

The Observer  
**food**monthly

July 2024 No 278

► Jay Rayner's  
food Olympics

► Fern Brady's  
Life on a Plate

► Nigel Slater's  
salads to share



**SUNNY  
DELIGHTS!**

The best ice-cream, rosé and picnic food rated  
in our super summer taste test special

# IT'S **BETTER OUTSIDE** WITH THE NINJA WOODFIRE ELECTRIC OUTDOOR OVEN



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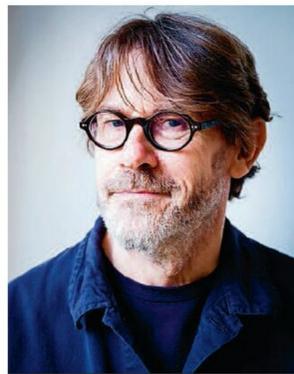
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Photograph  
Phil Fisk



# Nigel Slater

*Let's make the best of this short summer: long lunches, chilled wines and plenty of ice-cream*

**T**his may be a short, mean little summer, but that is not going to stop us celebrating. We have gathered our friends together to make the best of it with a collection of picnic food, lashings of ice-cream and a few bottles of the most beautiful rosé we can find. Ravinder Bhogal, Honey Spencer, and Sarit Packer and Itamar Srulovich from Honey and Co have put their heads together to find the best food for outdoors. Wherever you might be spending the summer, let us point you in the direction of good things to eat.

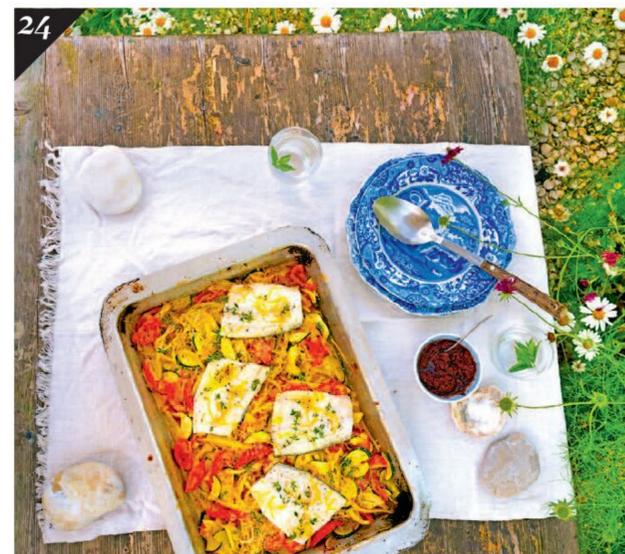
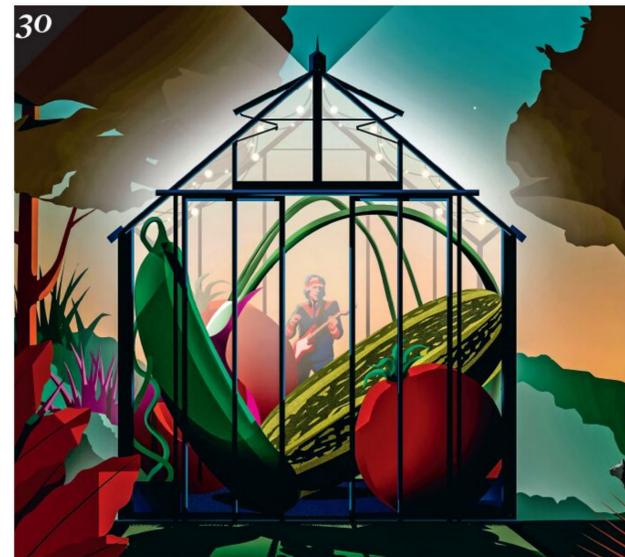
Danny Wallace has been busy in his greenhouse and has written a beautiful story of love and loss. He tells us of the rise and fall of his beloved glasshouse.

There are recipes too. We have a collection of substantial salads for you, from melon with basil and halloumi to gammon and haricot beans. Salads to share with friends, to celebrate

summer and to eat outdoors in the shade. No summer lunch would be complete without a bottle of something chilled, and we have a whole host of suggestions for you, with David Williams's 20 wines for summer.

Asma Khan joins us for lunch in Tooting. As the cook, restaurateur and UN ambassador tells Kate Mossman: "Male chefs have made cooking into a combat sport. I think it's a reaction to the idea that cooking is feminine: I'm not the dinner lady! I'm not your grandmother! Sorry, but if you're constantly screaming at staff it means you've trained them badly." The Afghan food is so delicious, the conversation so spirited, Asma almost misses her next meeting.

Jay Rayner isn't feeling the Olympics and is suggesting that the event goes back to its roots, with a few more cultural categories. He is suggesting an Olympic food competition. Not a cooking Olympics – there is more than enough competitive cooking around already – but one that involves eating. I rather fancy his idea of the long lunch mixed doubles. **OFM**



# GOOD

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## The Happy Eater

# Jay Rayner

*I know how to improve the Olympics. First up, the burger-stacking contest*

**I**n a few days the Paris Olympics will begin. This should be a moment of true joy and excitement but, honestly, I'm not feeling it. This is because I find the whole sporting shebang terribly unrelatable. It's about people who can jump high, throw things a long way or run fast. I can do none of these things. The Olympics weren't always like this. From 1912 to 1948, they included cultural contests in things such as painting, music, literature and town planning. That's more inclusive but I'm still not sure I'd thrive. I'm not up to planning a whole town under competition conditions.

What's needed, so that people like me can get involved, is a food aspect. I am aware there are already a bunch of competitions that style themselves as culinary Olympiads, but those mostly involve intense, young people in chefs whites fashioning the Wreck of the Hesperus out of pulled sugar and aspic, or a fully functioning submarine entirely out of chocolate. That's about as relatable as a bout of acrobatic gymnastics to the theme from *Succession*.

No, what we need are proper food contests that challenge the very character, good taste and stamina of the competitors. And I am the man to shape those events. Let's start with the edible decathlon, a gruelling series of 10-course tasting menus. Points are awarded for clearing each plate and saying smart things about them, and deducted for rolling your eyes and muttering "Christ, is there much



more of this?" under your breath. In a similar vein there's the long lunch mixed doubles, in which two couples join each other at a restaurant at 1pm and attempt to make it through to the dinner service, without running out of things to say, visibly getting drunk or lapsing into unconsciousness. There will, of course, be strict rules defining gaps between courses and portion size. This is a serious competition. That demands an internationally recognised set of regulations.

We need something a little nostalgic, so how about the cheese and pineapple hedgehog gala? Alongside points for technical skill, awarded for how many

portions of cheese and pineapple you can use, and how evenly the cocktail sticks are spaced, the entries would also be scored on artistic interpretation. Prettiest hedgehog wins. Then there are the domestic challenges. Who among us would not want the gold medal for having been judged to possess the greatest number of bottles of sticky condiments in our fridge, or the oldest verifiable tub or jar in the spice cupboard? The boost to national morale if one of our own could bring home those titles would be immense.

**F**inally, we get to the blue-riband events; the most coveted medals of all. Key among these is the stacked burger competition. How many toppings can you get on a burger without a) undermining its structural integrity (no cocktail sticks allowed) and b) coming over as an irritating tosser? That's serious stuff, but it's not quite as serious as the ultimate event, the equivalent to the 100m sprint: a global contest to crown the maker of the greatest bacon sandwich on the planet. It's about the balance of back to streaky, of crispness to softness. There are bread choices and condiment choices and lettuce choices. This is a competition in which I would be hugely proud to represent my country. And I am stone cold certain I would be crowned Olympic champion. These food Olympics would surely produce a gold rush for our proud nation. Come on Paris, what's stopping you? **OFM** [jay.rayner@observer.co.uk](mailto:jay.rayner@observer.co.uk)

**Who would not want a gold medal for the oldest jar in the spice cupboard?**

**Illustration**  
Sarah Tanat-Jones



### My secret ingredient

**Angela Hartnett's peperoncino**



Peperoncino is the generic word for dried chilli in Italy. They're great for throwing in anything to give it a little bit of a zizz. Unlike some of the dried chilli flakes you buy in UK supermarkets, these have a kick;

when you flake them up on your hand you can feel the heat.

If I'm making a classic tomato sauce for pasta, I'll fry off the onions and garlic, then crush in peperoncini, then add the tomatoes

so they get that heat through.

In stews, ragus, soups – you can even put them in your salad to add a kick. We make a dish called Sunday-night chicken, to use up anything in the fridge that needs

to go. We cut up all the vegetables, joint a chicken, put the pieces on the veg and crumble up a few peperoncini over that, then put it all in the oven.

I buy them dried – whole, tiny ones, in markets over in Italy and bring

heaps back. The ones I like come loose, and I just keep them in their paper bags from the market. I quite like that.

Angela Hartnett is the chef-patron of Murano and Cafe Murano; [cafemurano.co.uk](http://cafemurano.co.uk)

Interview  
Tim Lewis

Photograph  
Alex Lake

# My life on a plate

Fern Brady

Comedian, 38

**Mum was really into getting me and my brothers to try different foods.** Which is why I resent any depictions of working-class people just eating Turkey Twizzlers because my mum used to bake us focaccia and stuff. She worked in Tesco on the checkout but she'd have Greek food nights for us. We were always the children with weird packed lunches.

**I've never had a bread that I didn't like.** I even went to get hypnotised out of eating bread. [Fellow comedian] Lou Sanders went to the same woman to get hypnotised out of eating sweets. Then I was at Lou's for dinner and I couldn't eat because I'd had a load of toast. And Lou was eating sweets as the starter. We were both like: "I don't think the hypnotist has worked ..."

**Being on the Off Menu podcast** was good for getting a lot of food sent to you. But then I went to my first Comedy Awards do and my dress burst open because I'd been eating all the free food.

**I'm autistic and I always used to be like:** "Oh, I'm lucky I don't have the thing a lot of autistic people have where they just want to eat beige foods." But when I get burnt out, the desire to eat lots of different flavours goes away. I just want to eat the plainest foods possible and I revert to toast and sweets. It's terrible, but it's a good way of alerting you to the fact you're getting burnt out.

