

Baked Spinach and Ricotta Stuffed Pasta Shells

175g giant pasta shells
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 cloves garlic, crushed
A pinch dried chilli flakes, optional
200g spinach, chopped
125g ricotta
½ lemon, zested
2 onions, chopped
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tablespoon tomato purée
2 x 400g cans chopped tomatoes
1 tsp dried oregano
25g parmesan, finely grated

First make the tomato sauce. Heat one tablespoon of olive oil in a large saucepan, add the onions and cook on a low heat until soft. Add the garlic and tomato purée. Cook for a few minutes then add the chopped tomatoes and oregano. Season generously and simmer for 20 minutes, then allow to cool.

Heat the oven to 190C. Cook the shells following pack instructions, but drain when they are still a little al dente as they will cook more in the oven. Heat the remaining tablespoon of olive oil in a pan and gently cook the garlic (and chilli, if using) for 2-3 minutes. Stir in the spinach and cook until wilted. Stir in the ricotta and lemon zest, then season well.

Spoon the tomato sauce evenly across the bottom of a baking dish. Use a teaspoon to pack each shell with the spinach and ricotta mixture, then put into the dish, making sure the shells are evenly spaced apart. Dot any left-over mixture on top. Sprinkle with parmesan and bake for 20-25 minutes or until bubbling and golden.



Beetroot and Chocolate Brownies

250g butter, cut into cubes
250g plain chocolate (about 70% cocoa solids), broken into squares
250g caster sugar
3 eggs
150g self-raising flour
100g white chocolate, chopped
250g cooked and peeled beetroot, grated or puréed

Preheat the oven to 170C. Line a 20cm square baking tin with baking parchment. Put the cubed butter and chocolate into a heatproof bowl and melt over a pan of simmering water.

In another bowl, whisk the sugar with the eggs until smooth and creamy. Stir in the chocolate mixture until well combined. Sift in the flour, stir, fold in the white chocolate and beetroot. Pour into the prepared tin.

Bake for 20-25 minutes, until a knife or skewer comes out with a few moist crumbs clinging to it - be careful not to overcook the brownies. Remove from the oven, then stand the tray on a wire rack until cool enough to cut into squares. Can be served warm with ice-cream or eaten cold.



Buttermilk and Maple Syrup Scones

300g self-raising flour
100g oatmeal
100g wholemeal flour
50g caster sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
160g butter, cut into small pieces
125ml buttermilk
150ml maple syrup

Pre-heat the oven to 200C. Blend together the self-raising flour, the oatmeal, the wholemeal flour and the baking powder. Rub through the butter until it looks like breadcrumbs. Add the caster sugar. Mix together the buttermilk with the maple syrup and then stir into the dry goods to make a dough.

Press out onto a table about 3 cm thick, using a pastry cutter stamp out your scones. This mix will make a dozen good sized ones. Place onto a baking tray lined with baking parchment. Bake in the oven for around 10 minutes. Serve whilst still warm. If you wanted you could add 100g raisins or 100g chopped pecan nuts to the mixture before adding the liquid.



Buttermilk Pancakes with Avocado, Whipped Feta and Coriander Chilli Oil

For the pancakes

150g self-raising flour
½ teaspoon cream of tartar
1 tablespoon caster sugar
2 large free-range eggs, separated
284ml carton buttermilk

Whipped feta

200g feta, crumbled
200g plain Greek yoghurt (about 7oz)
Half a lemon, juiced
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 avocados to serve

For the coriander-chilli oil

1 red chilli, finely chopped
Bunch fresh coriander, leaves roughly chopped, stalks finely chopped
100ml extra-virgin olive oil
Juice 1 lime

To make the pancakes, mix the flour, cream of tartar and sugar in a bowl with a large pinch of salt. Make a well in the centre, then drop in the egg yolks and mix. Slowly pour in the buttermilk, stirring constantly, until you have a smooth, thick batter.

