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INTRODUCTION

Family is our greatest influence in shaping us, in making us.

At the heart of every family, there is a complex story of food. The family table represents a constantly evolving edible history, where nostalgia interlaces with tradition, identity, and culture, and where small moments grow into lasting memories. Along with the food that we eat around the table, there are also the shared experiences—the conversations, reflections, heated discussions, and informal exchanges that add a unique flavor to our food.

Family food isn't fancy or complex. Its roots are humble, stemming from recipes passed on through generations, or food rituals born from daily cooking. At home, even the simplest dish can hold deep significance. It could be a modest fried egg sandwich (which my mother made for me whenever I was cramming for a big exam), a bowl of ginger fried rice (which soothed a sore tummy), or a decorative watermelon basket (which my dad hand-carved for every childhood birthday party) that reminds us of a time, a person, or a feeling. The food we ate as children comforts us because it is evocative of a time when we were happy or nurtured; it connects us to our past, and provides a pathway to our future.

Family ties

This book is rooted at home, and observes how our families influence who we are and what we eat. Sharing food together around the table is the most basic act of kinship, but its effects are far-reaching and consequential. The table is a unifier—when we converse with one another around food, ideas are sparked, creativity is kindled, characters are formed, and lifelong habits are engendered.

Wherever I am in the world, it is the culinary foundations of my mother's dining table that influence and inspire me the most. Food was an intensely serious affair in our house. I would wake to my mother standing over her wok and go to sleep with her organizing the kitchen for the next day. Our dinners typically consisted of five or six Cantonese dishes served alongside a medicinal broth—not always our favorite—and rice. My mother didn't drive, so she would take multiple buses or trains just to purchase the best brand of tofu or noodles. But even so, it is not her delicious food or her audacious approach to feeding that inspires me most. Rather, it is her intent. For her, cooking was her way of nurturing. In our home, as it is in many Asian families, food was a means of communication, enabling our parents to convey their feelings towards their children. Traditionally, it is rare for Asian parents to verbally express their love for their children; rather, they *show* their affection through feeding them delicious—and often copious amounts of—food.

While I am a mother who is very different culturally to the one I grew up with, it is my mum's love of feeding that fuels me. It is the very life force that pumps through my veins. Within my own busy family life, prioritizing the life force of mealtimes is paramount—this is a time when we can engage with one another with intent and consideration, building a sense of belonging and strengthening our own family ties.



ROASTED DELICATA SQUASH WITH CHICKPEAS AND TURMERIC TAHINI

Serves 4 / gluten free / vegan

I thank my dear friend Jodi Moreno for introducing me to the wonderful world of delicata squash. The first time I tried it, Jodi had brought a plate of delicata, smothered in tahini, for an autumn potluck dinner. From that day on, delicata and I have been inseparable. Delicata squash signify the arrival of autumn in New York, as their signature stripy skin and long oval shape proliferate around farmers' markets. Rich in flavor, with a mellow brown sugar taste, delicata boast a thin skin that is tender enough to be roasted and eaten—no peeling required. I bulk up the sweetness in this salad with the wizardry of maple syrup and balance it all with an earthy, nutty tahini sauce.

3 delicata squash
(about 3½-4½ pounds/1.5-2 kg)
2 teaspoons cumin seeds
extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon maple syrup
7 ounces (200 g) cooked chickpeas
(about ¾ drained can)
handful of baby arugula or
spinach leaves
handful of cilantro leaves (optional)
2 handfuls of microgreens (any variety)
sea salt and black pepper

TURMERIC TAHINI

⅓ cup (90 g) tahini
1½ teaspoons ground turmeric
juice of ½ small lemon
1 tablespoon maple syrup
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
sea salt and black pepper

Substitute

delicata: butternut squash,
kabocha pumpkin or sweet potato
chickpeas: cannellini or borlotti beans
maple syrup: honey

Preheat the oven to 400° F (200° C).

Slice the delicata squash, with the skin on, into ½-inch (1 cm) thick rounds. Scoop out the seeds and discard. Place the delicata slices on a large baking sheet and sprinkle over the cumin seeds. Drizzle with olive oil, season with sea salt, and toss to coat. Roast for 20–25 minutes, until tender and turning golden. Remove from the oven and drizzle with the maple syrup. Set aside to cool.