**I was a vegetarian as a child,** stopped and then I was veggie again at uni. But

I had this really horrible boyfriend, who was a smug vegetarian and every time he cheated on me I'd eat a bacon sandwich. I went back to veggie when I moved to London, but, when I wrote my book [*Strong Female Character*], I started eating meat again. I think it was to do with the memories of that boyfriend.

**I hate roasts.** I hate everything around the culture of having a roast. And I hate how excited people are about having a roast. And when people get excited about Nando's, I think: "Arrgh, a bit tragic." A lot of people in the UK want their food to taste of as little as possible.

**Last year, I decided** I was going to start a coffee roastery in my shed – no other comedian is selling coffee on their website. The thing that motivated me was my local coffee shop was like: "You can't start a roastery." And I was like: "Watch me." But then my partner put paid to that idea.

**I'd never watched *Bake Off*** before being on it. Then, when I finished filming, I watched it and it dawned on me: "I approached this the wrong way." I went in as if I was in an actual competition, rather than one where you're supposed to be really silly. I was so starstruck by Mel B, because she was my favourite Spice Girl as a child. The excitement over meeting her clashed with my extreme competitiveness. She kept coming over and asking how to make buttercream and I wanted to help, but also wanted her to get away from my island. It was such a strange feeling. **OEM**

## My favourite things

### Food

*Malatang. It's a Sichuan pepper-flavoured hotpot, but much tastier.*

### Place to eat

*Bocca Di Lupo in Soho, because the menu changes a lot and the staff are so nice.*

### Dish to make

*I liked making cardamom buns, but that memory has been tainted by Paul Hollywood – "Oh, they're not equal size and shape." I looked at my buns and they just looked pathetic.*

*Fern Brady is on tour across the UK with her latest show *I Gave You Milk to Drink*, 20 Aug–20 Nov.*





*'I've never had a bread I didn't like. I even went to get hypnotised out of eating it'*

Lunch with

# Asma Khan

The restaurateur and UN advocate discusses kitchen bullying, Marxism and how to balance spices with *Kate Mossman*

**T**he elite in India are obsessed with *MasterChef Australia*, says Asma Khan, by way of explaining a decline in traditional home cooking. A naan the size of a surfboard is delivered to our table; she shows me how the bread has been “stabbed”, to stop it bubbling up like the ones you find in your local tandoori. “No one in India eats naan at home,” she says. “You need a tandoor. Your bloody house would catch fire. People’s idea of what we eat is so warped.”

Though known internationally for her Indian restaurant Darjeeling Express, in Soho (Hollywood celebrities regularly seem to drop in and take selfies), Khan prefers Afghan food to any other, which is why we meet at Watan in Tooting, a vast and fragrant eating house on the high street. Afghan food is free from the tyranny of the chilli and the “addition of tomatoes to everything”, says Khan, who is on a mission to reeducate taste buds about the huge spectrum of “Asian food”. She is on other missions besides: Khan is a UN World Food Programme advocate, and was chosen as one of *Time* magazine’s 100 most influential people of 2024 for her innovations in food and social progress.

“Food is deeply political,” she says. “Why are our famous chefs afraid to link the two? Food means who eats and who doesn’t. Where has the water come from? Who owns the land?”

“I come from Bengal, where the famine of the 1940s was a deliberate act by the British government to divert rice towards the forces and starve my people. I don’t understand why chefs keep quiet, while your empire has been built on food. Let’s talk about food, but as a political force – not as your sacred right to eat.”

A deep vein of femininity runs through Khan’s work. Though she is thankful to the Bangladeshi



Illustration  
*Lyndon Hayes*

restaurants who made the Brits love chicken tikka over boiled beef and carrots, she is dead set against the “blow your head off” tradition of atomic strength curry and beer.

She talks about the successful male chefs coming out of culinary school in India: “They trained in stainless steel empires, with freezers you could put a corpse in; they had gizmos, food processors and sharp knives, and they all ended up in five-star hotels.” Sophisticated Indian tasting menus all seem to look “French” to her – separate gravy, edible flowers. “Why are you so insecure? I am brown! My food is brown!”

The staff at Darjeeling Express are, famously, a core group of Indian

women, many of them “unwanted” second daughters like herself, picked from ordinary jobs and trained up in a series of supper clubs she ran from her Kensington flat 15 years ago.

“They are not chefs that follow menus,” she says. “They are cooking intuitively. It is unspoken and non-verbal. Why? Because Asian mothers are *really* bad at explaining things.”

Conflicts in her all-female kitchen tend to get sorted out quietly, in pairs, with voices lowered, she has noticed. “There is no public hanging. Male chefs have made cooking into a combat sport. I think it’s a reaction to the idea that cooking is feminine: I’m not the dinner lady! I’m not your grandmother! Sorry, but if you’re constantly



**'If you're constantly screaming at staff it means you have trained them badly'**



screaming at staff it means you've trained them badly."

Nibbling on a tender chicken kebab, Khan suggests that the hardcore, military culture of hospitality – the daunting 14-hour shifts – is propagated by men to preserve a male domain.

"Part of the problem with recruitment is the idea that it's extremely difficult to work in catering," she says. "Sorry, but nothing happens between lunch and dinner. It's not like brain surgery, where you can't leave the patient because you're the one doing the operation. Often, they're just peeling potatoes. Why can't you have women coming in, doing one shift, and then they can look after their kids? Everybody is bitching about how we

cannot recruit. Why are we not talking about how we can improve conditions? We have lost a massive number of people because of Brexit and now people don't want to come back."

She points into a sizzling karahi and shows how the sauce on our charsi chicken is retreating from the edges, like the tide going out. That's when you know the balance of spice is just right, she says. When Khan cooks at home she does so in bare feet, listening to Sufi music: "I can't think." In the kitchen, she enters a place where childhood sense impressions come flooding back: the "chhhhh" of mustard seeds going into a frying pan. She didn't see a freezer till 1991, in a Cambridge college.

But cooking wasn't instinctual to Khan either, not at the start: born into a wealthy, socialist Muslim family in Kolkata, she has a PhD in constitutional law, and only learned to cook when she became lonely and lost in the UK, and flew back to visit her mother. She gets into conversation with a young female server from Pakistan, who brings us our *gajar ka halwa*, a traditional carrot pudding. The girl misses home.

"Don't go back," says Khan. "Put up with it for a few more months. Otherwise they'll say you failed. If you stay, all the other women in your family will see that you made it."

**K**han is married to the Soas economist Mushtaq Khan, currently engaged in a sprawling research project on corruption. It was an arranged marriage: "By the time I graduated, still no one had married me, so I told my mother, great, now I can work," she says. She wrote for the economy pages of *Sunday* magazine in India, and her betrothed was tricked, by their families, into meeting her for academic research. She revealed the plot as soon as he sat down, and he walked out. But the next day, she heard that he was in reception. She borrowed the sports writer's shoes and the art director's shirt, went down to meet him and "told him what he'd be missing out on".

"He was everything that I wanted," she says. "Highly intelligent, extremely liberal, deeply political and very interested in justice." Mushtaq had spent his entire youth as a radical



## They ate

### Asma and Kate shared

*Afghan naan* £3; *ashak* £12; *chicken malai boti kebab* £12; *kabuli rice* £5; *charsi chicken karahi* £27; *masala fish* £13; *tarka daal mash daal* £7.50; *gajar ka halwa with vanilla ice-cream* £7; *keer* £4

## They drank

### Asma and Kate both drank

*Bottle of water* £2.50; *sweet lassi* £4; *doodh pathi* £6

*Watan Restaurant, 180 Upper Tooting Rd, London SW17 7EW Tel: 020 3649 0062*

Marxist, she says. "You don't need to be a Marxist to know the west didn't get rich by opening its markets. I'm from the colony – you all got rich by monopolies on spice!" She welcomes a Labour government but adds: "I wish there was someone in parliament who had the knowledge and passion to really speak about food."

Towards the end of our meal Khan returns to the subject of "barracks-style" kitchens and their systemic abuse of staff which, she says, in any other profession would result in resignations. She has horror stories from London restaurants headed by female chefs too. And she has no time for women who "throw away the ladder" when they've made it in a male domain.

"For those women, there is a special place in hell, where there is a tandoor. There is a pure chilli paste and there is ghee. Those women will have chilli and ghee rubbed on them and they are sloooowly, inch by inch, roasted."

She is sipping her milky tea when she casually mentions she has to talk to Google about sustainability after lunch, at 4pm. I tell her it is 3.55pm. We are still in deepest Tooting, and Google is in King's Cross. She turns on her phone, and it fills up with panicked messages.

It is touching that a woman with such broad visions can still be sidetracked by food, leaving a hundred executives waiting on the other side of town. She is flustered, full of apologies, and flies off into the street. **OFM** *Darjeeling Express, 2.4 Kingly Court, Carnaby Street, London, W1B 5PW*

# Let's take it outside

*Baked halloumi with sweet melon, crab toasts with earthy beetroot, gently spiced bulgur and apricots – Nigel Slater's salads for summer days*

Photographs  
*Jonathan Lovekin*

**I**t was the perfect summer lunch. The garden table set with large dishes and platters of salads; jugs of elderflower cordial on ice and bowls of raspberries to finish. There was no insistence on when to eat, the cooking was mostly done beforehand, the mood was relaxed for guests and cook. The fact that the sun shone for us was the icing on the cake.

A salad of crisp young beans and another of ripe, sweet melon with baked halloumi; a substantial platter of torn gammon, butter beans and parsley, and another of a fruit-flecked bulgur. To crown it all, there was baked beetroot with crisp toasts of white and rust-coloured crab meat. Salads for sharing.

An assortment of substantial salads is often the answer when it comes to feeding a horde at a summer lunch. No one wants to be tied to the kitchen on a day when the sun is beaming down and there are friends to spend time with. Dishes that can be mostly done in advance make sense. There can be a few last-minute tasks: a dish of cheese to bake, a bowl of warm beans to dress, or some little toasts to spread – but the less the better is my advice. On a bright summer's afternoon, no cook could ask for more.



*Above, melon with baked halloumi and basil. Right, beetroot and watercress with crab toasts*

## Melon with baked halloumi and basil

Baked cheese, warm from the oven, fragrant with basil and eaten with sweet melon. The contrast between warm cheese and chilled melon is delightful on a summer's day.