Meanwhile, make the oil: put the chilli, coriander and extra-virgin olive oil in a food processor and whizz until you have a bright green, red flecked mixture. Season and add the lime juice. If it's too thick to drizzle, add a couple of tablespoons of water.

Make the whipped feta: put the feta and yoghurt in a mixing bowl and whisk until the cheese is completely broken up and becomes creamy. Add the lemon juice and mix again.

Whisk the egg whites to soft peaks in a mixing bowl. Gently fold into the batter, starting with a heaped tablespoonful, then continuing in thirds. The batter should be airy. Heat a large non-stick frying pan. Put a knob of butter on a piece of kitchen paper, then wipe over the pan. The butter should be incredibly thin in the pan – you don't want any sizzling puddles. Drop heaped tablespoons of the batter into the pan, spreading them out slightly with a spatula. Cook over a medium heat for 1-2 minutes, lift up the bottoms to check they're golden, then flip them and cook on the other side for 2 minutes. Put on a plate and keep warm in a low oven while you use up the batter. You should have around 12 small pancakes in total.

Stack the pancakes on serving plates, then top with the whipped feta and avocado. Spoon over a little of the coriander-chilli oil, then serve. These can be served with bacon, blueberries and maple syrup as an alternative topping.

Chinese New Year

Omelette Vegetable Rolls

1 tablespoon sunflower oil
1 carrot, thinly shredded
120g mushrooms, stems removed and thinly sliced
100g bag beansprout
3 spring onions, thinly sliced
Knob of ginger, peeled and finely grated
1 garlic clove, chopped or grated
Soy sauce
3 eggs beaten with 1 teaspoon sunflower oil

Heat the oil in a wok and stir-fry the carrot and mushrooms for 2 minutes until just starting to soften. Add the beansprouts, onions, ginger and garlic and stir-fry for another 1-2 minutes or until the beansprouts are starting to turn transparent. Season with the soy sauce and set aside. Can be made up to 4 hrs ahead.

Heat a medium frying pan, add a little oil, then tip out the excess. Pour in a little of the egg and swirl around the pan to make a thin, even layer. Fry for 30 seconds or until the edges turn golden, then flip over with a palette knife for another 10 seconds. Slide out onto greaseproof paper and repeat until you have made six pancakes. Can be made up to a day ahead.

Cut each pancake in half. Spoon a little of the veg mix in the centre of the half-moon of pancake and roll up, tucking in the edges. Steam briefly to heat the rolls just before serving.

Noodle Soup

560ml chicken stock
3 spring onions, finely sliced into rounds
1 tablespoon Oyster Sauce
1 tablespoon light Soy Sauce
1 tablespoon dark Soy Sauce
120g dried Chinese noodles
4 leaves pak choi, sliced

In a large saucepan, heat the chicken stock and bring to a boil. Add the spring onions, pak choi, soy sauces, oyster sauce & the noodles. Reduce the heat and cook according to noodle package instructions (just until tender). Serve hot.

Egg fried rice with Tomatoes

2 tablespoons sunflower oil
3 free-range eggs, beaten
400g cooked long-grain rice, chilled until completely cold
½ small head broccoli, cut into small florets
1 carrot, cut into matchsticks
3 tomatoes, sliced
3 tablespoons light soy sauce
Dash of toasted sesame oil
Freshly ground black pepper (or pinch white pepper)
1 large spring onion, finely sliced

Heat a wok until smoking and add half the oil, then add the eggs and scramble for 1-2 minutes. Transfer the scrambled eggs to a warm plate and set aside. Wipe away the excess oil from the wok.

Reheat the wok and add the remaining oil. When the work is hot, add the broccoli florets and carrot and stir-fry for 3 minutes until tender, but still crunchy. Add the cooked rice and stir well to break up the grains, then add the tomatoes and stir fry for 1-2 minutes. Return the egg to the wok with the rice and vegetables and season, to taste, with the soy sauce, sesame oil and pepper. Stir in the sliced spring onion. Pile the rice onto a plate and serve immediately.

