

FOOD ◇ LIFESTYLE

## // ALTERNATIVE CHRISTMAS MEALS //

Article by GARY CLARKE ◇ December 22, 2016



Christmas: the biggest food event of the year, where tables across the country groan under the weight of turkey, roast potatoes, pigs-in-blankets and sprouts. Every year we have the same traditional roast dinner, so here's a few ideas to shake up this year's Christmas meal.

Turkey and Cranberry Curry with Jewelled Rice (serves 8)

This recipe combines some festive staples with one of our favourite styles of cuisine and is perfect as your main Christmas meal, or even as something exciting to do with leftovers on Boxing Day.

To make this dish vegan/vegetarian friendly just replace the turkey with Quorn or tofu, the stock with vegetable stock and the butter with a vegan butter (we recommend *Earth Balance* if you can get it).

Note: when cooking with acidic foods such as cranberries, it is important to use a nonreactive pan (stainless steel or enamel coated). This will help to get the best results in both taste and appearance.

### Ingredients

#### For the curry

- ◆ 3tsp olive oil
- ◆ 2lb turkey, diced
- ◆ 3tbsp mild or medium-hot [curry powder](#)
- ◆ 2tsp butter
- ◆ 1 small onion, chopped
- ◆ 1 tbsp yellow mustard seeds

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- ◆ 1/4tsp ground cardamom
- ◆ 1 can chopped tomatoes
- ◆ 1 green chilli chopped and seeded
- ◆ 350ml chicken/turkey stock
- ◆ 235g dried cranberries
- ◆ 175g fresh cranberries, chopped
- ◆ 1tbsp minced fresh ginger
- ◆ coriander to garnish, chopped
- ◆ salt and pepper

#### For the rice

- ◆ 350g [basmati rice](#)
- ◆ 1/2tbsp [salt](#)
- ◆ 4tbsp [vegetable oil](#) or butter
- ◆ 3 [cardamom](#) pods
- ◆ 1 piece [lemon peel](#)
- ◆ 1/4tsp crumbled [saffron](#) threads dissolved in 1 tbsp of hot water (optional)
- ◆ 1tbsp [olive oil](#)
- ◆ 1 large [onion](#), thinly sliced
- ◆ handful of [raisins](#) or barberries
- ◆ handful of [dried apricots](#), chopped
- ◆ handful of [pistachio](#) nuts, chopped
- ◆ salt and freshly ground [black pepper](#)
- ◆ fresh [mint](#) to garnish, chopped

#### Method

1. Heat the oil in a large pan over a medium heat.
2. In batches, cook the turkey (sprinkled with curry powder) until it begins to brown.
3. Add butter, mustard seeds and onion to the pan and cook until the onion begins to brown and the seeds pop.
4. Return the turkey to the pan and add any remaining curry powder and cardamom. Stir until the turkey is coated with the spices.
5. Cook for 1 minute, then add tomatoes, stock, dried and fresh cranberries, and ginger.
6. Bring to the boil then reduce to a simmer. Cook, without a lid, whilst stirring occasionally until the mixture reduces slightly and the turkey is cooked (around 10–12 minutes).
7. Wash and drain the rice in a sieve.
8. Put 500ml of water into a pan with the salt, oil or butter, cardamom, and lemon peel. Bring to the boil and add rice, stir with a fork.
9. Put the lid on the pan – a tea towel will also work – and turn the heat down. Cook until the liquid has been absorbed into the rice.
10. Whilst the rice is cooking, heat oil in a separate frying pan and fry the onion until brown. Add the raisins, apricot and pistachios. Season to taste and fry until the nuts are lightly toasted.
11. When the rice is cooked and all the water has been absorbed (and the bottom begins to crisp), take the pan off the heat, pour the saffron water over the rice and leave for 10 minutes.
12. Transfer rice to serving dish and top with the nut mixture and mint.
13. Garnish the curry with coriander and serve.



## Brandied Mushroom and Butternut Squash Pie with Chestnut and Cranberry Stuffing (serves 4-6)

This pie is a delicious Christmas main for both vegetarians and meat-eaters alike.

