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POACHED PEACHES PLUMS PLEASE**

Sometimes I almost wish I had a family fraught with angst and drama, a sort of harmless catastrophe of bumbling and exuberance. And then I'd just sit them all down with a bowl of fruit and some quinoa and a generous dollop of yogurt-spiked yoghurt and a dash of sugar. And I'd say, "Here you family, have this. Just relax, it's going to be OK." Pending such calamitous relatives, I'll have to eat it myself.

5 peaches or nectarines, or about 6 plums
4 cups (1 liter/35 fl oz) cranberry juice
2 large canisters (superfine) sugar
3 cinnamon sticks
2 wide strips lemon or orange rind (one white plus)

① Put kettle on, place fruit in a large bowl and cover with boiling water. Leave for 1 minute, then strain and run under cold water for 5 seconds. Peel skin away from fruit, then cut each in quarters and discard the stones.

② In a large saucepan, heat cranberry juice, sugar, cinnamon and citrus rind over medium heat, stirring gently until sugar dissolves. Bring to a gentle simmer for 5 minutes.

③ Add peaches and simmer for 5 minutes, until they can be easily pierced with a fork. Remove fruit from poaching liquid with a slotted spoon or tongs and set aside to cool in a large jar or container with a lid.

④ Meanwhile, reduce the poaching liquid, bring it to a simmer and leave for 10 minutes until reduced by about half.

⑤ Strain poaching liquid into a pot, discard citrus rind and cinnamon stick, then pour liquid over the fruit. Chill in the fridge until ready to eat.

Serves 4–6

** Tess these onto porridge or muesli (granola), or just have straight up with a big dollop of yoghurt.

BREAKFAST BLUEBERRY QUINOA *

Pronounced "keen-wah," quinoa is a seed that is usually used in savory dishes. But it's also great as a hot, creamy cereal for those not keen on porridge. I love it in winter, topped with poached fruits (see recipe above), or fresh blueberries and maple syrup. It's super healthy but also gives you loads of energy.

2 cups (500 ml/17 fl oz) milk or soy milk

1 cup (200 g/7 oz) quinoa, rinsed

½ tsp ground cinnamon

½ tsp brown sugar

1 cup (155 g/5½ oz) fresh blueberries

① Bring milk to a gentle simmer in a small saucepan. Add quinoa and return to the boil. Reduce heat to low, then cover and simmer for about 10–12 minutes, until three-quarters of the milk has been absorbed.

② Stir in cinnamon, sugar and a pinch of sea salt. Cover and let stand for 5–10 minutes, until all the milk has been absorbed. Stir in half the blueberries and cook for 30 seconds. Serve topped with remaining blueberries, and maybe some extra milk and a sprinkling of brown sugar, if desired. It's great with a big dollop of natural yoghurt too.

Makes 2 serves, or 3 really large ones





Crisp rosemary flatbreads • Flaky cheescake strudel • My kind of cheese biscuits • Poppy seed econome • Honey-mustard guacamole • Smokey eggplant dip • Mean green bean nachos • Hamantaschen • Grilled corn salsa with corn chips • Mexican-style tortilla chips • Sweet potato chips with miso-mayonnaise dipping sauce • Protein and cheddar gyoza with teriyaki vinegar dipping sauce • Filet triangles • I want! big fat Caesar triangles; Spicy tomato salsa triangles; Roasted honey triangles • Protein pancakes with banana and peanut butter • Almond cookie brittle sticks • Apple cinnamon pop-tarts • Sweet, crunchy nutty chewy coconut • Seeded orange scones • Strawberry stripes • Peanut butter popcorn balls



JAM JAR DRESSINGS (4 WAYS)

Throw the ingredients in a clean, empty jar, screw the lid on tight, shake shake shake, then pour. These four dressings can be used on just about any salad or even steamed vegetables. As a general guide, dressings should be balanced on a 1:1 part acid (lemon juice or vinegar) and sweetness to a tiny bit too acidic. Once it's on the salad it will be perfect.