Egg Fried Rice

250g long grain rice
150g frozen peas
2 tablespoons sunflower oil
100g pancetta, roughly chopped
1 small red pepper, chopped
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
2 large eggs
1 heaped teaspoon Chinese five-spice powder

Fill a large saucepan with water, bring to the boil and tip in a heaped teaspoon of salt - the water will bubble furiously. Pour in the rice, stir once and return to the boil, then turn the heat down a little so that the water is boiling steadily, but not vigorously. Boil uncovered, without stirring for 10 minutes. Drain and allow to become completely cold. Cook the peas in a pan of boiling water for 2 minutes and then drain.

Heat the sunflower oil in a wok and stir fry the bacon for 3-4 minutes until crisp. Tip in the red pepper and the garlic cloves and stir fry for a further 2 minutes.

Add the cold rice with the Chinese five-spice, stir frying for a couple of minutes before adding the beaten eggs. Stir fry until the egg just sets.



Chow Mein

225g dried egg noodles
1 tablespoon sesame oil, plus 1 tsp
100g boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into fine shreds
2½ tablespoons sunflower oil
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
50g mangetout, finely shredded
50g prosciutto, finely shredded
2 teaspoons light soy sauce
2 teaspoons dark soy sauce
1 tablespoon Shaoxing rice wine
½ teaspoon freshly ground white pepper
½ teaspoon golden caster sugar
2 spring onions, finely chopped

For the marinade

2 teaspoons light soy sauce
2 teaspoons Shaoxing rice wine
1 teaspoon sesame oil
½ teaspoon freshly ground white pepper

Cook 225g egg noodles in a large pan of boiling water for 3-5 minutes, then drain and put them in cold water. Drain thoroughly, toss them with 1 tablespoon of sesame oil and set aside.

Combine 100g chicken breasts, cut into fine shreds, with 2 teaspoons light soy sauce, 2 teaspoons Shaoxing rice wine, 1 teaspoon sesame oil, ½ teaspoon white pepper and ½ teaspoon salt for the marinade, mix well and then leave to marinate for about 10 minutes. Heat a wok over a high heat. Add 1 tablespoon sunflower oil and, when it is very hot and slightly smoking, add the chicken shreds. Stir-fry for a few minutes until chicken is cooked and then transfer to a plate.

Wipe the wok clean, reheat until it is very hot then add 1½ tablespoons sunflower oil. When the oil is slightly smoking, add the 2 finely chopped garlic cloves and stir-fry for 10 seconds. Add the mangetout and the prosciutto, and stir-fry for about 1 minute. Add the noodles and the rest of the ingredients. Stir-fry for 2 minutes. Return the chicken and any juices to the noodle mixture. Stir-fry for about 3-4 minutes. Add 1 teaspoon sesame oil and give the mixture a few final stirs. Put on a warm platter and serve immediately.



Hummus 3 Ways

Classic:

2 x 400g tins of chickpeas
10 tablespoons olive oil
Juice of 2 juicy lemons
2 heaped tablespoons tahini
3 cloves of garlic, peeled
2 teaspoons ground cumin
Salt and pepper

Simply place all of the ingredients into a food processor with 3 tablespoons water and blend until smooth; it's really that easy! Store it in an airtight container in the fridge for up to a week.

Beetroot:

1 quantity of classic hummus (recipe above)
1 small beetroot, roasted, peeled and chopped

Place the hummus and beetroot in a food processor and blend until smooth and creamy.

Roasted Red Pepper and Paprika:

2 large red peppers
1 quantity of classic hummus (recipe above)
1 green chilli, deseeded
2 teaspoons paprika

Preheat the oven to 210°C. Slice the red peppers into about eight long strips, discarding the seedy centre part. Place these strips on a baking tray and bake for 10 minutes until they begin to brown slightly. Once the pepper has cooked and is starting to turn ever so slightly brown at the edges, remove from the oven and allow to cool for a couple of minutes. Add the pepper to the food processor with the hummus, chilli and paprika and blend until smooth.

Serve with pitta bread, vegetable crudités or corn chips.