### Ingredients

#### Chestnut Cranberry Stuffing

- ◆ 75g dried cranberries
- ◆ 75ml brandy
- ◆ 5 banana shallots, peeled and sliced
- ◆ 2tbsp olive oil
- ◆ 120g cashews, roasted and chopped
- ◆ 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- ◆ 1tbsp rosemary leaves, chopped
- ◆ 2tbsp sage leaves, chopped
- ◆ 1tbsp brown miso
- ◆ 250g cooked chestnuts, ground
- ◆ 1 apple, grated
- ◆ 1/2 lemon, zest and juice
- ◆ pinch of grated nutmeg
- ◆ pinch of black pepper
- ◆ 100g breadcrumbs

#### The Pie

- ◆ 1 large butternut squash
- ◆ 1/2 recipe chestnut cranberry stuffing (can be made in advance)
- ◆ 2-3 Portobello mushrooms
- ◆ 1tbsp brandy
- ◆ 2tsp olive oil
- ◆ 2tbsp chopped thyme leaves
- ◆ 4 large leaves of kale
- ◆ 200g spinach
- ◆ grate of nutmeg
- ◆ zest from 1/4 lemon
- ◆ drop of olive oil
- ◆ 1 block puff pastry
- ◆ 1 egg, beaten
- ◆ salt and pepper

### Method

#### Chestnut Cranberry Stuffing

1. Simmer the cranberries and brandy in a saucepan over a low heat.
2. Heat the olive oil in a pan and add the shallots, salt and pepper. Cook until caramelised. Add the cashews, garlic, rosemary and sage, stir-fry for a few minutes. Remove from the heat, stir in the brown miso and ground chestnuts.
3. Take the brandy off the heat and stir the grated apple and cranberries. Season to taste with the lemon juice and zest, nutmeg and black pepper. Bind the mixture with the breadcrumbs.
4. Roll into balls, and bake in the oven for 15 minutes at 180°C.

#### The Pie

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C
2. Roast the squash whole for 40 to 60 minutes depending on its size.
3. Allow to cool slightly, then slice off the top to create a lid. Scoop out the seeds and sprinkle salt and pepper inside all over the flesh. Leave for a few minutes then cut into slices.
4. Place mushrooms on a baking tray and drizzle with brandy and olive oil. Sprinkle on thyme, salt and pepper. Roast for 15 minutes.
5. Wilt the kale and spinach. Drain well, squeezing out the excess juices. Flavour with salt, pepper, nutmeg, a little olive oil and lemon zest.
6. Cut a third off of your pastry and put to one side. Roll out the remaining pastry and line a greased 25 cm pie pan with it. Layer the dish with the squash, greens, stuffing and mushrooms.

7. Roll out the rest of your pastry and lay over the top to create your lid. Egg wash.
8. Bake for 40 to 60 minutes until the pastry is crisp and golden. Cover with foil if the pastry is browning too quickly.
9. Bring everything together and serve.

We hope these recipes provide you with a couple of great festive alternatives that differ from the traditional Christmas roast.

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TAGS: alternative, festive, christmas, curry, meals, pie, turkey



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## // SEASONAL EATS: JANUARY //

Article by GARY CLARKE ◇ January 23, 2017



Chefs and nutritionists often say that eating seasonally is the way to go, and it has its benefits for both your health and your wallet. Eating something when it's in peak supply means you are getting it at both its cheapest and best quality. But for the seasonal eater, January could be a potentially boring month in the kitchen that is easily overcome with some culinary problem solving. January is a good month for vegetables, with cauliflower, broccoli, and sprouts all being in season alongside chestnuts and apples. And if you're into game, this is the perfect time of the year for you! The hunting season for feathered game is ending around now, so this is prime-time to get it cheap from your local butcher. Here are three recipes that make use of some of the best seasonal pickings.

### January Cheese Bake (serves 4-6)

This recipe is a great way to get yourself through the cold, rainy evenings of January. It combines the best vegetables available in the month with a rich cheese sauce that will go well with roast potatoes. To keep the seasonality of the dish serve with chicken or beef.