To make the turmeric tahini, whisk the tahini, turmeric, lemon juice, maple syrup, and olive oil together with about 3 tablespoons of water until smooth. You may need to adjust the amount of lemon juice, oil, and water to achieve the right flavor balance and consistency for your taste. Season well with sea salt and black pepper.

In a large bowl, combine the delicata with the chickpeas, arugula, and cilantro, if using. Add a few spoonfuls of the turmeric tahini and fold it through the salad. To serve, transfer to a serving plate, season with sea salt and black pepper, drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil, and scatter over the microgreens to finish.

TIP

This tahini dressing can be made ahead and kept in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 7 days.







GRILLED PEACH SALAD WITH MOZZARELLA, BASIL, AND HONEY

Serves 4, as a light dish / gluten free

During the summer, grilled peaches are a surprisingly pleasant main meal ingredient. Use them in caprese salads, as a pizza topping, or pickle them. Reserve this salad for when peaches are at their most abundant and sweet, and choose peaches that are on the firm side, as they will soften up and sweeten with cooking. This is a perfectly light, slightly creamy, and subtly earthy dish for warm evenings.

6 yellow or white peaches
extra-virgin olive oil
2 handfuls of mixed salad leaves
1 pound (450 g) fresh mozzarella
handful of basil leaves, torn
sea salt and black pepper
1–2 tablespoons honey

Cut each peach in half, remove the pit, and then slice each half into four thick wedges. Place the peach wedges in a large bowl and drizzle over some olive oil.

Heat a grill or grill pan until searing hot, then add the peach wedges and grill for a minute or so on each cut side, until there are char marks and the flesh is starting to soften. (Don't cook for too long, as you don't want mushy peaches—you still want the flesh to retain some firmness.)

Arrange the salad leaves on a large platter and scatter over the peach wedges. Tear up the mozzarella, dot it amongst the peaches, and top with the basil leaves. To serve, drizzle generously with olive oil, season with sea salt and black pepper, and trickle over the honey.



SOUPY SALADS

SOUPS ARE HEALTH.

At my childhood table, soup was an elixir, a daily ritual to bring good health. Before bone broths became a luxury item, there was my mum's nightly medicinal broth, a meal disguised as a soup, brimming with potent Chinese medicinal herbs, promising healing powers and the balancing of yin (cool) and yang (heat). My soupy salads are inspired by my mum's inclusive soups—they are complete meals of epic proportions. These recipes are rich in plentiful ingredients and flavor, constructed with the attitude of a full-bodied salad, but transformed into a nutritious, robust, healing soup.







LENTIL SOUP WITH FETA-ROASTED CAULIFLOWER AND WALNUTS

Serves 6 / gluten free

I recently wrote a story about comfort food and, during my research, one dish was consistently cited as a favorite comforting dish—lentil soup. Indeed, this humble soup is a mainstay across several diverse cultures, a popular dish in Greek, Israeli, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian families. For me, this soup represents “pantry cooking” at its best, as I always have the bones of this recipe—lentils, carrot, celery, onion, tomato paste—in my larder. The feta-roasted cauliflower with walnuts is optional, but highly recommended.

extra-virgin olive oil
1 large carrot, finely diced
1 small yellow onion, diced
2 celery stalks, finely diced
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
4 ounces (110 g) tomato paste
2 cups (400 g) green lentils, rinsed
2 bay leaves
8 cups (2 liters) vegetable stock
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
sea salt and black pepper

FETA-ROASTED CAULIFLOWER WITH WALNUTS

½ cauliflower head
(about 14 ounces/400 g),
chopped into bite-sized pieces
extra-virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon dried oregano
small pinch of red chile flakes
1 cup (140 g) feta, crumbled
½ cup (70 g) walnuts, roughly chopped
handful of flat-leaf parsley leaves,
roughly chopped
sea salt and black pepper

Substitute

tomato paste: 2 fresh tomatoes, diced
green lentils: brown, black, or Puy lentils
omit feta for vegan

Preheat the oven to 425 °F (220 °C).