French dressing *

Every self-respecting home cook, chef and burgeoning gastronome has this on their need-to-know repertoire. Add a little to your salad, toss it together, then add a little more if really needed. Nobody loves a soggy salad.

01 In a jar, combine ½ finely chopped garlic clove, 1 top Dijon mustard, 2 tbsp red or white wine vinegar, a pinch of sea salt and freshly ground black pepper and 6 tbsp extra virgin olive oil. Put the lid on and shake vigorously until it's properly creamy. Drizzle sparingly over a salad and store any leftovers in the fridge.

Makes ½ small jar of dressing

Honey sesame soy *

Perfect for any Asian-style salad, or even cold leftover noodles.

01 In a jar, combine 1 tsp honey, 2 tsp soy sauce, juice of ½ lemon, 1 tbsp mīlin (Japanese rice wine), 1 teaspoon sesame seeds, 2 tsp sesame oil and 5 tsp extra virgin olive oil. Put the lid on, shake and drizzle.

Makes ½ small jar of dressing

Lemon dressing *

Simple and elegant—perfect for blanched vegetables or a perfect green salad.

01 In a jar, combine juice of ½ lemon, 6 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, 2 pinches of sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Put the lid on, shake and drizzle. Makes ½ small jar of dressing

Creamy yoghurt dressing **

Creamy and so good, this goes with vegetable salads or plain leafy greens with maybe some leftover roast chicken torn into bite-sized pieces and thrown in.

01 In a jar, combine 5 tbsp natural yoghurt, 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, 2 tbsp white or red wine vinegar, 1–2 tbsp chopped herbs (like mint or parsley), and a pinch of sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Put the lid on, shake and drizzle.

Makes ½ small jar of dressing



DRY YOUR OWN HERBS

Love herbs, hate waste. Here's how to keep that massive bunch of dill, thyme or oregano you can't seem to use right now. Use the microwave. Simply wrap the herbs in a single layer in a single layer on paper towels. Microwave on high for about 2 minutes and they will be dried, ready for storing in an airtight container by the time they have cooled. If not, repeat for another 30 seconds in the microwave.

HOW TO DRESS A SALAD

When my mother trained at London's Le Cordon Bleu cooking school in the 1960s, an important part of her training was how to dress a salad properly. A teacher would walk around the class and literally lift the entire salad out of the bowl with their hands, then tuck into the serving bowl. The bowl was not to have any puddle, pool or lake of dressing. In the bottom of the bowl could be a light film of dressing, and that's it!

* Too often people overdose on salads, thinking it makes salads better; instead of the mushy, cloying, acidic chaos they really are.



WATERMELON SALAD *

Watermelon in summer is like a massive glass of cold juice, but with a crispy, messy, fresh edge. Toss together with sea salt, coriander (cilantro) leaves and mint (fresh mint, if you have it). It's just the best salad side for a perfect barbecue. Serve with cold, with a cold drink for extra measure. This is a perfect addition to a barbecue.

01 850 g (1 lb 14 oz) watermelon, seeds removed, flesh cut into 3 cm (1½-inch) cubes
juice of 3 lime
½ small red chili, seeds removed, thinly sliced
300 g (6 oz) feta cheese, or a little more or less if you prefer
½ bunch coriander (cilantro) leaves

01 Put watermelon in a serving bowl. Sprinkle with lime juice and chili, then crumble feta over. Toss lightly, cover and store in the fridge until ready to serve. Sprinkle with coriander and a good pinch of sea salt just before serving. Serves 4–6 as a side



NOT-QUITE HUEVOS RANCHEROS **

This take on huevos rancheros, or ranch eggs, is a not-so-authentic version of a Tex-Mex breakfast tortilla.