### Ingredients

#### For the sauce

- ◆ 25g/1oz butter
- ◆ 25g/1oz plain flour
- ◆ 1 pint milk
- ◆ 1tsp English mustard
- ◆ 100g/3oz extra mature cheddar cheese, grated (for added flavour replace half the cheese with oak smoked cheddar)

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- ◆ salt and pepper

#### The Veg

- ◆ 3 carrots, peeled and sliced
- ◆ 1/2 swede, peeled and diced
- ◆ 1 cauliflower
- ◆ 1 broccoli
- ◆ 7-8 brussel sprouts, halved

#### Method

1. Prepare vegetables as listed in ingredients and preheat oven to 180°C.
2. Steam or boil vegetables until soft – but with a bite – then transfer into a deep tray or roasting tin.
3. Melt the butter in a pan over a low heat. Stir in flour until it becomes a thick paste and cook for 1–2 minutes.
4. Slowly add the milk and stir/whisk until it thickens.
5. Add the cheese slowly, stirring continuously to ensure you get a smooth sauce.
6. Whisk in the mustard.
7. Season with salt and pepper.
8. Pour the sauce slowly over the vegetables until evenly covered.
9. Sprinkle grated cheese on top and transfer to the oven. Bake until golden brown.



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#### Roast Chestnut, Mushroom and Herb Pesto Pasta (serves 6)

This simple yet delicious recipe is one that I have taken with me to restaurants and hotels throughout my career. It is quick, easy and showcases two ingredients that are at their best this time of the year: chestnuts and oyster mushrooms.

#### Ingredients

- ◆ 100g cooked chestnuts
- ◆ 50g parmesan
- ◆ 2 garlic cloves
- ◆ 150ml rapeseed oil
- ◆ 500g dried pasta
- ◆ 1 tbsp olive oil
- ◆ 125g chestnut mushrooms, quartered
- ◆ 125g oyster mushrooms
- ◆ Handful of basil, parsley, and mint leaves
- ◆ salt and pepper

#### Method

1. To make the pesto, put the chestnuts into a food processor and pulse until roughly chopped.
2. Add the herbs, parmesan and garlic. Pulse again until well mixed.

3. Add the rapeseed oil, mix together and season. Set to one side.
4. Cook the pasta in salted water. Meanwhile the heat olive oil in a frying pan and cook the mushrooms with seasoning for 6–8 minutes until tender and starting to brown.
5. Drain the pasta then return it to the pan. Mix in the pesto and mushrooms.

#### Pheasant Casserole (serves 4)

Pheasant is one of the best-feathered game birds available this month. It has a rich gamey taste and is one of the juiciest of more tender birds out there. The season for pheasant runs from 1 October to 1 February, so now is the best time to get your hands on some. The best and cheapest birds can be found at your local butchers, but some supermarkets will stock them. This recipe is simple and showcases the flavour of the bird with its best accompaniment: red wine.

#### Ingredients

- ◆ 2 tbsp beef dripping
- ◆ 2 pheasants, jointed (ask butcher to do this) leg and breast only
- ◆ 1 onion, chopped
- ◆ 1 carrot, chopped
- ◆ 1 celery stick, chopped
- ◆ 1 sprig of fresh rosemary
- ◆ 350ml red wine (North American or New Zealand Pinot Noir)
- ◆ salt and pepper

#### Method

- ◆ Preheat oven to 180°C.
- ◆ Heat the dripping in a frying pan and brown the pheasant. Remove from the pan and place in a casserole dish.
- ◆ Cook the vegetables into the frying pan and cook in the dripping for 2 minutes. Add the red wine and rosemary, bring to the boil.
- ◆ Pour the vegetable mixture over the pheasant, season with salt and pepper then cover the casserole dish.
- ◆ Cook in the oven for 1–1 ½ hours until tender.
- ◆ Serve hot.

These recipes are here to give you an idea of what can be done with what's available at the beginning of the year. As we move into February, then spring, more produce will come into season and the scope of what we can make widens.

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## // SEASONAL EATS: FEBRUARY //

Article by GARY CLARKE ◇ February 16, 2017



For the seasonal eater February is a sparse month in the kitchen. Many of the vegetables that carried you through the deep winter months are coming to the end of their growing cycle, and native gamebirds will not be back in season until mid-August. However, February is a great month for fish lovers. Here are three recipes that make the best of this month's seasonal pickings.

### Garlic Clam Tagliatelle (serves 1)

Clams are back in season this month. Molluscs may be small but they are a nutritious addition to any diet. They can be steamed, baked, stuffed or even eaten raw so they are also very versatile. This recipe is a simple one that pairs the delicious shellfish with one of its best partners – garlic.