Leek, Potato and Caerphilly Cheese Pasties

300g potatoes, cut into 1cm cubes
knob of butter
2 small leeks, finely sliced
3 thyme sprigs, leaves chopped
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons double cream
Flour, for dusting
500g block shortcrust pastry
140g Welsh Caerphilly cheese or strong cheddar cut into small chunks
1 egg, beaten

Cook the potatoes in boiling, salted water for 5-8 minutes until tender, but still holding their shape. Meanwhile, melt the butter in a large saucepan. Add the leeks and thyme and soften for 10-12 minutes. Drain the potatoes and add to the leeks with the mustard and plenty of seasoning. Stir in the cream and leave to cool a little.

Heat oven to 180C. On a floured surface, roll out the pastry to the thickness of a £1 coin. Use a side plate or a bowl as a template to cut out 6 x 15cm circles. Mix the cheese with the leek mixture and pile a mound of the mix onto the centre of each pastry circle. Brush around edges with a little egg, then bring edges together and crimp with your fingers to seal.

Place pasties on a baking tray lined with baking parchment, brush with the remaining egg and bake for 40-45 minutes until golden brown. Serve warm or leave to cool.



Lemon and Black Cherry Rice Pudding Tart

500g ready-made shortcrust pastry

Plain flour, for dusting

For the rice pudding

500ml whole milk

125ml double cream

3 lemons, zested

100g caster sugar

100g pudding rice, rinsed

4 tablespoons lemon curd

100g mascarpone

75g black cherry jam

2 eggs, beaten

For the compote

100g frozen black cherries

1 tablespoon black cherry jam

Heat the oven to 200C. Roll the pastry out on a lightly floured surface into a circle the thickness of a £1 coin. Line a deep 20cm tart tin with the pastry, leaving about 2cm hanging over the edge. Prick the base with a fork, then chill for 30 minutes.

To make the rice pudding, put the milk, cream, lemon zest and sugar into a pan. Bring to the boil, then pour in the rice and stir. Simmer, covered, over a low heat for 15 minutes, then uncover and cook, stirring, for 25-30 minutes until the rice is cooked but retains some bite. Remove from the heat and stir in half the lemon curd and mascarpone, then leave to cool slightly.

Meanwhile, cover the pastry with a slightly scrunched sheet of baking parchment and fill with baking beans. Put on a baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes. Remove the parchment and beans and bake for 10 minutes more until golden. Leave to cool, then trim the edges with a serrated knife and set aside.

Whisk the jam until smooth and spoon into the base of the pastry case, spreading it out. Stir the eggs into the rice pudding and tip into the case. Bake for 20 minutes until just golden and set with a slight wobble. Leave to cool completely.

Meanwhile, make the compote. Combine the black cherries, 1 tablespoon of water and the jam in a small saucepan and cook for 1-2 minutes, stirring occasionally, until syrupy. The cherries should be soft but still holding their shape. Remove the tart from the tin, put the rest of the curd in a piping bag and pipe over the top, then drizzle over most of the compote. Serve with any extra compote on the side.



Mango, Black Pepper and Cardamom Polenta Bake

3 large eggs
100g caster sugar
1 tablespoon vanilla bean paste
1 teaspoon ground cardamom
1 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper
400g polenta
150g butter, melted
850g tin of unsweetened mango pulp

For the lime yoghurt:

200g Greek yoghurt
2 tablespoons icing sugar
Freshly grated zest of 1 lime
1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste

Pre-heat the oven to 180C. Line a 35cm by 25cm baking tray with baking parchment. Put the eggs, sugar, vanilla paste, cardamom and pepper into a large bowl and beat together. Once blended, add the polenta and melted butter and mix well. Next add the mango pulp and mix again. Pour into the prepared baking tin and bake for 40 to 45 minutes until firm. Leave to cool completely in the tin.

Combine the ingredients for the lime yoghurt together in a bowl. Cut the polenta bake into 10 to 12 slices and serve with some of the yoghurt. A little taste of something sweet yet spicy!