½ cup (80 ml/7½ fl oz) olive oil
1 red capsicum (pepper), seeds removed, cut in 4 lengthways

4 mini tortillas
½ cup (50 g/1¾ oz) grated cheddar cheese

4 free-range eggs

4 free-range tomatoes, finely diced

1 red onion, finely diced

½ bunch coriander (cilantro), roughly chopped
400 g (14 oz) black beans, rinsed and drained

Tabasco sauce (optional)

(1) Heat a heavy-based saucpan over medium heat. Add a few drops of oil and fry capsicum pieces for 3 minutes each side. Remove from heat, cut into julienne and set aside.

(2) In the same pan, heat a little more oil, fry one tortilla until light golden, then flip. Sprinkle 1 tbsp cheese on the tortilla in the pan, then break 1 egg into the middle of the tortilla. Drag any egg white that has splashed out onto the tortilla and cook until set and season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.

(3) Flip the tortilla, being careful not to break the egg yolk. Fry for 30 seconds, or a little longer for a well-done egg.

(4) Flip the tortilla, egg side up, out onto a plate. Sprinkle with a little tomato, onion, coriander, beans, more cheese, and a few drops of Tabasco if you like. Season again with salt and pepper.

(5) Repeat with the remaining tortillas and eggs. (6) Roll the tortilla and eat with your hands, or leave it flat on a plate and devour using a knife and fork. Serves 4 for breakfast or as a light snack.

SOFT-BOILED EGG WITH TOAST SOLDIERS *

There are about as many techniques to soft-boil an egg as there are types of chicken in the world. But I use the method my grandmother taught me.

1 free-range egg
2 slices of wholegrain or seeded bread

(1) Submerge a large egg in a small saucepan filled with enough cold water to cover it. Bring to the boil over a medium-high heat. Once the water begins to boil, set a timer for 3 minutes.

(2) When time's up, plunge the egg into cold water to stop it cooking.

(3) While the egg is cooking, put 2 slices of bread in the toaster. When it pops, butter the toast, give it a grinding of sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, then cut into soldiers. Serve your egg in a little egg cup, with your toast soldiers on the side for dipping.

Serves 1



FRESH EGGS OR NOT?

They're covered in shelf and smell like nothing, so how long has that egg been in the fridge? How do you tell whether an egg has gone off, without cracking it open? Heat it in cold water. A healthy laid egg will buoyantly sink to the bottom, while one that is too old to swim flat on its back. If it's still floating, though, and it's undercooked, with a tiny bit poking through the surface, you're still OK.

It's a good idea to keep eggs in the refrigerator, though, as they last longer this way. If you've got a few old ones hanging around, though, don't worry: they're still good to eat.

Refrigerated eggs will last for about a week, though, so if you've got a dozen or more, consider freezing them. Just wrap them individually in plastic bags and store them in the freezer. They'll last for months.

RETRIEVING BROKEN EGG SHELLS

If you've ever cracked an egg, then found the pieces broken shell in the bowl and tried to pick them out by hand, you know how messy—after all, nobody likes egg shells in their food—so here's how hard this is. Step right tharver just use the broken shell in your hand to fish out any broken bits in the bowl. I don't know why it works, but it does. We'll chalk that one up to magic.



SCRAMBLING LES OEUVS

Scrambling eggs, or les œufs for our French friends, is trickier than it seems. You really don't want some spongy, grayish lumps of protein on your plate. Here's what you do:

• Don't use a high heat. You need to be patient to cook the perfect scrambled eggs. Use a medium-low heat, and stir constantly. Pull the pan off the heat if it gets too hot—the eggs should still be soft and wet, and will keep cooking a little even once the heat is off.

• Ditch the fork. It will wreck your pan, and won't stop the eggs overcooking on the bottom. Instead, use a wooden spoon, a silicone rubber spatula or wooden spoons—if you're using a non-stick or cast-iron pan, you can use chopsticks.

• Adding water, milk and even cream to your eggs before you scramble them might make them a little watery, just because the liquid can separate from the egg. Add a dash of cream if you must, but a better bet is to stir a spoonful of cream fraîche through the eggs once they've been removed from the heat.