*Serves 4*  
**halloumi** 2 x 200g pieces

**fresh oregano leaves** 2 tbsp (or 1 tbsp dried oregano)  
**olive oil** 4 tbsp  
**cantaloupe melon** 1 small and perfectly ripe  
**watermelon** 1kg (peeled weight)  
**basil** 20g

### ◆ Directions

Preheat the oven to 180C fan/gas mark 6. Put the halloumi into a baking dish. Chop the oregano leaves and sprinkle over the cheese, then pour the olive oil over the cheese. Bake for 30 minutes until the cheese has started to colour around the edges. It will have softened a little but will have kept its shape.

Cut the cantaloupe in half and scoop out and discard the seeds, taking care to preserve as much juice as you can. Slice the flesh away from the skin and cut into pieces. Do the same with the watermelon, picking out and discarding the seeds as you go. (I am not too particular about this, having no problem with the odd seed.) Put the pieces of melon on to a serving dish, trickling over any saved juices.

Pick the basil leaves from their stems then finely shred them. When the halloumi is ready, place the two pieces among the melon, scatter the basil leaves into the oil in the baking dish, then spoon over the melon and cheese.





## Beetroot and watercress with crab toasts

Some good things going on here. I love the marriage of crisp toast and rust-red crab meat, especially here with the earthy sweetness of beetroot and the peppery watercress. The beetroots are ready when a skewer will slide effortlessly through them and their skins will slide when you rub them with your thumb.

*Serves 4*

**beetroot** 750g, small  
**crab meat** 250g, brown and white meat separated  
**dill fronds** 2 tbsp, chopped  
**watercress** 50g  
**samphire** 50g  
**baguette** 8 thin slices

*For the dressing*

**lemon juice** 2 tbsp  
**honey** 1 heaped tsp  
**olive oil** 4 tbsp

### ◆ Directions

Scrub the beetroot, taking care not to split or tear the skin. Put them into a deep pan of lightly salted water and bring to the boil. Lower the heat a little, then simmer for about 40 minutes, till tender to the point of a knife. Drain them, then remove and discard their skins.

Separate the crab meat and season the white meat lightly with black pepper and the chopped dill. Wash and trim the watercress and samphire, shake dry and set aside.

Make the dressing by stirring the lemon juice and honey together, then season with salt and black pepper. Whisk in the olive oil using a fork.

Cut the beetroots into quarters, add to the watercress and samphire, then toss in the lemon and honey dressing. Transfer to a large serving dish.

Toast the slices of baguette, then spread with the brown crab meat. Pile the white meat on top.

Arrange the crab toasts among the beetroot and watercress. >>

## Gammon with butter beans and radishes

For one of summer's cooler days, a salad that has its feet in the classic winter dish of ham and parsley sauce. The "sauce" is a cream, mustard and parsley dressing, that coats the fat butter beans and nuggets of warm gammon, bringing beans and meat deliciously together. The pea shoots and white-tipped radishes are there to provide an essential freshness and contrast of texture. This is a salad to dress at the last minute. Too soon and the beans will soak it all up.

*Serves 4*

*For the gammon*

**gammon** about 500g, ready to cook  
**black peppercorns** 8 whole

**parsley stalks** 12  
**celery** 1 rib, cut into 4  
**carrot** 1 medium  
**onion** 1 medium, peeled and halved

*For the dressing*

**dijon mustard** 3 tsp  
**red wine vinegar** 2 tsp  
**olive oil** 2 tbsps  
**double cream** 150g  
**parsley** 15g

*For the salad*

**butter beans** 500g, bottled or tinned  
**parsley** a small bunch  
**spring onions** 3  
**pea shoots** 50g  
**radishes** 8

► *Directions*

Lay the gammon in a deep saucepan of water, add the peppercorns, parsley stalks, celery,

carrot and onion, and bring to the boil. Skim off any froth that has appeared using a draining spoon and lower the heat to a simmer. Partially cover with a lid and leave for about 45 minutes until the ham is cooked through.

For the salad, rinse the butter beans of any bottling or tinning liquor and put them into a mixing bowl. Pull the leaves from the parsley stalks and drop them, whole, into the beans (you will need a generous handful). Trim and discard the roots and the dark green ends of the spring onions. Finely slice and add to the beans. Wash and shake dry the pea shoots and radishes, and toss everything together.

Make the dressing: put the mustard in a small mixing bowl, stir in the red wine vinegar, olive oil, and a little salt and black pepper, then mix in the cream. Remove the leaves from the parsley stalks, then chop them finely. Stir into the dressing. Stir the dressing into the beans and pea shoots.

Drain the gammon and tear into small, rough-edged pieces, then toss with the salad and transfer to a serving dish.

## Three-bean salad

A salad of contrasting textures, deepest green, like its dressing. This is a garden salad, one to be eaten in the dappled light of a tree, on the hottest day of the year. I would offer it with some ripe tomatoes, sliced and dressed with olive oil and sea salt, and slices of warm frittata served in its pan. A practical point: it is fine (and good sense) to use the same water for cooking the beans, but cook the green beans before the broad beans as the latter are prone to colour the water. Warm the bottled or tinned haricot beans just before you toss everything together as they are best when dressed while still warm.

*Serves 4*

**green beans** 200g  
**fresh broad beans** 450g (weight in pods)



**This is a garden salad, one to be eaten in the dappled light of a tree**



*Far left, gammon with butter beans and radishes. Left, three-bean salad*

**haricot beans** 500g, bottled or tinned  
**nasturtium flowers** optional

*For the dressing*

**dijon mustard** 2 tsp  
**cider vinegar** 2 tbsp  
**olive oil** 4 tbsp  
**water** 2 tbsp  
**parsley leaves** 3 tbsp, finely chopped  
**shallot** 1, finely chopped  
**tarragon leaves** 8g, finely chopped

◆ *Directions*

Put a large pan of water on to boil. Trim the ends of the green beans, cook them for 2 or 3 minutes in the boiling water, then lift them out with a draining spoon.

Remove the broad beans from their pods (you should have about 125g of beans). When the green beans are out of the water, add the broad beans and cook for about 7 minutes, drain and, if you wish, pop the beans out of their papery skins (I do this with all but the youngest beans, because I'm not fond of the skins, though it is up to you).

Make the dressing: put the mustard in a jam jar, then add the vinegar, oil and water, then the chopped parsley leaves, shallot and tarragon leaves. Season with a little salt, then seal the jar and shake vigorously to mix the dressing.

Half fill the pan with water and bring to the boil, then add the drained haricot beans. Let them warm through for a few minutes, then drain and toss with the green and broad beans and the dressing.

A few nasturtium flowers or leaves, should you have any, will add a peppery element. >>



bottle  
green  
HAND-PICKED  
elderflower  
cordial

It's like evening wear  
for water

ADD A DASH OF  
Extraordinary





*Apricots,  
bulgur  
and mint*

### Apricots, bulgur and mint

A humble and sustaining salad, comforting and gently spiced, jewelled with fruit and herbs.

This is a riff on a classic tabbouleh, to which I have added the warmth of harissa and ripe, sweet apricots. A dish that feels both ancient and contemporary, light and yet thoroughly satisfying.

#### Serves 4

**bulgur** 100g  
**pistachios** 50g (unshelled weight)  
**pine nuts** 25g  
**flaked almonds** 30g  
**lemon** 1  
**parsley** 20g  
**mint** 15g  
**tomatoes** 400g  
**apricots** 6, ripe  
**golden raisins** 50g  
**rose petals** a handful to finish (optional)

## A comforting and gently spiced salad, jewelled with fruit and herbs

*For the dressing*  
**harissa paste** 1 tsp  
**olive oil** 2 tbsps

#### ► Directions

Tip the bulgur into a heatproof bowl, pour over enough boiling water from a kettle to cover the bulgur by 2cm and set aside.

Shell and roughly chop the pistachios, then put them in a large mixing bowl. In a dry, shallow pan over a moderate heat, toast the pine nuts till golden. (Keep an eye on them, they will colour slowly at first, then burn in a heartbeat.) Mix them with the pistachios, then scatter the flaked almonds in the pan and toast till golden, shaking regularly. Add them to the other nuts. Cut the lemon in half, place it cut-side down in the pan, and let the surface toast.

Pull the parsley leaves from their stalks, finely chop and add to the nuts, then do the same with the mint. Roughly chop the tomatoes (I like to keep the pieces quite small, but without reducing them to a mush). Halve the apricots, remove their stones then cut the fruit into quarters unless they are very small. Toss them and the raisins with the nuts and herbs.

Make the dressing: put the harissa paste into a small bowl or jar, pour in the olive oil, then squeeze in the juice from the toasted lemon. Mix with a small whisk or, if using a jar, tighten the lid and shake it vigorously.

Run a fork through the bulgur to separate the grains, then stir them gently into the nuts, herbs and tomatoes. Stir in the dressing and transfer to a serving dish. If you wish, scatter a few rose petals over the salad. **OFM**  
*@NigelSlater*

# *Picnic spots*

## *Quiche, dips, ice-cream & rosé*

*Honey & Co's Sarit Packer and Itamar Srulovich, chef and food writer Ravinder Bhogal and wine guru Honey Spencer taste and rate the best food and drink for outdoor gatherings*

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**Compiled by**  
*Holly O'Neill*

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**Portraits**  
*Phil Fisk*





# Picnic food

Sarit Packer and Itamar Srulovich test quiches, olives, potato salads, sausage rolls and more

## Exceptional by Asda Quiche lorraine

£3.50, 400g, [asda.com](http://asda.com)

**Itamar:** This feels very wet and raw.  
**Sarit:** Very soggy bottom. If you just eat the filling, it's not that bad, but ... it's pretty bad. I feel like you shouldn't be eating this at this level of bakedness.

★★★



## Waitrose Mac 'n' cheese quiche

£3.50, 400g, [waitrose.com](http://waitrose.com)

**S:** What is it? I can't tell. Pasta?  
**I:** The issue is similar with the pastry. The flavour I find ... offensive. Are we the best people to do this?

★

## M&S Viva Pork and English mustard sausage roll

£3.75, 2 x 180g, Marks & Spencer

**S:** This looks pretty appealing. Mustardy! That comes through. It does feel like there is some proper meat in it.  
**I:** I am a friend of this.