Parsnip Cake

For the sponge:

230g self-raising flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 teaspoons ground mixed spice
200g caster sugar
100g sultanas
3 eggs
150ml sunflower oil
500g parsnips
2 oranges, zested

For the frosting:

200g cream cheese
50g butter, softened
150g icing sugar
1 orange, zested

Pre-heat oven to 180C. Grease and line the base of two 20.5cm sandwich tins with baking parchment. Put the flour, baking powder and spices in a large bowl. Add the caster sugar and sultanas and mix together.

Put the eggs and sunflower oil in another bowl and beat for a few minutes. Mix the two lots of ingredients together, along with the grated parsnips and orange zest. Mix everything together until you have a thick batter; about 2 minutes. Divide the mixture between the 2 cake tins. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes. The cakes should be golden and a skewer inserted in the centre should come out clean. Leave the cakes in the tins for 10 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack and peel off the baking parchment. Leave to cool completely.

Make the frosting by beating the butter and then adding in the cream cheese and icing sugar. Be careful not to overbeat or the frosting will become runny. Sandwich the cakes together with the frosting and spread some on top too. Use the orange zest to decorate.



Pizza

250g strong white bread flour
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon sugar
7g sachet of easy blend yeast
2 tablespoons olive oil
125ml tepid water

Put the flour, salt, sugar and yeast into a bowl and mix. Make a well in the centre and add oil and water, gradually working in the flour to make a soft dough. Add a little more flour if the mixture feels sticky. Knead for 10 minutes until the dough is smooth and stretchy.

Leave to rise in a bowl until doubled in size.

4 tablespoons homemade tomato sauce
Toppings: sweetcorn, ham, salami, peppers, mushrooms, rocket etc
100g mozzarella cheese

Heat the oven to 200C. Divide the dough into 4 and roll each piece out into a circle on a lightly floured surface. Top with the tomato sauce and then add your toppings of choice before sprinkling with mozzarella. Cook for about 15 minutes until crisp and golden.



Proper Chicken Nuggets with a Sweet Paprika and Parmesan crumb Served in a Pitta Pocket with Sweetcorn Relish

500g free-range, skinless chicken breasts
1 clove of garlic
½ teaspoon sweet smoked paprika
1 tablespoon Greek yoghurt
1 large free-range egg
1 lemon
200g wholemeal bread
50g Parmesan cheese
Olive oil
Pitta breads
300g sweetcorn
Mayonnaise
Shredded lettuce

Cut the chicken breasts into roughly 30g nugget-sized portions. Make the marinade by crushing the unpeeled garlic cloves through a garlic crusher over the chicken. Add the paprika, yoghurt, egg, and a good pinch of sea salt and black pepper. Finely grate over the lemon zest and squeeze over all the juice, then use your clean hands to massage all that flavour into the meat. Cover and marinate in the fridge for at least 1 hour, or overnight.

Tear the bread into a food processor, finely grate in the Parmesan, add 2 tablespoons of oil and whizz until you have fine breadcrumbs, then tip into a large shallow tray. Use two forks to transfer the pieces of chicken into the crumbs, using the forks to gently flick crumbs over each piece of chicken so that they're well coated. Transfer the nuggets to a baking tray lined with non-stick baking parchment.

Put in the oven at 200C for 15 to 20 minutes, or until golden and cooked through. Make the sweetcorn relish by mixing some mayo into the sweetcorn. When the nuggets are cooked, heat through the pittas so that they easily form a pocket and add a nugget with some relish and shredded lettuce.



Roasted Red Pepper, Sweet Potato and Smoked Paprika Soup with Homemade Soda Bread

1 sweet potato, roughly chopped into dice with the skin still on
1 red pepper, de-seeded and cut into chunks
1 red onion, peeled and cut into chunks
3 garlic cloves, peeled
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
2 tablespoons olive oil
200ml coconut milk
200ml chicken stock
½ tablespoon sriracha
1 teaspoon maple syrup

Heat oven to 200C. Put the sweet potato, pepper, onion and garlic on a baking tray. Sprinkle with the paprika and seasoning, then drizzle with the oil. Toss together. Roast for 30 minutes or until beginning to brown.

