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THE SUNDAY TIMES

The Dish

Thanks, Mum

To celebrate Mother's Day, four chefs tell Rachel Walker how they were inspired — and share their favourite childhood recipes

Rachel Walker

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James Lowe

He went from the Fat Duck to St John. Now he has won a Michelin star for his own restaurant, Lyle's, in Shoreditch, east London

My restaurant is named after my nan, Margaret Lyle. Green-fingered, she spent most of her time in her garden. My parents live in East Sussex and a few years ago, I planted some wild garlic there, but the dogs went mad for it and there were holes all over the place. The following year, though, wild garlic came up everywhere. Now Mum picks bagfuls of it each spring and delivers it straight to the kitchen at Lyle's. It means a lot when you have such a personal connection to the ingredients you're using.

Mum has always loved food, and we often get each other cooking-themed presents. One thing she doesn't need any help with, though, is her trifles. They're her go-to dessert for family get-togethers. The fillings may change, but they're always boozy.

Blood-orange trifle

Serves 4

For the jelly

6 blood oranges

6 sheets of gelatine

800ml blood-orange juice

For the almond cake

8 eggs, separated into yolks and whites

300g sugar
300g ground almonds

For the posset

600ml double cream
150g sugar
3 blood oranges, juiced
1 lemon, juiced

For the trifle

40ml Campari
40ml sherry
400ml double cream
Walnuts, toasted at 180C for 3 minutes

Start by preparing the jelly base. Skin the oranges, cut them into quarters and place them on a tray in an oven with the pilot light on — or in a dehydrator — and dry them out until they start to shrivel into chewy chunks with concentrated flavour.

Soak the gelatine sheets in cold water. Meanwhile, gently heat half the blood-orange juice (aim for the temperature of a hot bath, rather than a simmer). Once the gelatine has “bloomed” (gone soft and started to swell), add it in to the juice and stir until it’s completely dissolved. Stir in the remaining blood-orange juice, and leave the liquid to cool at room temperature.

To make the cake, whisk the yolks with half the sugar until it has doubled in volume. Whisk the whites with the remaining sugar until they form soft peaks. Fold the almonds and 5g salt into the yolk mixture, then carefully add the whites. Pour the mix into a shallow tray and bake at 180C for 20 minutes. Leave to cool uncovered.

The ideal proportions of this trifle are 15% cake, 45% jelly, 25% posset and 15% cream. With that in mind, start by tearing up the cake into 2cm-wide pieces and arrange them in the bottom of four individual dishes, and pour 10ml Campari and 10ml sherry over each sponge base.

Cut each chunk of dried orange in half and place four pieces in each bowl (save the rest for the topping). Once the jelly is cool — but not set — divide the liquid between the bowls, place them in the fridge and leave to set.

Next, make the posset. Mix the cream and sugar in a heavy-based saucepan and simmer for 2 minutes. Whisk in the juices, pass the liquid through a fine sieve into another clean pan and allow it to cool.

Once the posset has cooled and is close to setting, give it a quick whisk and pour it on top of the jelly. Place in the fridge and allow to set. Finally, whip the cream and spoon it very carefully on top of each trifle, making sure the cream comes above the rim of the bowl. Garnish with the remaining pieces of dried blood orange, and grate the roast walnuts over the cream topping.

Vivek Singh

Trained in India, Vivek is executive chef of three top London restaurants: the Cinnamon Club, Cinnamon Kitchen and Cinnamon Soho

I remember the first time I tried moong lentil tadka. I grew up in Bengal, but my father’s family lived far away, so we would often pile into the car and set off on The Great Trunk Road, which links Kolkata to Peshawar. Along the way we’d stop at *dhabas*, or roadside shacks, and it was in one of those where I first

tried this dish.

Lentils weren't something children were expected to like. They were often boiled, served plain, and thought of as a healthy necessary evil — like broccoli in Britain. My mother, Urmila, was delighted that we liked the takka dhal, so she copied the dish and started making it for us at home.

She was a fabulous cook. For years, I was very cruel — when people asked me how I ended up being a chef, I used to joke: “It’s because my mother was such a horrible cook.” It must have been heartbreaking for her, particularly because nothing could have been further from the truth. She used to cook three meals a day; often four or five different dishes: rice, lentils, a vegetable dish, perhaps a chutney and occasionally some meat or fish.

I didn't acknowledge it at the time, but now I recognise that a lot of my deep-rooted culinary influences came directly from her. It's a joy when she comes to stay, and I can finally repay her by cooking tadka dhal for her instead.

Green moong lentil tadka

Serves 4

120g whole green moong lentils, or mung beans
6 cloves of garlic, peeled
1 thumb-sized piece of ginger, peeled and grated
2 bay leaves
3 cardamom pods, preferably black, otherwise green will do
2 tbsp vegetable oil
1 tsp cumin seeds
2 onions, finely chopped
1½ tsp red chilli powder
1 tbsp ground coriander
2 very ripe tomatoes, puréed
2 green chillies, finely chopped
½ tsp garam masala
15g butter
Juice of ½ lemon
A handful of coriander, chopped, to serve

Wash the lentils, then leave them to soak in cold water for 20 minutes. Drain, then tip them into a pan and cover with 1.2 litres of water. Crush 2 of the cloves of garlic and add them to the pan, along with the ginger, bay leaves, cardamom and 1½ tsp salt. Bring the water to the boil, cover and simmer for 30-40 minutes, until the lentils are soft, but still holding their shape. Take the pan off the heat but do not drain.