★★★★



## Morrisons the Best 'Nduja sausage rolls

£3.50 for 8, 144g, [morrison.com](http://morrison.com)

**S:** Is this kind of a chorizo? I don't like the look of it. Yes, I hate that. It's claggy, no flavour.  
**I:** You expect it to be more punchy. I don't think that's offensive.  
**S:** To me that's offensive.

★

## Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Feta and honey filo straws

£3.50 for 4, 130g, [sainsburys.co.uk](http://sainsburys.co.uk)

**S:** It's surprising inside. It's like an actual Middle Eastern-y thing. Is it a feta thing?  
**I:** Even though I feel like it is meant to be crispy but isn't, it's nice.

★★★★

## Aldi Specially Selected Sicilian queen nocellara olives

£1.80, 150g, [groceries.aldi.co.uk](http://groceries.aldi.co.uk)

**I:** We're big olive people. I love the look of this. I love the colour.  
**S:** Crisp. Good.  
**I:** All day, every day. This in one sitting, just me. This is top.

★★★★★



Itamar's pick

## Tesco Finest Double stuffed halkidiki olives

£3.25, 160g, [tesco.com](http://tesco.com)

**S:** Is it chilli or pepper stuffed? And garlic. Still crisp. I'd eat these.  
**I:** Nice, but a little bit too salty. But good.

★★★★

## Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Romesco olives

£3.50, 160g, [sainsburys.co.uk](http://sainsburys.co.uk)

**I:** Mmm, I love this. This is lemon and chilli.  
**S:** It's like a Tunisian peppery relishy lemony thing.

★★★★★

Very soggy bottom. If you just eat the filling, it's not that bad, but ... it's pretty bad



If you stuff an olive for me, we're good. If there's cheese and ham in it, you start high

Sarit Packer and Itamar Srulovich are chef-owners of Honey & Co. The 10th anniversary edition of Honey & Co: Food from the Middle East is out now (Headline, £28)

Sarit's pick

SET DESIGN AND STYLING VICTORIA TWYMAN. SARIT'S HAIR AND MAKEUP JULIANA SERGOT USING BOBBIBROWN AND KIEHL'S. ITAMAR'S GROOMING NEUSA NEVES AT ARLINGTON ARTISTS USING LISA ELDRIDGE BEAUTY AND AVEDA



**M&S Collection**  
**Deli Spanish pinchos**  
£5, 124g, Marks & Spencer

**I:** If you stuff an olive for me, we're good. If there's cheese and ham in it, you start high. It's like a meal.  
**S:** It's a satisfying snack for a picnic.  
**I:** If the olives were a shade less strong, it would be kissing five stars.  
★★★★

**M&S Viva**  
**Green goddess dip**  
£2.25, 170g, Marks & Spencer

**I:** Oh! I like this green guy. Herby – basil, dill.  
**S:** Does it have avocado? The flavour is OK, but it's quite oily. I might spread it on a sandwich.  
**I:** Yes, I wouldn't call it a dip.  
★★★

**Aldi the Deli**  
**Serrano and gouda rollitos**  
£1.99, 80g, aldi.co.uk

**S:** Cheese in ham. This is nice. Decent. The cheese is a bit funky.  
**I:** I respect the effort. Yum. Really good. Rolled things is a whole genre I didn't know existed.  
★★★★★



**M&S Food**  
**Fully loaded Indian style dip**  
£4, 410g, Marks & Spencer

**S:** A layered dip, how American.  
**I:** Again, we respect the effort. Oh, I love it, something beanie-lentilly, something tomatoey, something creamy. I don't even need a dipper.  
**S:** Yeah, that's OK. It's super rich.  
**I:** ★★★★★/S: ★★★★★

**Asda**  
**Italian cheese and ham rollitos**  
£3, 88g, asda.com

**I:** Now all I want to eat is cheese rolled in ham. Two minutes ago I didn't know it was a thing.  
**S:** This is not as good. Is it mozzarella or something? But I would still choose this on a picnic.  
★★★★

**Co-op**  
**Creamy Bombay potato salad**  
£2.50, 225g, coop.co.uk

**I:** Everything is very good here except for the potatoes. Something bad happened to them.  
**S:** They're floury and mushy but also waxy.  
★



**Co-op Irresistible**  
**Whipped feta and mint dip**  
£2.50, 160g, shop.coop.co.uk

**S:** It's like a seasoned ricotta, yoghurt or something. What is it?  
**I:** With mayonnaise?  
**S:** Please tell us what it is ... oh, it's not salty enough to be a whipped feta.  
★★



**Waitrose**  
**Roast garlic aioli potato salad**  
£2.50, 225g, waitrose.com

**S:** This at least tastes like a potato.  
**I:** The chivey sour cream is completely my thing. I can sit with this happily.  
**I:** ★★★★★/S: ★★★★★

# Ice-cream

Ravinder Bhogal tests ice lollies, ice-cream, gelato, cones and sorbets



*This smells like mango. Looks like mango. Tastes like mango. But I think I'd rather have a mango*

Ravinder Bhogal is chef patron of Jikoni, London WC1

**Remeo**  
**Blackcurrant ice lollies**  
£4.50 for 3, [waitrose.com](http://waitrose.com)

Love the colour, like black cherry nail polish. Oh, it looks good. But a little sweet. I don't think I could eat a whole one. I'd have to have a lolly partner.

★★★



**Haagen-Dazs**  
**Macaron vanilla and blueberry ice-cream**  
From £5.35, 420ml, [Tesco](http://Tesco), [Asda](http://Asda), [Morrisons](http://Morrisons) and [Ocado](http://Ocado)

Is this a ripple? I quite like this. Is it scone, or biscuit pieces? It tastes a bit like afternoon tea.

★★★★★



**Asda**  
**Mango sorbet**  
£2.55, 500ml, [asda.com](http://asda.com)

This smells like mango. Looks like mango. Tastes like mango. But I think I'd rather have a mango. It doesn't have the sumptuousness you get from a really lovely mango.

★★



**M&S Food**  
**Mango and passion fruit kefir frozen yoghurt**  
£3.30, 500ml, [Marks & Spencer](http://Marks & Spencer)

I can't tell what flavour this is. Like passion fruit-y. Is it more like a sorbet? Tastes like my childhood, like a Kenyan fruit bowl.

★★★★★



**Aldi Specially Selected**  
**Raspberry lollies**  
£2.09 for 4, [aldi.co.uk](http://aldi.co.uk)

It looks like it might be a pomegranate flavour? Raspberry? Sharp, but not in a pleasant way.

★

**M&S Food**  
**Chocolate peanut cones**  
£3.75 for 4, [Marks & Spencer](http://Marks & Spencer)

This has some bits on top. Chocolate peanuts? I like peanutty things. The ice-cream doesn't feel rich. It's a chocolate cone, excellent cone. It's not exciting, but I'll eat it.

★★

**Tesco**  
**Pineapple coconut and lime ice lollies**  
£2.50 for 4, [tesco.com](http://tesco.com)

Tastes like flat lemonade. A bitter aftertaste, a bit coconutty as well. Coconut flat lemonade, not nice. There's a funny aftertaste. I don't like that.

★

**Waitrose No 1**  
**Alphonso mango and passion fruit ice-cream**  
£4.40, 500ml, [waitrose.com](http://waitrose.com)

Passion fruit and ... something else? The passion fruit is strong, but not in a bad way. Creamy, rich, sharp, balanced.

★★★★★

Best buy



**Gelatelli**  
**Strawberry cheesecake premium**  
£2.49, 500ml, [Lidl](http://Lidl)

Oh! This is strawberry shortcake. Fun! But very, very sweet. The biscuity bits are nice. The berry is strong. Like a friend you see little of – fun in short measures.

★★★★

**Co-op Irresistible**  
**Italian pistachio, raspberry and mascarpone gelato**  
£4.75, 350ml, [coop.co.uk](http://coop.co.uk)

It doesn't feel like there's enough pistachio paste in it. Is it strawberry, the layer? It doesn't really work in something creamy.

★★



**M&S Food**  
**Nut your average ice-cream**  
£4, 500ml, [Marks & Spencer](http://Marks & Spencer)

I'm not sure about this one. Why would you want to put a whole nut in an ice-cream? The ice-cream is delicious, but I'd rather have it in chocolate form, like a bar.

★★★★★



**Morrisons the Best**  
**Madagascan vanilla ice-cream**  
£3, 500ml, [morrison.com](http://morrison.com)

I think this is just vanilla. But it's not very vanilla. I'd want to see vanilla ice-cream mottled with lots of seeds, but this doesn't have that. It's a bit milky, and not very creamy or rounded.

★★

**Sainsbury's Taste the Difference**  
**Pink lemonade ice lollies**  
£2.50 for 4, [sainsburys.co.uk](http://sainsburys.co.uk)

To me this tastes like Refreshers or those kinds of powdery-ish sweets.

★★

**Tesco Finest**  
**Raspberry eton mess ice-cream tub**  
£3, 480ml, [tesco.com](http://tesco.com)

Whatever is this weird sugary ripple? It's really sweet, quite sickly. I don't think the ripple works – it is raspberry? There are sugary bits. I think it is not nice.

★

**Waitrose**  
**Lemon drizzle cake ice-cream**  
£3.40, 480ml, [waitrose.com](http://waitrose.com)

A big hit of citrus smell. I've never eaten washing-up liquid but ... would it taste like this? It tastes like lemon frosting on a cake. One made by the nana that's not a very good nana. It's not subtle.