### Ingredients

- ◆ 100g tagliatelle
- ◆ 1 garlic clove, crushed
- ◆ 75ml dry white wine
- ◆ 125g clams, rinsed in clean cold water
- ◆ 50ml boiling water
- ◆ 2tbsp fresh parsley, chopped

### Method

1. Cook the tagliatelle in boiling water until cooked. Drain and set aside.
2. Put the garlic, white wine, clams, and boiling water in a medium saucepan, cover with a lid and cook for five minutes, or until all the clams have opened.

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3. Drain and discard any clams that haven't opened.
4. Toss the clams with the cooked tagliatelle, place in a bowl and sprinkle with parsley.



Saddle of hare © Ewan Munro. *Original Via Flickr / Creative Commons Attribution Share-alike License*

#### Saddle of Hare with Beetroot Mash (serves 4)

Although the feathered game is now out of season, the hare is still very much available. It is an underappreciated piece of game that is often overlooked but is a very sustainable source of meat. This recipe will work just as well with rabbit and both types of meat should be sourced from a trusted butcher or game dealer. This recipe accompanies the meat with beetroot and red onion – two vegetables that are also in season around this time of the year.

#### Ingredients

##### The Meat

- ◆ saddle fillets of 2 large hares
- ◆ 1–2 knobs of butter
- ◆ 150–170g red beetroot, peeled
- ◆ 1 large red onion, peeled and chopped
- ◆ 1 tsp thyme
- ◆ cider vinegar
- ◆ 1tsp redcurrant jelly
- ◆ 150ml chicken stock
- ◆ 1–2tbsp vegetable or corn oil
- ◆ salt and pepper

##### The Mash

- ◆ 300g yellow or white beetroot, peeled and quartered
- ◆ 1 knob of butter

##### Method

1. Put the meat out before cooking so that it reaches room temperature.
2. To make the beetroot mash, cook the beetroot in simmering, salted water until tender (around 40 minutes).
3. Remove from the heat and mash with butter. Season to taste and set aside to warm up just before serving.
4. Heat butter in a saucepan and add the red beetroot, onion, and thyme. Cover and cook over a low heat for around half an hour, stirring occasionally. Add a splash of water if the pan begins to dry.
5. Add the cider vinegar and redcurrant jelly to the red beetroot, season and cook for a further five minutes without the lid on.
6. Add the stock and continue to simmer until there is around 2–3tbsp of the liquid in the pan. Keep warm.
7. Season the hare fillets with salt and pepper.
8. Heat the oil in a frying pan and cook the fillets over a high heat for 3–5 minutes. Make sure you keep the

meat quite rare since the meat overcooks quickly.



Rhubarb © Alice Henneman. *Original Via Flickr / Creative Commons Attribution Share-alike License*

#### Forced Rhubarb and Vanilla Clafoutis (serves 4)

Rhubarb is typically considered to be a summer vegetable. However, modern farming methods mean that some foods can be eaten outside of their traditional seasons. For instance, forced rhubarb is grown in sheds, extending the season by a few months and as such yields more tender flesh than the plants grown under the summer sun. This recipe is a hearty pudding that invokes the memories of summer to get you through the long nights of February.

#### Ingredients

##### The Filling

- ◆ 20g butter, plus extra to grease the dish
- ◆ 400g rhubarb, cut into 5cm pieces
- ◆ 2tbsp granulated sugar

##### The Batter

- ◆ 1 vanilla pod
- ◆ 150ml full-fat milk
- ◆ 150ml double cream
- ◆ 5 whole eggs
- ◆ 120g caster sugar
- ◆ 75g plain flour

##### To Serve

- ◆ icing sugar and crème fraîche, to taste

##### Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C.
2. For the filling, melt the butter in a frying pan over a medium heat.
3. Add the rhubarb and one tablespoon of the caster sugar. Fry for two minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside.
4. For the batter, split the vanilla pod in half with a sharp knife and scrape out the seeds.
5. In a separate pan, place the milk, vanilla seeds and pod, and cream over a medium heat and bring to a simmer. Remove from the heat, and leave to cool so that the flavours infuse.
6. Whisk the eggs in a mixing bowl until light and frothy. Add the sugar and whisk until well-blended.
7. Fold in the flour and gradually pour in the milk and cream, removing the vanilla pod.
8. Butter a shallow oven-proof dish and lightly sprinkle with the remaining caster sugar.
9. Place the rhubarb in the dish, pour in the batter and bake in the oven for 45 minutes, or until golden-brown

and firm. Dust with icing sugar.