Heat the oil in a large, heavy-based pan and add the cumin seeds. When they start to crackle, crush the remaining cloves of garlic, add them to the pan and fry for 1-2 minutes until golden. Add the onions and cook on a high heat for 6-8 minutes until golden brown, then stir in the chilli powder and ground coriander. Cook for 3-5 minutes, until the oil starts to separate from the mixture around the edge of the pan. Add the puréed tomatoes and cook for a further 6-8 minutes. Pour the lentils and their cooking water into this mixture, bring to the boil and simmer for 10-12 minutes.

Add the chillies and garam masala, then simmer for a further 2-3 minutes. Stir in the butter and lemon juice, garnish with fresh coriander and serve with parathas.

Jose Pizarro

The Spaniard is the chef and owner of two eponymous restaurants and a tapas bar in London

I treat my restaurants like home, often displaying my mother's textiles. At the moment she is working on a 10ft tablecloth with a thick lace trim, but she has also made me curtains and placemats, and has even crocheted a set of animals. I'll be framing these on the walls over Mother's Day.

She still lives in the same farmhouse, in rural Extremadura, where I grew up. My father ran the farm — he could rear and kill a pig and cure the meat, but he couldn't fry an egg, so my mother did all the cooking. I was expected to help my father on the farm and wasn't really allowed in the kitchen, because I was a boy.

I only started cooking a little when I moved to Caceres. I was studying to become a dental technician, but while I was looking for a job, I enrolled on a cookery course. As soon as I started, I knew I could never go back to teeth. When I told my mother I was going to become a chef, she said, "What? But you've never cooked."

Now she loves my food. When she visits, she always comes to the restaurant with me first thing in the morning, to see what's going on. My style of cooking is inspired by dishes from my childhood, but I often make a small tweaks. I'm attributing this recipe to her — it's filled with the flavour of home.

Chicken cooked in beer

Serves 4

*1.5kg chicken, jointed into 8 pieces
1 tsp sweet pimenton (smoked paprika)
25g plain flour
3 tbsp olive oil
25g butter
500g onions, finely sliced
6 cloves of garlic, peeled
1 tsp fennel seeds
1 tbsp sugar
4 fresh bay leaves
2 tsp Dijon mustard
250ml lager-style beer
250ml chicken stock
2 tsp red wine vinegar
2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
Crusty bread, to serve*

Remove the skin from the pieces of chicken, sprinkle over the pimenton and season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Toss in the flour, knocking off any excess.

Heat the olive oil in a flameproof casserole dish. Add the chicken pieces and fry for about 4 minutes on both sides, until golden brown all over. Remove the chicken from the pan and set to one side.

Add the butter to the casserole and, when it has melted, add the onions, whole garlic cloves, fennel seeds, half the sugar and the bay leaves and season. Cover and fry over a medium heat, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes, until the mixture is soft and has caramelised.

Stir in the remaining sugar, along with the mustard, beer, chicken stock and 1 tsp of the vinegar. Return the chicken pieces to the casserole, bring everything to the boil, cover, then reduce the heat and simmer for 30 minutes, until the sauce has thickened and the chicken is tender.

Stir in the remaining vinegar and some salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with parsley and serve with slices of warm, crusty bread.

Angela Hartnett

Having trained under Gordon Ramsay, Hartnett is now chef-patron of the Michelin-starred Murano and also runs two Cafe Muranos, all in London

My mother's mother was a fantastic Italian cook, but she wasn't so good at desserts. When my mum, Giuliana, did a British cordon bleu cooking course, she learnt all the classics, from fruitcake to lemon meringue pie, but an apple tart was the thing that she loved to make the most.

Mum is in her eighties now, and still makes a great apple tart. Her pastry work is impeccable. I often ring her to ask for advice on anything, from pies to pasta. She will look through her cookbooks and find a good recipe, then read it out over the phone. If she can tell I'm rushing around, then she'll go to the library to photocopy it, or write it out and post it to me.

A while ago, I had some apples that needed using up, so I made three of these apple tarts and put them in the freezer. I cooked one straight from frozen and it was delicious — I remember phoning Mum and telling her how good it tasted, how perfect the pastry was.

A few weeks later, she came to visit and I had one left in the freezer, so I thought I'd cook it. Of course, I blame my partner, Neil, for taking it out too early. It was soggy as anything, and Mum couldn't wait to tease me about it, promising to teach me how to make pastry, so I'd know better next time.

Apple pie

Serves 6

For the shortcrust pastry

300g flour

75g hard margarine, or butter, cut into small cubes

75g lard, cut into small cubes

2 tbsp milk, to glaze

For the filling

3-4 bramley apples

1-2 tbsp caster sugar

Heat the oven to 180C (non-fan 200C). Make the shortcrust pastry by mixing the flour and a pinch of salt in a bowl. Add the butter and lard, then use your fingertips to rub everything in until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs.

Add ice-cold water, 1 tbsp at a time, mixing the whole time, until the pastry starts to come together into a smooth dough. Wrap the pastry in clingfilm and rest it in the fridge for 20 minutes.

Roll out half the pastry on a floured surface to an area about 2cm wider than your pie dish (I suggest using

one 20cm in diameter). Fold it back over your rolling pin and carefully lift it and line the pie dish, then gently press it into all the edges.

Peel and core the apples, slice them into the dish and sprinkle some sugar on top.

Roll out the rest of the pastry and place it on top of the pie. Trim off any excess and crimp the edges together to seal. Cut a couple of slashes in the top, brush the pastry with milk and sprinkle over a pinch more sugar. Bake for 30-35 minutes, until golden. (If it's frozen, allow to cook for an extra 15 minutes or so.) Serve with cream or ice cream.

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