★★

# Rosé

Honey Spencer tests rosés, cremants and pet nats from France, Italy and Greece



You've got this kind of blueberry pie thing going on. Very picnicable

Honey Spencer is co-owner of Sune, London E8. Her new book, *Natural Wine, No Drama*, is out now (Pavilion, £25)

**Chosen by Majestic**  
**Rosé pays d'oc**  
£9.99, majestic.co.uk

This one smells quite funky, but fun. It's got a really lively texture, and lots of classic red fruits. This is more on the natural side, but it's very clean. I would take this to the park.  
★★★★



**Athlon**  
**Assyrtiko syrah rosé**  
£9.99, aldi.co.uk

It has that kind of freshly struck match smell, which tends to lift off quite quickly. Very dry, very spritzy, a little smoky, doesn't feel super harmonious on the palate. A little too dry for my taste.  
★★★

**Vilarnau 'Gaudi'**  
**Organic rosé cava brut reserva, penedès**  
£13.99, majestic.co.uk

Incredibly persistent bubbles. But not necessarily a bad thing, it means you can keep it open for quite a long time. Fine, sherbety, refreshing.  
★★★★



**Aldi Specially Selected**  
**Rosorange rosé**  
£9.99, aldi.co.uk

Not much on the nose, but that's not the end of the world with the rosé. Really fresh texture, nice herbaceousness, feels quite hydrating. Very dry and definitely suitable for picnic foods.  
★★★★

**Co-op Irresistible**  
**Côtes de provence**  
£10.50, coop.co.uk

Pretty fun; very dry. Kind of watermelon ... almost a little bit like Haribo Tangfastic. Some nice kind of tangerine-orange fruit as well in the mid-palate. I do like this one.  
★★★★



**Tesco Finest**  
**Prosecco rosé**  
£8, tesco.com

Kind of like a sweet fudge or a creme caramel. I like that. It's delightfully dry. The bubbles are at a perfect level. It's very smooth; really nice finish. Really interesting and balanced.  
★★★★

**Cave des Roches**  
**Mediterranée rosé**  
£6.50, tesco.com

Lots of sweet red fruit on the nose, berry compote – the bouquet jumps out at you. Truly, it's pretty pleasant. I imagine that's going to turn out to be the most conventional wine, but it does taste nice.  
★★★★



**Sainsbury's Taste the Difference**  
**Bandol natu roque**  
£16, sainsburys.co.uk

Really nice and multidimensional for a rosé; reminds me of papaya. Dry base, very crunchy. Extremely fruity on the nose, very light and kind of spritzy.  
★★★★★

**M&S**  
**Rosé pet nat brut**  
£15, M&S

It's probably the first rosé we've had that could actually have come from a grape. I really like this. It has a lovely creamy texture. I like that it's cloudy. That's a pet nat, isn't it?  
★★★★



**Exquise**  
**Grenache prestige rosé**  
£7.49, lidl.co.uk

Has this aqua smell that's a bit like being in a holiday swimming pool, in a good way. Really nice balance of texture and flavour. Very harmonious, very well integrated between acid and fruit.  
★★★★

**M&S Found**  
**Susumaniello**  
£9, M&S

Definitely Italian, this one. I really like it. Lots of nice white spice. Very dry, but very mineral. A perfect poolside sipper. Very quenching.  
★★★★★



**Cuvée Royale**  
**Crémant de limoux rosé**  
£15.49, waitrosecellar.com

Quite cheesy on the nose, not in a bad way at all; it has quite a piquant level of acidity. Definitely more savoury elements than sweet. The elements of the wine are a little bit disjointed, I think.  
★★★★

**Asda Extra Special**  
**Malbec rosé**  
£7.75, asda.com

This one is the most blue pink. It's malbec, isn't it? A really interesting balance of sweet and savoury. You've got this kind of blueberry pie thing going on. Very picnicable.  
★★★★



**Tread Softly**  
**Rosé**  
£9.99, waitrose.com

Really beautiful; really well balanced; lovely and dry. Probably the most interesting wine we've had. It's really savoury, intriguing. I like wines that make me think and go "what?". It's very nice.  
★★★★★

**Sainsburys Taste the Difference**  
**Nerello mascalese rosé vino spumante brut**  
£9.75, sainsburys.co.uk

Fairly light on the nose – kind of like an English hedgerow in a breeze. I'd be happy to drink a bottle with my mum.  
★★★★★



# Outlaw's rules: keep it simple, make it fun

*Nathan Outlaw had a Michelin star at 26, then restaurants in Knightsbridge and Dubai. Now he's content with Cornwall and enjoying a more relaxed way of cooking. Plus overleaf, five brilliant Cornish summer recipes*

**T**o say Nathan Outlaw has had an eventful decade is something of an understatement. Ten years ago, the Cornwall-based chef was in full-on expansion mode. Adding to three sites in the county, including his eponymous two-Michelin-starred seafood restaurant, he had recently set up shop at the Capital hotel in London's Knightsbridge. Soon he would make the leap to Dubai, launching at the hyper-luxury Burj al-Arab hotel. He was travelling a lot, writing cookbooks and not doing as much cooking as he'd have liked.

Then came the contraction. The Capital was sold in 2017 and Outlaw relocated to the Goring hotel in Mayfair, before Covid shuttered the restaurant. The Dubai stint came to an end, as did his tenure at the St Enodoc hotel and the Mariners pub in Rock. Now, Outlaw's footprint has shrunk to just a couple of streets in Port Isaac, where he runs two restaurants, a guesthouse and self-catering properties with his wife, Rachel. But despite all this, he has never felt more fulfilled as a chef.

Dashing between far-flung outposts took its toll, he says, so "it's a pleasure to be in the kitchen these last two or three years – I've been cooking all the time". The contraction may have been painful but those stints in London and

Dubai allowed the Outlaws to buy their own premises for the first time, plus he gets to be in Cornwall full time. After more than 20 years running restaurants there, he clearly still loves the county – the locals, the sea, the fabulous produce. That's not to say it's easy. "People think that, come summer, Cornwall is paved with gold, but far from it. You have to work bloody hard, but the people are lovely. I'd say a lot of my successes are because of where I am."

His connection to Cornwall goes way back: he used to come for holidays as a child. When he was 19, he returned there to work. By then, Outlaw had already been working in professional kitchens, first helping his dad out at his catering job in Kent, then in London where he worked with Gary Rhodes and Eric Chavot. Some colleagues had a connection to Rick Stein, so Outlaw asked for a trial at Stein's Seafood Restaurant and ended up staying for two years. It sparked his abiding love of seafood and it was where he met Rachel, who was working front of house.

When he was 24, Outlaw opened his first restaurant, the Black Pig, in Rock. Rachel had given birth to their son two weeks earlier and they were living in a spare room at her brother's house. "When I think about it, it's like, fucking hell," he says. "But I was just so determined." The restaurant only lasted two years but it was where Outlaw won his first Michelin star. "There were

**Food  
photographs**  
*Romas Foord*

*Right, mackerel  
tartare with  
cucumber and  
apple chutney,  
see page 26*



FOOD AND PROP STYLING POLLY WEBB-WILSON



only two of us in a tiny kitchen. With those constraints, you rely on great ingredients and cooking them really well.”

His approach to cooking is largely unchanged. “I’ve always appreciated simplicity,” he says. “But I want it to be perfect.” Although, these days, Outlaw says that cooking “in a manner that’s fun and enjoyable” is equally important.

When he started seafood-only menus in 2011, people told him it was a bad idea, but he proved them wrong, building a reputation as one of the country’s greatest seafood chefs. Now he has taken another gamble. “After Covid, I felt that people would want something a bit more accessible,” he says. “I was finding that the whole fine-dining thing was just a bit paint-by-numbers.” He has dropped some of the formality and stopped trying to second-guess Michelin. Outlaw’s New Road and Outlaw’s Fish Kitchen still have one star apiece, but with the more casual approach he has noticed “a massive difference in the attitude of our team, and also in the customers enjoying themselves.

“I’ve never been fashionable,” he says. “I’ve always shied away from that because I think it’s a bit dangerous. So I’m sticking to what I know and love. It might be the wrong move but I have to be true to myself.” He laughs. “If nothing else, we will always be that place you can get a good plate of fish.” **KILLIAN FOX** >>

## Baked bass, fennel, courgette and tomato gratin, tapenade dressing

Bass is a lovely fish to eat and this dish is great for family-style dining. I've paired it with a gratin made with vegetables that are truly summer heroes. To be honest, the gratin could be served as a summery veggie meal by itself. My tapenade dressing really complements the other flavours, making them shout summer. You could use it to dress pasta or salads as well.

*Serves 4*

**thyme leaves** 2 tbsp  
**olive oil** 3 tbsp  
**sea salt and black pepper**  
**bass** 4 x fillets, about 160-200g each

*For the tapenade dressing*

**pitted black olives** 150g  
**capers in brine or salt** 1 tbsp  
**salted anchovy fillets** 2  
**garlic** 1 clove, finely chopped  
**olive oil** 4 tbsp  
**sea salt and black pepper**

*For the fennel, courgette and tomato gratin*

**olive oil** 2 tbsp  
**shallots** 2, peeled and finely sliced  
**fennel** 2 bulbs, trimmed and finely sliced  
**garlic** 2 cloves, peeled and chopped  
**courgettes** 2, finely sliced  
**tomatoes** 4, finely sliced  
**full fat creme fraiche** 300g  
**parmesan** 150g, grated  
**sea salt and black pepper**

*To serve*

**thyme leaves** 2 tsp, picked and chopped  
**lemon zest** of 1, finely grated

◆ *Directions*

First, make the tapenade dressing by blitzing all the ingredients in a food processor until you have a smoothish

**The gratin is made with vegetables that are truly summer heroes**

mixture. Season to taste, then keep to one side.

Next, chop the thyme leaves for the bass and mix with the olive oil. Season with salt and pepper, then coat the bass fillets all over and leave to marinate while you get the gratin prepared and cooked.

Preheat your oven to 180C fan/gas mark 6. Warm a large frying pan and add the olive oil. Sweat off the shallots, fennel and garlic for 5 minutes, stirring the mixture so that it softens evenly.

Place the courgettes, tomatoes, creme fraiche and parmesan in a large bowl and then add the shallot mixture. Mix everything together well, season to taste and transfer to an ovenproof dish. Place in the oven and bake for 25 minutes.

Remove the gratin from the oven and place the fish on top. Return the dish to the oven and cook for a further 8 minutes.

Remove from the oven and sprinkle over the thyme leaves and lemon zest.

Serve immediately with the dressing on the side.



*Nathan Outlaw photographed in Cornwall for OFM by Harry Borden; Right, baked bass, fennel, courgette and tomato gratin, tapenade dressing; Top right, baked saffron rice, tomato and coriander chutney*





## Baked saffron rice, tomato and coriander chutney

This rice dish is easy to make and is a real winner too. Don't be tempted to add any more saffron though, 1 teaspoon of the strands is enough. And don't be tempted to peek under the foil before time either. You need to keep the steam in to finish the cooking.