10. Put the crème fraîche into a ramekin.

February may be a lean month, but it doesn't have to be a boring one. This is the perfect time to be varying your diet after the samey months of early winter. As we move into March we will start to see the weather improve and, slowly, more food will become ready for our tables.

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TAGS: February, food, game, hare, recipes, Rhubarb, Seasonal Eats, tagliatelle

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## // SEASONAL EATS: MARCH //

Article by GARY CLARKE ◇ March 3, 2017



March is an ‘in-between’ kind of a month in the kitchen. The vegetables that have sustained us through the winter are just coming out of season and our spring vegetables (peas, cabbage, and radishes) are not ready to be harvested. But this intermediary month doesn’t mean there’s nothing good to eat. March is the season of spring greens – a relative of the cabbage – and purple sprouting broccoli. We also see what I think is one of the most underrated herbs in household cooking: wild garlic.

Wild garlic is a native herb to Britain, but is rarely seen anywhere but the menus of higher-end restaurants. This can give the impression that it is an expensive and hard to use ingredient, but this could not be further from the truth. Wild garlic is as versatile as parsley and makes a great garnish when fried. It is also pretty cheap and can be found in its dried form in some supermarkets or fresh from whole food retailers such as [Real Foods](#). Or, you can get it for free! This herb grows naturally all over the UK and is easily identified and [foraged](#). So, here are three recipes that make the best of what’s available in the month of March.

### Chicken and Vegetable Broth

(serves 4)



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Here is a recipe that utilises both outgoing and incoming produce of the season; it's an easy to cook recipe, filling and perfect for the long, cold nights of a dying winter. This recipe is ideal to cook and freeze the night before, or to slow cook and have waiting for you when you get home from a hard day's work or study.

### Ingredients

1tbsp olive oil

1 onion, chopped

500g chicken thigh or breast

300g small new potatoes

425ml vegetable stock

200g broccoli, cut into small florets

(if you can get purple sprouting broccoli do so, it will add colour and crunch to the dish)

350g spring greens, shredded

140g brussels sprouts

1 bunch of spring onions, sliced

2tbsp pesto

(if you're trying to make this recipe vegetarian be careful, not all pesto is vegetarian.

A good alternative to shop-bought pesto is to use the Herb Pesto from my [January article](#))

salt and pepper

### Method

1. Heat the oil in a large, heavy pan.

2. Add the onion and gently fry for 5 minutes until softened.

3. Add the chicken, then fry until lightly coloured.

4. Add the potatoes, stock and freshly ground black pepper, then bring to the boil.

Cover, then simmer for 30 minutes until the potatoes are tender and the chicken is cooked.

5. Add the broccoli, spring greens, sprouts and spring onions, stir well, then return to the boil.

Cover, then cook for 5 minutes more, stir in the pesto and heat through.

6. Serve.

## Cod and Mixed Vegetable Teriyaki Stir Fry

(serves 4)



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The stir fry is fast becoming one of the nation's favourite foods as it is a quick and healthy method of cooking, ideal for the fast-paced modern world. This stir fry takes some of the best home-grown food and throws in some teriyaki sauce to really lift and compliment the fish in this dish. Any shop bought teriyaki sauce will suffice for this recipe, however, if you want to make your own I would suggest this one.

### Ingredients

1½tbsp olive oil

2 onions, thickly sliced

400g spring greens, shredded

2-3 boneless cod fillets, diced into rough cubes or flaked

300g egg noodles (stir in or dried)

8tbsp teriyaki sauce (either home-made or shop-bought)

### Method

1. If using dry noodles, heat a pan of water over a medium heat.

Once boiling, add the noodles and cook for 2-3 minutes or until just cooked

(they will finish cooking in the sauce later) drain and then set aside.

(It is at this point that you would make your own teriyaki sauce if you decided against using one that is shop-bought).

2. Heat oil in a wok over a medium heat.

3. Add the onions and spring greens. Stir fry for around 3 minutes or until onions have started to go clear.

4. Add the cod and the teriyaki sauce and fry for around 5 minutes until the fish is cooked all the way through. If using stir in noodles add these now.

5. Serve.

## Wild Garlic Risotto

(serves 4)





Wild mushroom risotto © Jun Seita [Original Via Flickr](#) / Creative Commons [Attribution Share-alike License](#)

I have harped on about wild garlic enough, now it's time to use it. This risotto shows it off in all its glory using a simple dish that really showcases the underrated greatness of this wonderful herb.

