots.
  3. Simmer for 10 mins, then add the chickpeas.
  4. Use a stick blender to whizz the soup a little.
  5. Stir in the beans and simmer for 3 mins. Pack into a flask or, if you've got a microwave at work, chill and heat up for lunch. Great with naan bread.
- *This is such a 'comforting' soup that gives you a reassuring hug and tastes better the day after you have made it.*
  - **Garam Masala** has warmth BUT no spicy heat. A gentle blend of whole spices: cinnamon, mace, peppercorns, coriander seeds, cumin seeds and cardamom pods are dry toasted in a frying pan to release their aromatics and then ground to a powder

*Having what I call 'bits and pieces on a 'sharing' plate is a great way to get your family and friends together around the table. A single platter can be prepared in advance. With the addition of fresh raw salad veg and warm breads (pittas, ciabatta etc) these WILL be winners! We know because adults and children alike have loved them despite their initial fear of the ingredients list!!*

# Smoked mackerel dip

## Ingredients:

- 250g smoked mackerel fillets, skinned and finely flaked
- 142ml tub soured cream
- bunch spring onions, trimmed and finely chopped
- 4 tsp horseradish
- selection of crunchy raw vegetable, to serve

## Method:

1. In a mixing bowl, stir the smoked mackerel, soured cream and spring onions together to make a textured dip, then stir in the Make a batch of this simple, healthy dip and keep it in the fridge for whenever you want a quick bite horseradish. Spoon into a serving bowl and serve with sticks of raw veg for dipping. Can be chilled for up to 3 days.

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# Pilchard Dip

## Ingredients:

- Tinned pilchards (in tomato sauce) x1 small tin
- Cream cheese 200g
- Chives ½ bunch (finely chopped)
- Juice of x1 lime
- Pinch of ground black pepper.

## Method:

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1. Place the pilchards and their sauce in a small bowl.
  2. Using a kitchen knife and fork, split each pilchard in half along the natural 'belly' line and remove the soft backbone.
  3. Mash the pilchards together with the cream cheese with a spatula until soft and creamy.
  4. Add the finely chopped chives, lime juice (to taste) and a good pinch of pepper.
  5. Blend well until thoroughly mixed.
  6. Chill in the fridge until ready to use.
  7. *Serve with crisply toasted pitta breads*
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# Chef's own Tzatziki dip

- 1/2 cucumber, (peeled, de-seeded and finely chopped)
- 150ml pot of full fat Greek yogurt (can opt for reduced fat)
- 3-4 tbsp crème fraîche
- X1 clove of garlic (peeled and finely grated)
- X1 small bunch of fresh dill (fronds removed and finely chopped)
- X1 tbsp white wine vinegar
- X1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and black pepper to taste

## Method:

1. Combine all ingredients in a medium size bowl and mix gently together.
2. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary.

## Serving suggestions:

Pitta breads (toasted). Mixed colour sliced sweet peppers, carrot 'sticks'.

*Ultimate combo: with grilled chicken or lamb from the BBQ*

# Mains

I do love my meat and try hard to search for the best quality and apply some simple strategies to making meat go further. A small amount of beef mince can be bulked out using dried or tinned lentils to create a variation on cottage pie,

However, I am, nowadays, choosing to eat less meat as a lifestyle choice. Two of the included recipes are PACKED with flavour and texture and will satisfy the hungriest of appetites. They just happen not to have any meat.

## Contents:

- 8 Chilli Con Veggie
- 9 Butternut Squash and Sage Risotto
- 10 Chicken in a Red Sweet Pepper Sauce



# Chilli con veggie

Serves 4-6

## Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onions, peeled and finely chopped.
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and finely chopped.
- 1 leek, washed and finely chopped.
- 1 red chilli, deseeded and chopped.
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 1 tbsp ground coriander
- 1 tbsp smoked paprika
- ½ cinnamon stick
- 1 tbsp dried oregano
- ½ whole nutmeg ( for grating)
- 1 tbsp tomato puree
- 1 tin green lentils (drained and rinsed)
- 1x400g tins of kidney beans ( drained and rinsed)
- 1x400g tins of black beans (drained and rinsed)
- 1x400g tins of chopped tomatoes
- 600ml vegetable stock
- Salt and pepper to taste

## Method:

1. Heat the oil in a large heavy-based pan. Add the onions, garlic, leek and chilli. Fry for about 5 mins or until softened.
2. Add the spices, dried herbs and a good grating of nutmeg. Fry for 2 mins. If it appears a little dry, add a splash of water.
3. Stir in the tomato puree and cook for a further x2 mins.
4. Stir in the lentils, beans and chopped tomatoes. Then add the stock. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer and let it bubble away for about 45mins or until thickened and reduced.
5. Serve with: rice/jacket potato/soured cream/ fresh guacamole/ fresh coriander and tortilla chips.