### Serves 4

**sunflower oil** 2 tbsp  
**unsalted butter** 50g  
**white onion** 1, peeled and finely chopped  
**carrot** 1, peeled and finely chopped  
**celery** 1 stick, finely chopped  
**fennel** 1 bulb, peeled and finely chopped  
**red chilli** 1, deseeded and finely chopped  
**garlic** 1 clove, peeled and finely chopped  
**vegetable stock** 650ml  
**basmati rice** 300g, soaked for 10 minutes in cold water, then rinsed until the water runs clear  
**star anise** 2  
**fennel seeds** 2 tsp  
**saffron strands** 1 level tsp  
**sea salt and black pepper**  
**mint** 2 tbsp, chopped  
**coriander** 2 tbsp, chopped

### For the chutney

**ripe tomatoes** 4, halved and sliced

**red onion** 1, peeled and finely chopped  
**coriander** 1 tbsp, chopped  
**cumin** ½ tsp  
**cayenne pepper** 1 pinch  
**white wine vinegar** 3 tsp  
**olive oil** 3 tbsp

### Directions

Preheat the oven to 180C fan/gas mark 6.

To begin, make the chutney by mixing all the ingredients together in a bowl. Season well to taste and leave to one side.

Heat a large ovenproof saucepan over a medium heat. Once hot, add the oil and butter, and allow the butter to melt but not brown. Add the vegetables, chilli and garlic to the pan and cook gently for 5 minutes until they begin to soften.

Bring the stock to a simmer.

Add the rice, star anise, fennel seeds and saffron to the vegetables and season with salt and pepper. Stir together for 30 seconds, then pour in the hot stock. Stir again, then cover tightly with foil and place in the oven for 14 minutes.

Remove from the oven and leave to stand for 5 minutes, keeping the foil intact. When the time is up, remove the foil, then gently stir the mint and coriander through the rice.

At this point you can either serve the rice hot or allow to cool completely and chill. ➤

## Mackerel tartare with cucumber and apple chutney

Mackerel is my favourite fish because it's sustainable, versatile and tasty. This is a great starter and it's pretty easy to make. If you wanted, you could increase the amounts and add some good quality bread to create a delicious light lunch. One word of warning though, the mackerel needs to be super fresh to get the best result.

*Serves 4 as a starter*

*For the mackerel*

**mackerel** 2, very fresh, filleted, pin-boned and skinned  
**shallot** 1, peeled and finely chopped  
**mint** 2 tsp, chopped  
**tarragon** 2 tsp, chopped  
**flat-leaf parsley** 2 tsp, chopped  
**good-quality full-fat Greek yoghurt** 2 tbsp  
**lemon juice** of ½  
**sea salt**  
**ground white pepper**

*For the chutney*

**cider vinegar** 50ml  
**caster sugar** 40g  
**sea salt**  
**cucumber** 1, washed, halved, deseeded and grated  
**crisp green apple** 1, peeled and grated  
**chilli** ½ small, deseeded and chopped  
**tarragon** 2 tsp, chopped  
**mint** 2 tsp, chopped



*To serve*  
**extra virgin olive oil**  
**mustard cress** 1 punnet, washed

### ◆ Directions

To make the chutney, put the cider vinegar, sugar and a pinch of salt in a small pan and bring to a simmer. Mix the cucumber, apple and chilli together in a bowl, then pour the vinegar mixture over and stir well. Put to one side.

Slice the mackerel fillets into 4 equal strips lengthways, then slice across those to give small dice roughly ½cm each. Place the mackerel in a bowl and add the remaining ingredients. Season and mix gently.

To serve, divide the tartare between 4 plates, drizzle with the extra virgin olive oil and sprinkle with the cress. Add the tarragon and mint to the chutney and stir in. Serve the tartare immediately with the chutney on the side.

**Mackerel is my favourite fish – it's sustainable, versatile and tasty**

## Poached eggs on toast, summer piccalilli salad

You may associate piccalilli with winter but when you look at the ingredients, you'll see everything is really summery. The spice mix gives a flavoursome warmth and isn't harsh at all. If you are worried about poaching eggs, use soft boiled eggs instead. Do give this a go, it's one of my favourite meat-free summer recipes.

*Serves 4*

*For the wet spice mix*

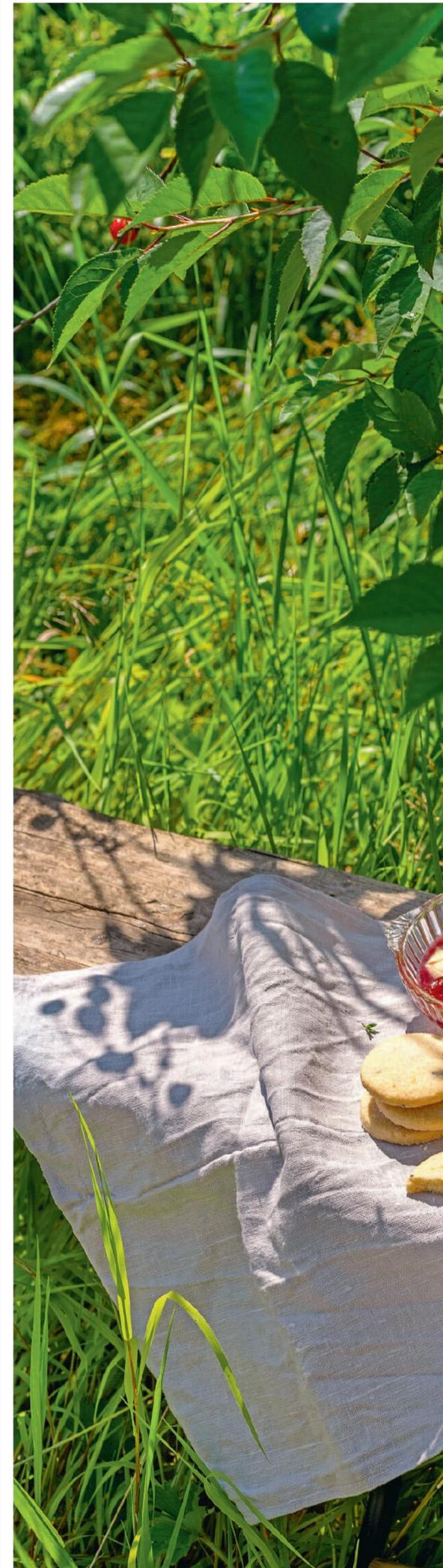
**cayenne pepper** ½ tsp  
**ground ginger** ½ tsp  
**ground turmeric** ½ tsp  
**yellow mustard seeds** ½ tsp  
**sea salt** 1 tsp  
**garlic** 1 clove, crushed  
**dijon mustard** 1 tbsp  
**cider vinegar** 100ml  
**water** 100ml  
**honey** 50g

*For the salad*

**cauliflower** ½ small, finely sliced or shaved on a mandoline  
**red onion** 1, peeled and finely sliced  
**cucumber** ½, peeled, halved lengthways, deseeded and thinly sliced  
**cherry tomatoes** 8, halved

*Bottom left, mackerel tartare with cucumber and apple chutney*

*Left, poached eggs on toast, summer piccalilli salad*





*Below, cherry fool, thyme and lemon shortbread*

**tarragon** 2 tsp, chopped  
**chives** 2 tsp, chopped  
**sea salt and black pepper**

*For the eggs*  
**turmeric** 1 tsp  
**white wine vinegar** 3 tbsp  
**free-range eggs** 8 very fresh, large  
**sea salt and black pepper**

*To finish*  
**sourdough bread** 4 slices  
**salted butter** softened

◆ *Directions*  
To make the spice mix, add all the ingredients to a pan and bring to a gentle simmer. Cook gently, stirring occasionally, until it comes to a syrupy consistency. Leave to one side to cool.

Place all the salad ingredients together in a large bowl. Add 4 tablespoons of the spice mix and gently combine. Leave the salad to mingle while you cook the eggs.

To cook the eggs, bring a large pan of water to the boil, then add the turmeric and vinegar. Crack the eggs into 8 ramekins and line a tray with good quality kitchen roll.

Toast or griddle the sourdough and keep it warm.

Turn the water down to a simmer and add the eggs quickly but carefully. Cook for 4 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove and drain on the kitchen roll.

Butter the toast and place a slice each on 4 warmed plates. Add a pile of the piccalilli salad, then nestle 2 eggs on each plate. Serve warm.

### **Cherry fool, thyme and lemon shortbread**

I love cherries and serving them in this fool is great as they cut through the richness of the cream. The shortbreads are “melt in the mouth”. It might be wise to make a double batch as I guarantee they’ll be eaten.

*Serves 4*  
*For the shortbreads*  
**unsalted butter** 250g, softened  
**golden caster sugar** 80g, plus extra for sprinkling  
**lemon** zest of 1

**plain flour** 330g  
**cornflour** 1 tbsp  
**thyme** 2 tsp, picked and chopped

*For the fool*  
**cherries** 300g, pitted  
**golden caster sugar** 3 tbsp  
**lemon** zest of 1  
**thyme** 1 tsp, picked and finely chopped  
**double cream** 200g  
**full fat creme fraiche** 200g  
**icing sugar** 3 tsp  
**cider brandy** a splash (optional)

◆ *Directions*  
To make the shortbread, beat the butter and sugar together in a bowl until light and fluffy. Add the remaining ingredients and mix until a dough forms.

Transfer the dough to a floured surface and knead gently. Flatten down and cover with a damp cloth. Chill for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 160C fan/gas mark 4. On a floured surface, roll out the shortbread dough to the thickness of a £1 coin. Cut into your desired shape (I like rounds).

Place the biscuits on a lined baking tray and bake for 15-20 minutes until they begin to turn golden at the edge. Remove from the oven and sprinkle with sugar. Once cool, place on a wire rack.

To make the fool, place the cherries and sugar in a pan with a splash of water. Place on a medium heat and cook gently until they begin to collapse. Add the zest and thyme, stir and leave to cool.