For the feta-roasted cauliflower, place the cauliflower on a baking sheet, coat with a drizzle of olive oil, and season with sea salt and black pepper. Add the oregano, chile flakes, and feta and toss to combine. Roast for 10 minutes, then remove the tray from the oven, add the walnuts, and toss everything together. Roast for a further 7–8 minutes, until the cauliflower is golden and the walnuts are crispy. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for a few minutes. Add the parsley and toss to combine.

Place a Dutch oven or saucepan over a medium heat. Drizzle with olive oil and add the carrot, onion, and celery. Cook for 5 minutes, until starting to soften. Add the garlic and cook for another 2 minutes, until the vegetables are slightly caramelized. Finally, stir the tomato paste through the vegetables and fry for another 2 minutes.

Add the lentils, bay leaves, and stock to the vegetable and tomato mixture. Cover and simmer over a low heat for about 20 minutes, until the lentils are soft. Finish with the red wine vinegar and season well with sea salt and black pepper. To serve, ladle into bowls and add a big spoonful of the roasted cauliflower.

TIP

This soup can be consumed immediately, or stored in the fridge overnight for even deeper flavors.



PASTA NIGHT

PASTA IS SOLIDARITY.

A bowl of pasta brings harmony to our family table, where approval is clear in the hungry eyes and smacking lips. Pasta is a staple dish for many families, and with good reason—it’s a dinner made from pantry ingredients, it’s simple and quick and, let’s be honest, it’s downright delicious. Like the noodles of my youth, pasta is an egalitarian dish that pleases and comforts. On pasta night, venture beyond Napoletana and Bolognese sauce, and unearth the possibilities of unique plant-based sauces (such as miso brown butter, creamed corn, herbed tahini, and caramelized onion with cashew cream) that will reinvent pasta night around your table.

My recipes are “choose your own pasta” adventures—mix and match your favorite pasta shapes with each sauce; use gluten-free pasta if you prefer. Just remember to keep a little of the pasta cooking water, as this magical starchy liquid will transform your dish, helping the sauce to cling to the pasta.







TOMATO AND WALNUT PESTO

Serves 4

Pesto is the consummate pasta sauce. With an ideal “just thick enough” consistency that clings perfectly to pasta, it is endlessly adaptable—I tend to make pesto with whatever leaves, nuts, and seeds I have on hand.

Apart from classic basil, I also love to use spinach, kale, arugula, carrot tops, parsley, and cilantro.

This pesto is a little different, with a bold tomato base. Grill your tomatoes to bring out their sweetness and add smokiness, then whiz them up with walnuts and Parmesan for a creamy, tangy sauce.

Recommended pasta shape:

fusilli / linguine / spaghetti / bucatini /
pappardelle

2¼ pounds (1 kg) cherry or small
tomatoes, halved
extra-virgin olive oil
2 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
3 tablespoons chopped flat-leaf
parsley leaves
zest and juice of ½ lemon
¼ teaspoon red chile flakes (optional)
½ cup (45 g) walnuts, toasted
½ cup (45 g) grated Parmesan,
plus extra to serve
1 pound (450 g) pasta
handful of basil leaves
sea salt and black pepper

Substitute

walnuts: almonds, sunflower seeds,
pumpkin seeds

Heat the oven broiler to high. Place the tomatoes on a large baking sheet and drizzle over some olive oil. Season with a big pinch of sea salt.

Broil the tomatoes for 6–8 minutes, until they have blistered and released some liquid.

In a blender or food processor, whiz up the garlic, parsley, lemon zest, and red chile flakes, if using, to a fine paste. Add the walnuts and half of the tomatoes and, with the motor running, pour in ⅓ cup (80 ml) of olive oil in a steady stream. When combined, stir in the Parmesan and season with sea salt and a good turn of black pepper.

Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil and add the pasta, stirring. Cook according to the package instructions until al dente. Reserve ½ cup (125 ml) of the pasta cooking water and drain the pasta.

Place the pasta in a large bowl and add the pesto, along with a splash or two of the reserved pasta cooking water. Keep adding the cooking liquid in small amounts until the sauce coats the pasta effortlessly. Scatter over the remaining grilled tomatoes and the basil leaves.

