

Tomato & bean soup with harissa & honey

Use a good-quality harissa paste (or see page 56) and balance the heat with a mild, not-too-floral honey. Served with all the 'extras' it makes a hearty and filling lunch or supper dish. Although we enjoy the temperature contrast of the chopped hard-boiled eggs and capers, this soup is also lovely served with a softly poached egg, which oozes, lava-like into the spicy soup.

We favour the robustness of chard here, but you could just as well use kale, cavolo nero or even spinach. You will only need the chard leaves for this recipe, so reserve the stalks for another dish (they are delicious roughly chopped, then sautéed in olive oil with a little lemon juice, allspice and cinnamon, or blanched, then tossed with olive oil, salt and pepper and drizzled with tahini).

SERVES 4-6

40 ml (1 ¼ fl oz) olive oil
 1 leek, well washed and finely chopped
 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
 1 teaspoon ground cumin
 3 teaspoons good-quality harissa (or see page 56)
 1 teaspoon honey
 1 sprig thyme
 400 g (14 oz) tin cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
 400 g (14 oz) tin chopped Italian tomatoes
 750 ml (24 fl oz) vegetable stock
 ½ teaspoon sea salt
 ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 75 g (2 ½ oz) (about 2 big handfuls) chard (silverbeet) leaves, stems removed
 4 thick slices sourdough bread
 1-2 tablespoons salted baby capers, well rinsed
 2 cold, hard-boiled eggs, coarsely grated
 extra-virgin olive oil, to serve
 2 tablespoons coriander (cilantro) leaves, shredded

Heat the oil in a large saucepan and sauté the leek over a low heat for 8-10 minutes until soft and translucent. Add the garlic, cumin, harissa, honey and thyme and cook for a few more minutes, until the leeks are well coated and the spices are aromatic.

Add the cannellini beans, tomatoes, vegetable stock, salt and pepper and bring to the boil. Lower the heat and simmer gently for 15 minutes.

Shred the chard leaves and add them to the pan. Simmer for 5-8 minutes, or until they are wilted and soft.

When ready to serve, grill or toast the bread and place a slice in the base of each bowl.

Ladle in the soup and top each bowl with the capers and hard-boiled eggs. Drizzle with a little oil, garnish with coriander leaves and serve straight away.



Potato salad with peas & Persian spices

This is not your standard potato salad, drowned in gloopy mayonnaise. In fact it's a salad only inasmuch as we like to serve it at room temperature! But it's one of our very favourite quick-and-easy dishes. It's a treat for the eyes too, with its vibrant greens and yellows, and the palate-jolting flavours really pack a punch. It also makes a great stuffing for sambusek (page 128).

SERVES 4

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) small new potatoes
 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 ½ teaspoon mustard seeds
 1 shallot, very finely chopped
 2-3 cloves garlic crushed with
 ½ teaspoon salt
 ½ teaspoon turmeric
 ¼ teaspoon ground cumin
 1 small dried red chilli, crumbled*
 ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black
 pepper
 120 g (4 ¼ oz) fresh or frozen
 baby peas
 ½ cup shredded coriander
 (cilantro) leaves
 lime wedges, yoghurt and warm
 flatbread, to serve

Boil the potatoes in salted water for 18 minutes, or until just tender. Drain in a colander and leave them to dry. When cool enough to handle, peel away and discard the skins. Cut the potatoes into 1 cm (½ in) dice.

Heat the oil in a small frying pan and fry the mustard seeds over a high heat for a minute or until they start to splutter. Add the shallot and garlic paste, followed by the spices, and cook for around 10 minutes, stirring every now and then, until the onion is soft and translucent.

Meanwhile, cook the peas in briskly boiling water for 2-3 minutes, then drain them well.

Add the potatoes and peas to the spicy onion mixture and stir everything together gently but thoroughly. Cook over a gentle heat for 2-3 minutes, then taste and adjust the seasoning if need be. Remove the pan from the heat and cool to room temperature. Stir in the coriander and serve with lime wedges, yoghurt and plenty of warm flatbread.

***Note:** In truth, chillies are used rather sparingly in Persian cooking, and really only feature in the south of the country, where the Indian influence is stronger. Use more, or fewer, depending on your preference.



Lebanese spiced chickpeas & eggplant with pita

This is our take on a traditional and very popular dish called *fatteh*. There are endless versions of this all around Lebanon (and other parts of the Levant) but all include stale, fried or toasted pita as a base, which is then topped with yoghurt and chickpeas – and then anything else that takes your fancy!

Some versions of *fatteh* use spiced lamb or chicken, but we favour eggplant – and for this recipe, the long, Japanese variety, with its rich flavour and silky texture. It's a brilliant way of using up bits of leftover bread, but the complex layering of spices and the contrasting textures make it much, much more than the sum of its parts.

SERVES 4-6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) vine-ripened tomatoes
 extra-virgin olive oil
 2 medium onions, thinly sliced
 2 long green chillies, seeds removed, finely shredded
 ½ teaspoon ground ginger
 ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
 ½ teaspoon ground allspice
 ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 250 ml (9 fl oz) vegetable stock
 sea salt
 640 g (1 lb 7 oz) eggplant (aubergine), peeled and cut into fat wedges
 250 g (9 oz) cooked chickpeas (good-quality tinned will do, at a pinch)
 1 pita
 250 g (9 oz) Greek-style yoghurt

Preheat the oven to 200°C (400°F). Arrange the tomatoes in a roasting tin and drizzle with a generous tablespoon of oil. Roast for 10 minutes, or until the skins are slightly coloured and splitting away from the flesh. Set aside until cool enough to handle, then peel away the skins.

Heat another few tablespoons of oil in a heavy-based flame-proof casserole or saucepan and add the onions, chillies and spices. Sauté very gently for 10 minutes, or until very soft and translucent.

Add the vegetable stock to the pan and bring to the boil. Add ½ teaspoon of salt and reduce to a simmer. Tip in the tomatoes with their roasting juices and simmer for 15–20 minutes, or until the liquid has reduced by around a quarter.

Meanwhile, arrange the eggplant in a large roasting tin and toss with 100 ml (3 ½ fl oz) extra-virgin olive oil and a sprinkling of salt. Roast for 15–20 minutes, or until tender. Shake the pan from time to time to ensure they colour evenly.

Add the chickpeas to the tomato mixture and continue cooking for a further 5 minutes. Finally, add the cooked eggplant (keep the roasting tin to one side and the oven on) and stir in very gently.

Roll up the pita into a tight roll and shred into ½ cm (¼ in) strips. Scatter into the eggplant roasting tin and drizzle with a little more oil. Cook for 5–7 minutes, shaking from time to time, until the bread crisps and browns evenly.

Spoon the *fatteh* into a deep serving bowl. Dollop the yoghurt around the edge of the bowl and then scatter the toasted bread over the top. Serve straight away.