Put the double cream, creme fraiche, icing sugar and brandy (if using) in a large bowl and whisk until the mixture forms floppy peaks. Spoon equally into 4 glasses. Top with the cherry compote and stir through gently to form a ripple effect. Chill for 1-2 hours. Serve with a shortbread biscuit (or two). **OFM**

*Nathan Outlaw is chef-owner of Outlaw’s restaurants and guest house; outlaws.co.uk*

*The Observer aims to publish recipes using fish rated as sustainable by the Marine Conservation Society’s Good Fish Guide*

# 20 great wines for summer

Drinks to pair with an alfresco meal or to relax with on a lazy afternoon. Chosen by **David Williams**



## Whites

### The Wine Atlas Carricante Terre Siciliane

Sicily, Italy 2023  
£6.50, Asda

Sicily's carricante is one of Italy's most distinctive grapes. It's at its scintillating best on the slopes of Mount Etna, but this example, from vineyards lower on the island, is brilliant value.



### Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Muscadet Sèvre et Maine

Loire, France 2023  
£10.50, Sainsbury's

It makes sense that good muscadet should pair well with shellfish. This, from the Loire estuary near Nantes, is a ripe, super-crisp version with a subtly salty, bright citrus finish.



### Waitrose Blueprint Dry Riesling

Mosel, Germany 2023  
£8.49, Waitrose

With its modest (11% abv) alcohol and stream-over-stones ripple of cool, fluent acidity, this is a classic modern Mosel riesling. A barely perceptible cushion of sugar means it pairs well with mild chilli spice.



### Circumstance Sauvignon Blanc by Waterkloof

Stellenbosch, South Africa 2023

From £12.50, Hennings; Field & Fawcett

This luminously compelling South African sauvignon blanc adds a limey brightness and sea-breezy freshness to the grape's cool, refreshing feel.



### Tesco Finest Torrontés

North-west Argentina 2023

£8.50, Tesco

Like gewurztraminer, torrontés's full-on floral perfume is not to all tastes. But this example, made by top producer Catena, is more summer garden than boudoir, with a compelling zip and freshness.



### Funkstille Skin Contact

Niederösterreich, Austria 2023

From £13.49, Hay Wines; Connollys; Stroud Wine; Fine Wine Co

Austrians have a knack for orange wines. Here, the white grüner veltliner responds well to extended skin contact, producing gingery spice and tangy fruit.



### Bodegas la Purísima 'La Purísima' Blanco

Yecla, Spain 2023

From £9.89, All About Wine; Great Wines Direct; Aitken Wines

This charming blend of macabeo and sauvignon blanc from high-altitude vines in south-east Spain has a winning combination of fleshy stone fruit and ripe lemon citrus.



### Kumeu River Estate Chardonnay

Auckland, New Zealand 2022

from £25.80, Secret Bottle Shop; Lea & Sandeman; Noble Grape

A treat from one of the finest exponents of the chardonnay grape: chiselled and fine-boned, with subtle toasty savouriness and a burst of ripe apple.



## Reds

**Des Tourelles Claret**  
Bordeaux, France 2022  
£5.49, Tesco

We might think of Bordeaux as the home of expensive “grands vins” designed for cellaring and savouring, but it also does a neat line in crunchy, fresh, drinkable young wines like this, which works so well chilled for summer.



**Caliterra Pétreo Carmenère**  
Colchagua Valley, Chile 2021  
From £14.50, Noel Young; Latitude Wine; ND John

Chile is making the most of carmenere, originally from Bordeaux and for years confused with merlot. Restraint is the operative word in this summer-fruity, herbal delight.



## Fizz

**Bersano Montelivolo Moscato d'Asti**  
Piedmont, Italy 2023  
£9.99, Waitrose

One of summer's simplest pleasures is a big bowl of strawberries with a pot of cream. Pair with this bottle of sweet, gently fizzy, blossom, pear and muscat grape-scented moscato d'Asti.



**Incanta Pinot Noir**  
Romania 2022  
£9.99, or £7.99 in a mixed case of six, Majestic

Romania's Cramele Recaş has cornered the market in sub-£10 versions of that most luxurious of red grape varieties, pinot noir. This is one of the firm's best: a burst of berry-juicy joy with a sprinkling of sweet spice.



**Clos de la Roquette Fleurie**  
Beaujolais, France 2022  
From £14.50, the Wine Society; Lea & Sandeman

The Fleurie cru is renowned for some of Beaujolais' prettiest wines, and this ticks that box, adding a succulent core of cherries, raspberries and mineral length beneath the violet-floral nose.



**Portal da Calçada Espumante de Vinho Verde DOC Brut**  
Portugal  
From £11.95, Aitken Wines; Cellar Door Wines

Vinho verde's light, pleasingly sour white wines are well known. But northern Portugal also makes fully sparkling wines, and, as this is, they can be outstandingly good value.



**Extra Special Great Western Shiraz**  
Victoria, Australia 2021  
£9.50, Asda

The spiciness and savoury meatiness of shiraz makes it particularly good with meat and aubergine from the barbecue. This Victorian is brilliantly done, mixing fragrant floral prettiness and peppery blackberry.



**Tetramythos Agiorgitiko**  
Peloponnese, Greece 2023  
£18, Shrine to the Vine

Greek wine is getting better by the vintage and more accessible in the UK. This is a vivid red-fruited example of the local agiorgitiko grape – the tangy dry finish makes it a versatile partner for mezes.



**Ayala Brut Nature Champagne**  
France NV  
From £33.95, ND John; the Whisky Exchange; Champagne Direct

In the summer heat, “zero dosage” wines, made without added sugar, offer maximum refreshment. Ayala's stylish cuvée is pristine, fluent and unerringly thirst-quenching.



**Domaine de la Noblaie Les Temps de Cerises**  
Chinon, Loire, France 2023  
£12.95, The Wine Society

No list of summer reds is complete without a Loire cabernet franc, and here is a paradigmatic example of its refreshing charms: cherries, raspberries, blackcurrants and a cool hint of graphite.



**La Cayetana Cabernet Franc**  
Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2020  
£27.25, Whisky Exchange

Some of Argentina's finest wines are made from the leafy-fresh cabernet franc, which seems to thrive in high-altitude conditions. This one is flat-out gorgeous: polished, fine, with perfectly ripe fruit.



**Roebuck Estate Rosé de Noirs**  
Sussex, England 2018  
£42, Roebuck Estates

When English winemakers get it right, I'm not sure anywhere is better at rosé fizz. And with this fine-bubbled, red apple-infused example from a fine vintage, Roebuck Estate has certainly got it right.





# ‘Seeding, planting, watering ...

*Danny Wallace’s search for perfect veg went from his greenhouse to the Cotswolds and even into orbit, with advice along the way on the sentience of plants and what music to play them*



# Knopflering'

Illustrations  
Matt Murphy

I present a brief story of food love and loss. One that begins and ends with the greatest cucumbers I've ever eaten.

Mum gave the first one to me, fresh from her small greenhouse.

Small, stubby, military green.

Taken home, tasted, followed by a wide-eyed pause as I thought: "OK, how did she *do* this?"

Within a month, I have a greenhouse of my own. I had to ensure I too could grow my own highly superior cucumbers.

The cucumber had tasted like no other cucumber I'd known. It tasted *100% cucumber*.

Every other cucumber had been a terrible cucumber by comparison. Weak, watery, a taste so distant it was like cucumber homeopathy.

Imagine what else I'd missed out on.

The greenhouse was supermodel beautiful. Sleek and extravagant. *Danish*.

Somehow floating before laurels that applauded it in the breeze, it was almost invisible but for fast-moving clouds reflected on panels above. Soon each glass side-pane hinted at tasty treasures within: burgeoning tomatoes. Chillies of every seed and strain. Dark green feathers of mint.

I should have been doing this years ago.

Gerald Stratford has been doing it for 60 years.

He's a former butcher and barge controller now in his 70s and his speciality is growing very big vegetables. Much bigger than you're thinking. So big that when he started posting pictures of them on Twitter/X he immediately attracted 300,000 followers.

The author of *Big Veg*, Gerald likes marrows larger than cats, onions the size of netballs. Onions are his favourite.

Each day begins in one of his four Cotswolds greenhouses. "First thing that hits me is that lovely smell of warm soil," he says.

I think of that same moment in my own greenhouse. That smell of life.

"It's like connecting with Earth, isn't it?" I ask, and he says, "Oh yes."

By 7am, he's tapping his plants, waking them up. Bothering strawberries, inhaling it all, enjoying that floaty atmosphere.

"And I'll touch one of the tomato plants, and that glorious tomato smell surrounds me. Oh, I love that. It's better than any painkiller."

The sound around him: muted and somehow cut off from present day. »

Pops of reds in greens; the nourishing heat of some damp distant jungle.

Smells so loud they're in colour.

Soils that rich you could grow an inch yourself if you just stood still.

"Last year I grew a very big tomato," he shares. "Just under 4lb. And we sliced it, laid it on wholemeal bread, put it under the grill, and we ate it that day, with just a little olive oil and some Himalayan pink salt. And it was beautiful. That plant grew just for me to do that."

His voice fills with something like prayer.

"I look upon the plants as ... they're repaying my love by growing nice and big for me to eat them. And we have fun. I've got a radio in every greenhouse and I'll tell them what's coming up. I'll say: 'Come on kids, let's have some Mark Knopfler today!'"

Like Gerald, I came quickly to love the order and ceremony of it all.

*Seeding, planting, watering, airing, plucking, potting, Mark Knopflering.*

The warmth of exotic lands. Otherworldly light. The sense of protection. Tenderly tending, sometimes in sunshine, sometimes under rains battering the thin glass roof above.

Slow victories, frequent failures. Peppers for stews. Lettuce, so fresh and clean (Gerald recommends dousing in cold water, then a sprinkling of sugar to make the lettuce sing). The hot sauce I made from angry chillies that was less a hot sauce and more an unlicensed chemical attack.

Knowing that your favourite tomato had grown by a millimetre overnight.

Realising that you had a favourite tomato.

**P**rofessor Tomonori Kawano, a plant biologist at Japan's University of Kitakyushu, grew up the son of a farmer with that same smell of warm, wet soil in the air, surrounded by "french beans and aubergines in the greenhouse".

He must feel like me, and when I ask if it is normal to have a favourite tomato, he says: "It is an interesting point of view. I am happy to know that."