Tip the roasted vegetables into a blender (or use a stick blender) with the coconut milk, stock, sriracha and maple syrup. Whizz until smooth. Pour back into the pan and heat until piping hot. Check for seasoning and serve with soda bread (recipe below).

Soda Bread

350g plain white flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
285ml buttermilk

Pre-heat your oven to 180C. Line a baking tray with baking parchment. Mix all the dry ingredients together thoroughly. Tip in the buttermilk and stir to combine. Once all the ingredients come together as a dough, squidge them together to form a ball. Place the ball of dough on your baking tray and cut a deep cross in the centre. (This is really important as it helps the centre of the bread to cook properly – so cut nice and deep, almost to the bottom). If you wish, you can dust the loaf with a little flour, then place the bread in your preheated oven for 30 minutes.



Sweetcorn and Potato Soup with Cheese and Mango Chutney Toasties

2 tablespoons olive oil
50g butter
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
1 onion, finely sliced
150g potato, cut into small cubes
200g sweetcorn
600ml hot vegetable stock
50ml double cream
salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 teaspoon fresh chives, finely chopped
50g mature cheddar, grated
50g hard mozzarella, grated
1 large round garlic naan bread
1 tablespoon mango chutney
10g butter

Heat the olive oil with the butter in a frying pan over a medium heat. Once the butter has melted add the garlic, onion and potato and sauté for five minutes, until softened. Add the sweetcorn and continue to cook for two more minutes.

Add the stock, bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to simmer for five minutes, until the potato has cooked through. Stir in the cream and season, to taste, with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

In a bowl, mix the cheeses. Cut the naan in half down the centre. Spread one half with the chutney, top with the cheese and then cover with the other half. Melt the butter in a frying pan over a medium heat until just beginning to foam. Add the naan sandwich and use something heavy like a saucepan to press it down. Fry on one side for 4-5 minutes or until golden brown, then turn over and repeat. Both sides should be crisp, with the cheese gooey.

Serve the soup chunky or blend until smooth using a stick blender. Pour into a warm bowl, garnish with a sprinkle of chives and serve with the cheese toasties.



Toffee Apple Trifle

2 Bramley apples, peeled, cored and chopped
70g caster sugar
A squeeze of lemon juice
6 tablespoons Dulce de Leche
6 shortbread biscuits
200ml double cream
Icing sugar

Put the apples in a saucepan with the caster sugar and a squeeze of lemon juice. Cook for 10 minutes until really soft, then blitz in a food processor or mash with a fork until smooth. Swirl through the toffee sauce.

Divide between 6 individual glass bowls and crumble the shortbread biscuits over. Whip the cream with a little icing sugar until thick. Spoon over the crumbs.



Valentine's Shortbread Cookies

225g butter, at room temperature
95g icing sugar
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
290g plain flour
100g sprinkles

Put butter, icing sugar and vanilla extract into a food processor. Process until smooth. Add the flour and pulse until mixture looks crumbly and chunky. Add the sprinkles and quickly pulse until the sprinkles are just incorporated.

Turn the dough out onto a large piece of wax paper and form the crumbles into a log that's about 14 inches long. Shape the log so that it has three flat sides, giving the ends a triangular shape. Wrap the triangular log with the wax paper. Using a ruler, press an indentation into one flat side of the log. Round the edges of that side to form a heart-shaped log. Place the wrapped cookie dough on a baking sheet and freeze for 2 to 3 hours or until solid.

Pre-heat oven to 180C. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Remove log of dough from the freezer. Allow the cookie dough to come to room temperature for 5 minutes or until just soft enough that it doesn't crack or crumble when sliced. Using a sharp knife, cut the log into slices that are approximately 1cm thick. Arrange cookies on the prepared baking sheets. Bake until cookies just barely turn a light golden colour around the edges, between 12 and 15 minutes. Allow to cool on the baking sheets.