To serve, top the bowls of pasta with a generous amount of Parmesan, a sprinkle of lemon juice, and a final drizzle of olive oil.







ONE-PAN SWEET POTATO MAC AND CHEESE

Serves 4–6

My friend-slash-culinary-wizard Samantha Hillman really changed my life with her mac and cheese recipe. There's no cream, no milk, no bechamel, no fuss. Sam relies on the alchemy of starch and water to create magic, producing the creamiest yet lightest mac and cheese sauce I've ever tasted. Using a tasty vegetable stock as the pasta cooking water is genius idea number one; then, there is the ingenuity of introducing starchy stock to cheese, a happy pairing that morphs into a rich cheese sauce. This is now the one and only way I make mac and cheese. This is a simple recipe with big flavors—the sweet potato adds an indulgent sweetness—and, best of all, it can be made all in just one pot. Minimal ingredients and minimal washing up.

extra-virgin olive oil
 9 ounces (250 g) sweet potato, peeled
 and cut into very small chunks
 1/8 teaspoon freshly grated or
 ground nutmeg
 2 tablespoons (30 g) butter
 1 yellow onion, finely chopped
 3 thyme sprigs, leaves picked
 1 pound (450 g) elbow macaroni pasta
 5 cups (1.25 liters) vegetable stock
 2 cups (200 g) grated sharp cheddar
 2 cups (200 g) grated aged Gouda
 or Parmesan
 handful of finely chopped chives
 sea salt and black pepper

Substitute

pasta: gluten-free pasta
 sweet potato: Brussels sprouts

Place a Dutch oven over a medium heat. Once hot, add a drizzle of olive oil, along with the sweet potato, a pinch of sea salt, and a splash of water. Cover and cook for 5–6 minutes, until the sweet potato has softened. Take the dish off the heat, add the nutmeg, and stir with a wooden spoon to break up the sweet potato. Remove the sweet potato from the pot and set aside.

In the same pot, add a little more oil, the butter, onion, and thyme and cook, stirring, for 4–5 minutes, until the onions are soft and golden. Add the pasta and stock and stir to combine. Cover and bring to a simmer, then reduce the heat to medium and cook for 6–8 minutes, until the pasta is al dente and most of the stock has been absorbed—you want some starchy water left in the pan. Turn the heat down to low, add the sweet potato and cheese and stir to combine. The heat will melt the cheese. Taste and season with sea salt and lots of black pepper.

Spoon into serving bowls, scatter with chives, and eat while still hot.



SPINACH AND TOFU WONTONS WITH GINGER-PONZU BROTH

Serves 4-6

As a kid, I loved wontons. At *yum cha*, (dim sum) I would devour them deep-fried, smothered in a viscous sweet tomato sauce. At home, our wonton offerings were more traditional. My mum made them the signature Cantonese way, filled with shrimp and minced pork. She would make them in bulk and freeze them, making this a meal we could enjoy quickly, whenever the craving hit. This is my favorite veggie wonton—spinach and tofu. It is such an easy combination, with minimal preparation, yet is still packed with flavor. When picking your wonton wrappers, go for the square yellow egg variety (the round ones are for pot-sticker dumplings) as they are softer and hold up better to boiling. For the noodles, there is a variety called “wonton noodles” available from Asian supermarkets—they are chewier and more elastic than regular wheat noodles, but honestly, use any noodle you have on hand.

extra-virgin olive oil
 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
 7 ounces (200 g) spinach,
 stems removed
 5 ounces (150 g) firm tofu, crumbled
 2 scallions, finely chopped, plus extra
 to serve
 1 teaspoon sesame oil, plus extra
 to serve
 1 teaspoon soy sauce or tamari
 2 teaspoons white sesame seeds,
 plus extra to serve
 1 teaspoon potato starch or cornstarch
 40-45 square wonton wrappers
 8 ounces (240 g) wonton or dried egg
 noodles
 handful of chopped scallions and
 cilantro leaves
 sea salt and white pepper

GINGER-PONZU BROTH

¾-inch (2 cm) piece of ginger,
 peeled and finely grated
 ½ cup (125 ml) ponzu sauce
 4 cups (1 liter) vegetable stock
 3 dried shiitake mushrooms
 sea salt

Substitute

wonton noodles: rice noodles, ramen
 noodles, vermicelli

ponzu: soy sauce or tamari

TIP

Remember, always cover both unused wrappers and completed wontons under damp tea towels during the wrapping process. If they dry out, the wrappers will split.