Which is a very polite way of saying: "No."

I mention playing Mark Knopfler to jalapeños, and Tomonori brings up the *Kojiki*: the collection of myths and historical accounts from eighth-century Japan which told of the "many Japanese monks, poets and ordinary people who would offer songs and poems to comfort the surrounding nature" and who "considered it perfectly normal that we should have a conversation" with whatever

lives alongside us and whatever foods we've nurtured ourselves. Connecting with Earth, soil somehow so good for the soul.

In 1971, the Salyut 1 space mission was launched by the Soviets.

The world's first space station, it carried within it the first cosmic greenhouse – nicknamed Oasis – but it would not be until 1975 and Salyut 4 that two cosmonauts would be allowed to actually eat the very first vegetables grown off-planet: space onions.

Dr Sandra Häuplik-Meusburger of the Vienna University of Technology is an expert in space greenhouses and astro gardens, and the author of *Architecture for Astronauts*.

She tells me about Valentin Lebedev, on board Salyut 7 in 1982, who said: "It is amazingly pleasant on board to look after plants and to observe them. They are simply essential to men in space."

Space travellers, says Sandra, come to think of the plants they grow in space stations as "companions and pets and almost imaginary friends. They provide a daily pleasure. In space, fresh food is more valuable than gold or diamonds. Those, you cannot eat ..."

Greenhouses in space, she has said, take their place alongside music, art and literature in nourishing not just bodies but minds.

Humans like taking care of plants, she says, and I'm reminded of the sense of protection you feel a greenhouse brings. All the times I opened or closed that door and was sure my plants felt safe and looked after, and how that was part of the pleasure I would take from it.

Some would say that is also a problem.

Paco Calvo is professor of philosophy of science at Spain's University of Murcia and co-author of *Planta Sapiens: Unmasking Plant Intelligence*.

He thinks plants have had it too easy, too long, and it's partly the fault of the greenhouse.

"Maybe domesticated plants are like the stupid guys of the green world. Because the stuff they're able to do is a *joke* compared to their counterparts in the real world!"

He thinks greenhouses are part of a culture of plant molycoddling. We line them up in neat little rows, mist them, coo at and cosset them, we play them Mark Knopfler. We are raising snowflake generations of workshy shallots and very entitled cucumbers.

"Take vines," says Paco. "Take pea plants or tomato plants. We keep forgetting we've been sticking a pole next to them for *thousands* of years. And these pea plants are like: 'Oh, there's a pole! *This* is convenient, I think I'll just twine around *that*,' and they have become *spoiled*."

I had never before considered I had been spoiling my peas.



**'In space, fresh food is more valuable than gold or diamonds'**



“Generation after generation, it’s like spoiling children. Oh, the *fridge* is full of *food*. Well, surprise, surprise, somehow there is *always* food in there! How did it get there? Who cares! And the kids just take the food back to the sofa and scroll down their screens. They make no effort. It’s this way with these plants.”

Paco suggests that keeping our tomatoes, peas and parsley constantly unnerved, tense and unsettled is character building. He says that if they come to get used to our constant pathetic nurturing, then life in a greenhouse “becomes a really boring way of living for them”.

They require not comfort to truly live, but chaos, he suggests.

“The best tomato in Spain only grows in the

valley greenhouses in the east of Almería. The Raf. It is the golden tomato, the best, right? And they have a special taste because they *suffer* a lot. They are very stressed tomatoes. Because they are grown in soils with salt. The type of soil that makes them work and search for nutrients themselves. And because they are so stressed they develop a very [specific] taste. So it’s good to move a tomato from its comfort zone.”

Tomatoes don’t need Mark Knopfler; they need dire straits.

I put this idea of tough love for tomatoes to Gerald Stratford.

“Well, I mean, I’ll tell tomatoes off,” he says, taken off guard. “Like if they haven’t grown big enough! I mean, I’m not afraid to tell them off!”

If Gerald ever works out that he can grow even *bigger* veg by being more confrontational with them, we may have another *James and the Giant Peach* situation on our hands.

**A**nd then, one day at home, tragedy.

The winds came. And I watched that afternoon from my window in rising horror as the trees around my greenhouse swayed and bucked, and the tips of the tallest seemed to bend to the point of doing pilates.

Pine cones dropped like heavy bombs around it.

A tree fell, and as the winds grew stronger still, the door of the greenhouse began to rattle wildly. And as the winds reached 72mph, *off* came that door, bouncing and crashing dangerously around, leaving my poor baby tomatoes exposed to the storm.

I ran outside but had absolutely no plan, and do you know what happens when a planless man who wears glasses runs out into a 72 miles per hour wind?

His glasses fly off at 72 miles per hour.

And when his wife finds them and presses them back on his face? He finds the lenses have shot out too. I’m fairly sure my glasses broke a land speed record.

And then, the CRASH.

My greenhouse – my tomato palace, my chilli castle, my vegetable slaughterhouse – collapsed and shattered into a hundred thousand tiny sad Danish shards of lost dreams and wasted achievement.

I just stared.

Once I’d found the lenses for my glasses, anyway.

I get my cucumbers from Mum again now.

She takes pride in growing them; more still in giving them.

I will return to greenhouses soon. Maybe a small lean-to, placed somewhere less windy. A few modest pots. A little lemon tree, because my gosh, if you think a homegrown cucumber is powerful, try a lemon.

And I know that somewhere in the Cotswolds, Gerald will be doing the same, and millions of others like him.

And that somewhere high above us all, some astronaut in the vast unending silence of space is inhaling what Gerald calls that “lovely smell of warm soil” – and making, even from there, that same incredible connection to Earth. **OFM**

*Somebody Told Me: One Man’s Unexpected Journey Down the Rabbit Hole of Lies, Trolls and Conspiracies* by Danny Wallace is out now (Ebury, £22)



## The last word

# Rachel Cooke

*I'm going to be eating summer-winter food in this changeable weather. So, mostly tomatoes then...*

I think we all know the weather's changing; that this damp summer may be a sign Britain now has a rainy season – one that apparently begins in June. But still, we must try to keep things in perspective, too. Turning to a beloved kitchen companion, *Cooking for Occasions* by Fay Maschler and Elizabeth Jane Howard, it's cheering to read – in the chapter about picnics – of the sandy sandwiches the authors remember eating as girls on a beach in a gale, each of them “aubergine-coloured from a short battle with the sea”. I look out at the garden, where the slugs roam like some miniature brown army, and feel a bit better. I, too, remember the mottled legs of freezing cold childhood. At least now I can choose when – if – I wear a cagoule with a hood that makes me look like a Womble.

The feeling that I'm living in a pan with a lid on it – these grey skies! – is, however, playing havoc with my appetite. Notionally, of course, I register the culinary season. At the greengrocer, the lettuces are luxuriant and frilly. In the garden, the mint is threatening some kind of putsch (though not even it can defeat the molluscs). Everywhere I go, people tell me the strawberries are delicious this year – and who am I to disbelieve them? But my body has other ideas, sullenly insistent it's still winter, however hard I try to trick it (I wear sunglasses at any opportunity, like some Borough Market Anna Wintour). It craves stew and pasta, and will not give up on thoughts of mashed potato. Show it some poached salmon, a few slices of cucumber or a little pile of broad beans, and it feels, not deprived exactly, but slightly put out that none

of these things may easily be served on toast, with butter.

But fear not! If fashion journalists are happy to deploy strange new terms in the cause of their art (eg shacket), I don't see why a part-time food writer shouldn't do the same – and on this basis, I give you summer-winter food (or if you prefer, winter-summer food), a concept that until the monsoon ends will be my way of both accommodating my longings and dealing with the fact that it doesn't feel right (morally, aesthetically) not to eat foods that are in season. No, summer-winter food doesn't encompass melons that taste of honey and remind you of a boy you met on French exchange. But it definitely does involve all the tomatoes a person could possibly eat, the only difference being that, this summer, they'll mostly be cooked.

Raw tomatoes don't taste of much without sunshine to coax them, but cooked, they'll do even in a downpour



– and they go with everything. Swap potatoes for rice when you roast a chicken or grill a lamb cutlet, but spruce it up with, yes, some tomatoes you've fried very slowly with some chopped shallots in olive oil and a little butter until they're pulpy and liquid (a cheat's pilaf). If you're having beans, whether runner or dwarf, don't let them squeak; stew them until they're soft and compliant, again in a tomato sauce (there are good recipes for this dish in Blanche Vaughan's excellent *A Year in the Kitchen* and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's *River Cottage Every Day*). With fish, I like Nigella's moon-blush tomatoes, which owe their name to the fact they're roasted in the residual heat of a hot oven overnight.

But the best summer-winter supper is surely stuffed tomatoes, fat and oozing. I didn't think of it at first – they're so old-fashioned – but I happened to be reading *Ida At My Table*, a soon-to-be-published memoir by Simonetta Wenkert about the running of her family restaurant in Queen's Park, west London (it's great, and I hope to write more about it soon). At its end, Wenkert gives the reader a recipe for *pomodori ripieni con patate*: beef tomatoes stuffed with risotto rice, parmesan and herbs which are roasted alongside some cubed potatoes. My eye ran down it, and a chord – de-dah! – played loudly inside me somewhere. The perfect combination of comfort, flavour and a certain lightness (yes, in spite of the double carbs), it's surely the ultimate dish for summer 2024, and I plan to make it this weekend whether it's raining or not. **OFM** @MsRachelCooke

**The feeling that I'm living in a pan with a lid on is playing havoc with my appetite**

Free next week

## 20 best Easy summer salads

Showstopping, simple recipes you'll return to, from Nigella's lemony prawns and Nigel Slater's noodles to perfect pasta and Greek salads

Free with the Observer on 28 July



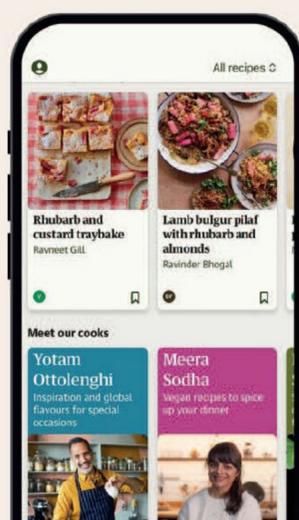
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# Non-stop bangers



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