### Ingredients

- 2tbsps olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 100g wild or cap mushrooms
- 250g risotto rice (Arborio)
- 175ml white wine
- 700ml vegetable stock
- 100g wild garlic, crushed
- 50g parmesan/Italian style hard cheese (optional)
- salt and pepper

### Method

1. Heat the oil in a heavy-based saucepan over a low heat.
2. Add the mushrooms and onion, fry for 3–5 minutes or until the onions go clear and the mushrooms begin to colour.
3. Add the risotto rice to the onion mixture and stir well until the rice has mixed in evenly.
4. Add the wine and cook, stirring constantly, until the wine has been absorbed.
5. Begin adding the stock a bit at a time, enough to just cover the rice, and simmer gently while stirring continuously.
6. Keep topping up the stock as the rice absorbs it, this should take around 15–20 minutes.
7. With the last of the stock, add the wild garlic and the cheese if using.
8. Cook for 1–4 minutes or until the wild garlic has wilted. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
9. Serve.

These three simple recipes are healthy, cheap and seasonal. March is very much a month of in-between, but spring will soon be upon us and that's where things start to get more varied again. Next month we will see peas, lettuce and radishes come back into the kitchen!



TAGS: Broth, chicken, cooking, food, march, recipes, Risotto, Seasonal Eats, Stir fry, vegetables



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## // SEASONAL EATS: APRIL //

Article by GARY CLARKE ◇ March 31, 2017



Spring is finally here. The weather is getting warmer, the days are becoming longer and we finally get a break from the heavy food of winter. At this time of year, we see many spring staples come back into the kitchen: peas, pomegranates, spring onions, British lamb, crab and the much-loved Jersey Royal potatoes. It is a common belief that to eat seasonally is expensive, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Here are two easy recipes – and one slightly harder one – that use the best of what's available this month.

### Chilli Crab Linguini

(serves 4)

Crab is one of those foodstuffs that has a reputation for poshness. It is an expected item on the menus of fancy restaurants or the centrepiece of a middle-class housewife's dinner party. Yes, crab can be expensive if bought from certain retailers, but it has been slowly coming down in price. You can pick crabmeat up, tinned from most supermarkets, and even Waitrose now sells a fully prepared crab for £3.99. Here is a recipe that can be made with tinned or fresh crab and can easily be made quite cheaply.

#### Ingredients

400g dried linguine or spaghetti

3–5 cherry or [vittoria](#) tomatoes, halved

300g [fresh](#) or [tinned](#) white crabmeat (if using tinned, drain and flake with a fork)

1tbsp fresh or dried parsley

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1.5tbsp lemon juice  
50ml extra-virgin olive oil  
1 pinch, dried chilli flakes  
1 garlic clove, finely chopped

### Method

1. Cook the pasta in a large pan of boiling water for 7–8 minutes or until al dente (with a bite).
2. Meanwhile, put the chopped tomatoes, crabmeat, parsley, lemon juice, olive oil, chilli flakes and garlic into another pan and warm through over a low heat.
3. Drain the pasta, return to the pan with the warmed sauce ingredients, then briefly toss together. Season to taste.
4. Serve.



Lamb Tagine © Stu\_Spivack [Original Via Flickr](#) / Creative Commons [Attribution Share-alike License](#)

## Easy lamb Tagine

(serves 4)

Cheap lamb from New Zealand can be eaten all year round, but in-season lamb is hard to beat. From April to June it's at its most tender, but as the season progresses the flavour develops. Spring lamb is fantastic for roasting with garlic and herbs. This early season lamb is slightly tougher than it will be in a months' time, but as with all tough meats, you can get around this by cooking it slowly. This tagine is an excellent way to make the meat tender whilst keeping it succulent.