*Learning the art of risotto making is one well worth mastering and, in reality, takes nothing more than a bit of patience and care to bring together the creamiest of savoury rice dishes I know. Being what is referred to as 'old school', I like to apply my stock gradually and gently blend it into the risotto rice (arborio or carnaroli).*

*However, there are other methods in many recipes. So you can pick and choose.*

*The INDULGENCE in this recipe is the use of mascarpone instead of butter right at the end. Oh my, oh my!*

# Butternut Squash & Sage Risotto

## Ingredients:

- 1kg butternut squash, peeled and cut into bite-size chunks
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- bunch sage, leaves picked, half roughly chopped, half left whole
- 1½ l vegetable stock
- 50g butter
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 300g risotto rice
- 1 small glass white wine
- 50g parmesan
- or vegetarian alternative, finely grated

## Method:

1. Before you make the risotto, heat oven to 220C/200C fan/gas 7. Toss the squash in 1 tbsp oil together with the chopped sage. Scatter into a shallow roasting tin and roast for 30 mins until it is brown and soft.
2. While the squash is roasting, prepare the risotto. Bring the stock to the boil and keep on a low simmer. In a separate pan, melt half the butter over a medium heat. Stir in the onions and cook gently for 8-10 mins until soft but not coloured, stirring occasionally. Stir the rice into the onions until completely coated in the butter, then stir continuously until the rice is shiny and the edges of the grain start to look transparent.
3. Pour in the wine and simmer until completely evaporated. Add the stock, a ladleful at a time, and stirring the rice over a low heat for 25-30 mins, until the rice is cooked al dente (with a slightly firm, starchy bite in the middle). The risotto should be creamy and slightly soupy.
4. At the same time, gently fry the whole sage leaves in a little olive oil until crisp, then set aside on kitchen paper. When the squash is cooked, mash half of it to a rough purée and leave half whole. When the risotto is just done, stir through the purée, then add the cheese and butter and leave to rest for a few mins. Serve the risotto scattered with the whole chunks of squash and the crisp sage leaves.

I often think people are put off from making their own curry from scratch because of the process and time taken. This 'curry in a hurry' could not be faster or any fresher. However, it does have one rather unusual ingredient that shouldn't be left out UNLESS, of course, you have an allergy to flaked almonds.

# Chicken in a Red Sweet Pepper Sauce

## Ingredients

- 500g jointed chicken pieces: (thighs, breast), skinned
- 1 onion, peeled & coarsely chopped
- 1 cube of fresh ginger, peeled and chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled
- 25g/1oz blanched flaked almonds
- 2 red sweet peppers, de-seeded & coarsely chopped
- 1tbsp ground cumin
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- ½ tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp salt
- 7 tbsp vegetable oil
- 250ml water
- 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

## Method:

1. Cut the chicken breast into equal bite-size pieces.
2. Heat x1 tbsp vegetable oil in a frying pan and brown the chicken thighs (you are not trying to cook these through, but just getting a nice colour on the outside). Remove from pan and keep warm until ready to use.
3. In food processor, combine the onions, ginger, garlic, almonds, peppers, cumin, coriander, turmeric, cayenne and salt in the container of a food processor or blender. Blend to a smooth paste.
4. Put the oil in a large wide saucepan and onto a medium heat. When hot, pour in paste and stir-fry for 10 mins.
5. Add the browned chicken pieces together with the chicken breast pieces and water.
6. Add the lemon juice and black pepper. Stir to mix, cover with lid, bring to the boil and turn heat to low for 35-45mins.
7. Serve with plain boiled rice. The flaked almonds blend easier having been soaked in boiled water for 5mins and then drained.

# Desserts

Dessert/pudding/after.... call them what you will, making a choice of a mere three for this Webinar series was torturous!

As a child Sundays were ALL about pudding. Two choices on each occasion was sheer bliss to a young man who, all too often, was corrected for constantly rocking to and fro making little comforting moans as he ate.

I also learnt that pudding tasted far better when eaten with no shoes or socks on. This helped me to grip the carpet better with my toes in fear of floating with joy.

'Lemon meringue pie' may well be the last three words I utter as leave this World. It means more to me than anyone can appreciate.

Most importantly, it carries MEMORY. Memory of a 4ft 6inch Welsh grandma smelling of fags and pastry in her Birmingham kitchen hand beating egg whites on an enamel plate with a palette knife. Her lemon meringue pie told me that, whatever came my way, as long as there was PIE, all would be well.