For the ginger-ponzu broth, combine the ginger, ponzu, and stock in a saucepan and bring to the boil over a medium-high heat. Season with a pinch of sea salt. Reduce the heat to medium-low, add the mushrooms, and leave to simmer gently while you prepare the rest of the dish.

In a large frying pan over a medium heat, drizzle some oil and add the garlic. Sizzle for about 30 seconds, then add the spinach and cook for about 2 minutes, until wilted. Drain and, when cool enough to handle, squeeze out any liquid. Roughly chop the spinach and add it to a large bowl, along with the tofu, scallions, sesame oil, soy sauce or tamari, and sesame seeds. Season well with sea salt and white pepper. Using your hands, squeeze and knead everything together to form a coarse mixture. If the mixture is too wet, place it in a sieve and squeeze out the moisture with your hands. Add the potato or cornstarch and stir to combine (this will also help to absorb any excess moisture).

Set the wonton wrappers out on a work surface and cover with a damp towel—it's important to do this as they dry out quickly. Take one wonton wrapper and place a spoonful of the filling in the center—don't overfill; you only need a small amount. Moisten the edge of the wrapper with a dab of water and carefully fold one corner to the next to form a triangle, making sure you enclose the filling tightly to avoid any air pockets, which can make the wontons burst. Carefully pleat the two edges towards the center, to form a ball shape with a fishtail (a bit like a tadpole). Transfer to a baking sheet and cover with a damp towel to keep the dumpling from drying out. Repeat with the remaining wrappers. At this point, you can freeze the wontons, or just cook some of them and freeze the rest.

Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil, then reduce the heat to medium (you don't want the water to boil too rapidly as this might break up the wontons). Add the noodles and cook according to the package instructions until just tender. Place in a colander and refresh under cold running water. In the same pot, drop six to eight wontons into the water and boil until they float to the surface. Remove immediately from the water with a slotted spoon and set aside. Continue until all the wontons are cooked.

To serve, place the noodles in deep serving bowls, top with five to eight wontons, and add a small ladleful of the ponzu broth to just cover the wontons. Top each bowl with some chopped scallions, cilantro leaves, and a scattering of sesame seeds. Serve immediately.



BAVARIAN APPLE TORTE

Recipe by Janine Phillipson

Serves 4–6

PASTRY BASE

8 tablespoons (115 g) unsalted butter,
at room temperature
⅓ cup (80 g) superfine sugar
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup (150 g) all-purpose flour

FILLING

9 ounces (250 g) cream cheese, at room
temperature
3 tablespoons superfine sugar
1 large egg
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

TOPPING

⅓ cup (80 g) superfine sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 apples, peeled, and cored
3 tablespoons sliced almonds

Preheat the oven to 425 °F (220 °C). Grease the base and side of an 8-inch (20 cm) springform pan.

For the pastry base, cream the butter, sugar, and vanilla extract together using an electric mixer, until light and fluffy. Add the flour and beat to combine and form a dough. Press the dough onto the base and 1 inch (2.5 cm) up the side of the prepared pan.

To make the filling, combine the cream cheese with the sugar and mix together well. Add the egg and vanilla extract and mix well until combined. Pour this mixture into the pastry-lined pan.

For the topping combine the sugar and cinnamon in a large bowl. Cut the apples into slices—not too thin—and add these to the cinnamon sugar. Toss well to coat all the slices, then arrange the apple slices on top of the filling, starting from the outer edge and working around in a circle, slightly overlapping the slices as you go. Sprinkle any leftover cinnamon and sugar over the top together with the almonds.

Bake for 10 minutes, then reduce the oven temperature to 375 °F (190 °C) and bake for another 25 minutes, until the center is set. Remove from the oven and allow to cool slightly on a wire rack. Serve warm or leave to cool completely before serving.