### Ingredients

800g lamb, cubed  
1 onion, chopped  
2 garlic cloves, chopped  
50g dried apricots, halved  
half a tin of chickpeas  
pinch of mixed spice

1 tin of chopped tomatoes

150g couscous or 370g of rice

1 lamb or chicken stock cube

### Method

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan.
2. Brown the lamb in batches. Remove with a slotted spoon and store. Between each batch, deglaze the pan with 1tbsp of hot water.
3. Once all the lamb has browned, add more oil to the saucepan and fry the chopped onion until it is turning brown (about 3–5 minutes).
4. Add the garlic and fry for another minute.
5. Return all the lamb to the pan and pour in the chopped tomatoes, chickpeas, apricots and add a big pinch of mixed spice.
6. Crumble the stock cube into a jug and add 500ml of boiling water. Mix well with a fork and then pour the stock into the saucepan.
7. Stir and mix well, then turn the heat down to a low setting. Cover the saucepan with a lid and simmer for an hour.
8. If serving with couscous, place the couscous in a bowl and add 200ml of boiling water. Stir well, cover, and leave to stand for 5 minutes. After cooking, separate the grains with a fork before serving.
9. If serving with rice, add rice to a pan of salted, slightly boiling water (the ratio for perfect rice is two parts water to one part dried rice. So, for this recipe use 740ml water). Cook for 10 minutes, or until the rice has absorbed most of the water.
10. Serve.



Rosemary Focaccia © Parkerman & Christie *Original via Wikipedia / Creative Commons Attribution Share-alike License*

## Spring Onion Focaccia

(serves 6)

This recipe is something a bit different. Baking has always been my personal passion in the kitchen, especially Focaccia, and it does take time and money. But if it's worth doing, then it is worth doing it properly. Focaccia is an incredibly versatile bread and there are hundreds of recipes out there – this is one of my favourites.

## Ingredients

### For the bread

300ml warm water

7g sachet fast action dried yeast

300g strong white flour

200g plain flour

2tbsp caster sugar

0.5 tbsp salt

100ml extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for greasing and drizzling

a few fresh rosemary sprigs

sea salt flakes for sprinkling

### For the topping

2 bunches spring onions, stalks trimmed

1tbsp good quality aged balsamic vinegar (I like Belazu, available from larger supermarkets)

0.5tbsp caster sugar

## Equipment

20cm x 30cm high-sided rectangular baking tin (or similar)

## Method

1. Put the warm water in a jug, add the yeast and mix briefly. Leave for 5 minutes or until frothy.
2. Put the flours, sugar and salt in a large mixing bowl. Make a well in the centre and pour in the yeast mixture. Combine with your hands.
3. Add the olive oil and mix well to form a loose dough (it should feel wet and very soft).
4. Turn the dough out onto a work surface and knead for about 8 minutes. Alternatively, knead in an electric mixer with a dough hook on a medium speed for 5 minutes.
5. Lightly oil a large clean bowl. Add the dough and cover with lightly oiled cling film. Leave in a warm place for 1–2 hours until doubled in size. (As a general rule, the higher the bread rises at this stage the lighter your end result will be. You can tell that your bread is ready for the next stage when it springs back if you poke it. If it does not spring back, leave it for longer or repeat step 4.)
6. Heat the oven to 160°C/140°C fan. Put the spring onions in a small baking tray, drizzle over the balsamic vinegar, then sprinkle with sugar and a pinch of salt. Toss to coat, then bake for 6–8 minutes until soft. Set aside.
7. When the dough has risen, turn it out onto a work surface and knead gently for 5 seconds. Carefully lift the dough into your baking tin. Don't stretch and pull the dough to fit the tin, it will increase in size as it bakes.
8. Arrange the spring onions on top and dot with the rosemary sprigs. Sprinkle generously with sea salt flakes and drizzle with oil. Create dimples all over the surface of the dough by pressing deep down with your fingertips. Leave in a warm place until doubled in size (approximately 1 hour).
9. Heat the oven to 220°C/ 200°C fan. Bake the focaccia for 10–15 minutes until golden, then lower the heat to 200°C/180°C fan and cook for 20 minutes more.
10. Remove from the oven and drizzle with more oil, then leave it to sit in the tin for 5 minutes. Carefully remove the bread from the tin, then cut or tear it into thick slices.
11. Serve.

April is definitely the month where we first see a big change in our diet after Christmas. There is so much to discover this month, and hopefully you will feel inspired to take some of these recipes and incorporate them into your Easter meal. Next month, more berries and fruits will be available and one of the most underrated and ignored plants comes into season – Elderflower.

TAGS: April, cooking, crab, Easter, Focaccia, food, lamb, recipes, Seasonal Eats, spring [f](#) [t](#) [G+](#) [p](#)



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