In the meantime, let's start off with a project 'belter'

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- 12 Sticky Toffee Pudding
- 13 Best Ever Tropical Fruit Salad (with Citrus Poppy Seed Dressing)
- 14 Crema Catalana
- 15 Churros (with Chocolate Sauce)

# Sticky Toffee Pudding

## Ingredients:

- 100g butter, softened, plus extra for greasing
- 175g light muscovado sugar
- 2 large free-range eggs
- 225g self-raising flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 3 tbsp black treacle
- 275ml full-fat milk
- double cream or vanilla ice cream, to serve
- For the sauce
- 100g butter
- 125g light muscovado sugar
- 1 tbsp black treacle
- 300ml pouring double cream
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 180C/160C Fan/Gas 4. Butter a wide shallow 1.7-litre/3-pint ovenproof dish.

Put the butter, sugar, eggs, flour, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda and treacle into a mixing bowl. Beat using an electric handheld whisk for about 30 seconds or until combined. Pour in the milk gradually and whisk again until smooth. Pour into the prepared dish. Bake for 35–40 minutes or until well risen and springy in the centre.

To make the sauce, put all the ingredients into a saucepan and stir over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved and the butter has melted. Bring to the boil, stirring for a minute.

To serve, pour half the sauce over the pudding in the baking dish. Serve with the cream or ice cream.

# Best Ever Tropical Fruit Salad

## Ingredients:

- 12 mandarin oranges, divided (for dressing and salad)
- 2 cup strawberries, sliced
- 1 pineapple, cut into bite size chunks
- 5 kiwi, sliced
- 3 mangoes, cut into bite size chunks

## Citrus Poppy Seed Dressing

## Ingredients:

- 1 medium lemon
- 1 lime
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1/2 teaspoon Gourmet Garden Ginger Paste or fresh grated ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon poppy seeds

1. Wash and dry lemon, lime and 2 mandarin oranges.
2. Zest the washed and dried citrus with a zester or fine grater.
3. Add to 1 cup measuring cup or small bowl.
4. Cut each in half and squeeze the juice into the measuring cup. (You should get about 1/2 cup juice).
5. Add honey, ginger and poppy seeds to juice mixture and whisk until combined.
6. Set aside or place in the refrigerator if serving later.
7. Prepare remaining fruit. Slice strawberries and kiwi. Section remaining oranges. Cut pineapple and mango into bite size chunks.
8. Place fruit in a large bowl.
9. Pour dressing on top of fruit about 30 minutes before serving.
10. Gently toss to coat. Serve and enjoy!

Our finale with good reason;

When I launched Community Chef, I was adamant that food should have ambition intrinsically linked to it. There was no justification for settling for 'that will do'. If I could do more, I had to ignite the taste buds of the young and dispel the 'fears' of those trapped in habit and familiarity.

The Mediterranean diet has much to offer in relation to the foods we choose to eat. From Spain comes a little bit of 'custard' heaven.

Let's be honest, life without custard? Strawberries without cream? Don't think so.

# Crema Catalana

## Ingredients:

- 300ml full fat milk
- 300ml double cream
- Zest of 4 oranges
- Zest of 4 lemons
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 4 large egg yolks
- 75g caster sugar (plus x4 tbsp)
- 2 tbsp cornflour

## Method:

1. Gently heat the milk, cream, zests and cinnamon in a pan until just simmering.
2. Remove from the heat and allow mixture to infuse for 15mins.
3. Beat egg yolks and sugar until pale & creamy.
4. Beat in the cornflour.
5. Return milk/cream infusion to the heat and bring to just below boiling and strain into a large jug.
6. Use 2-3tbsp of the infused milk to slacken egg/sugar mixture. Then pour on remaining milk mixture, whisking constantly.
7. Return mixture to the pan and simmer gently until thickened.
8. **DO NOT ALLOW MIXTURE TO BOIL.**
9. Divide mixture into small heatproof containers. Allow to cool and then place in the fridge for at least 2-3 hrs.

The Crema Catalana, Spain's response to Crème Brûlée, doesn't need anything on the side, does it???

Why not. This recipe for Churros is truly authentic.

Take note: NO EGGS, you are NOT making a choux pastry

# Churros

## Ingredients:

- 500g plain flour
- 500ml water
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp salt
- 3 tsp baking powder
- Caster sugar and cinnamon for dusting
- Sift flour into a large bowl
- Pour water into a pan together with the salt and baking powder and whisk
- Add the olive oil and bring to the boil
- Pour the mixture onto the sifted flour and mix until stiff. Allow to cool slightly and then fill the Churrera.

## Chocolate Sauce

## Ingredients:

- 400ml milk
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 300g dark chocolate
- 125ml condensed milk
- 250ml double cream



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