

Mediterranean Feast – Vegetarian Cook-along 17th April 2021

Recipes & Ingredients

Spanish Chickpea Stew

This Seville-inspired stew comes together in under 20 minutes and is a hit with everyone. I'm using yellow pepper here since we'll have roasted red peppers as a side but you can substitute the pepper with celery if you like, or the spinach for other greens, such as chopped chard. This makes a hearty, warming lunch, served with some crusty bread. For a more substantial dinner, you could serve it with quinoa or rice and leave out the stock for a slightly thicker consistency.

Servings: 4

Ingredients

3 tablespoons flaked almonds
1½ tablespoons oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
1 large yellow or red pepper, deseeded and chopped
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 teaspoons ground cumin
2 teaspoons smoked paprika
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 large handful of fresh parsley, stalks finely chopped and leaves roughly chopped
1 tablespoon tomato purée
2 x 400g tins of chopped tomatoes
2 x 400g tins of chickpeas, drained and rinsed
*100ml veggie stock or water (optional) **see bonus recipe to make your own*
250g spinach
1 tablespoon lemon juice
sea salt and black pepper
1-2 teaspoons brown sugar (optional)
extra-virgin olive oil, to serve

Method

In a large, deep frying pan or casserole pot, toast the almonds over a medium heat (dry) for just under a minute until golden, then set aside. Heat the oil in the hot pan, add the onion and pepper and fry for 6 minutes until starting to soften.

Add the garlic, spices and parsley stalks and fry for 1 minute, stirring constantly to prevent them from burning, then add the tomato purée and cook for another 30 seconds.

Tip the tinned tomatoes into the pan and sugar if using, adjust to taste, turn up the heat to a medium simmer and cook for 15 minutes, uncovered, to thicken and reduce. Add the chickpeas and cook for another 3 minutes with a lid on. If you want the stew to be more soup-like, add the stock.

Turn up the heat, drop in the spinach and cook for 1 minute, covered with the lid, then add the lemon juice and season with salt and pepper.

Serve each bowl with a good drizzle of olive oil and with the parsley leaves and toasted almonds scattered over.

Roasted Red Peppers

These are very simple to make and are a great accompaniment to many Italian, Spanish or Greek dishes. Roasting the peppers really brings out the best in this fairly commonly used ingredient. Make sure to retain the juices from the roasting dish as this is where the flavour lies.

Servings: 4

Ingredients

2 red (bell) peppers

Salt

1 garlic clove

Olive oil

A few springs of fresh herbs e.g., oregano or rosemary (optional - see notes)

Method

Roast red peppers in the oven at 190C for approx. 40 minutes - turning them after 20 minutes so they cook evenly. They're ready when the skins start to blacken and blister.

Remove from the oven and allow to cool enough so you can handle them. Pierce them with a knife to let out steam, being careful not to burn yourself.

Carefully peel and deseed the roasted peppers.

Slice them into strips and put in a container along with any juice from the peppers.

Add freshly crushed garlic and salt. Cover with olive oil and stir to disperse the garlic and salt evenly.

If you're doing these in advance you can add a few whole springs of herbs to infuse overnight. If you're serving immediately, leave out the herbs.

They will keep in the fridge for at least a few days but best served at room temperature (the oil solidifies to some extent in the fridge).

Olive Tapenade

Olive tapenades make a fantastic appetiser or a flavourful addition to any Mediterranean meal. The better the quality of olives you use, the nicer this will be but don't get too hung up on the type of olives and use only black ones if you prefer - just double the quantity. The herbs are optional but fresh rosemary really elevates this deliciously savoury spread to another level.

Servings: makes approx. 300g

Ingredients

90g (½ cup) pitted black olives (kalamata)
90g (½ cup) pitted green olives (Castelvetro)
2 cloves garlic, chopped
2 tablespoons capers
2 tablespoons fresh Italian parsley, chopped
1 tablespoons fresh rosemary, chopped
2 tablespoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Combine all ingredients except the olive oil in a food processor or using a hand blender and process until everything is finely chopped.

Slowly add the olive oil while you are blending the ingredients together. Blend until you have a paste that's not completely smooth but still has some bits in it.

Greek Dakos

Since the tapenade recipe already includes raw garlic, you can choose to omit it here! Again, the herbs are an optional garnish, and you can use whatever is most readily available. I suggest using basil at this time of year, which may not be quite as authentically Greek as oregano would be but should nonetheless whisk you off to the Mediterranean in spirit ;-)

Servings: 4

Ingredients

4 large slices of nice crusty bread
2 garlic cloves (optional)
Olive tapenade (see above)
A small sprinkle of fresh oregano, dill or basil leaves
2 medium tomatoes or equivalent amount of cherry tomatoes
4 tablespoons olive oil approx.
150g feta cheese

Method

Chop up the tomatoes quite small into a bowl.

Lightly toast the bread.

Peel the garlic if using and cut off the tip so that it has a flat edge. Rub the garlic clove all over the toasted bread and drizzle with some olive oil.

Cover each slice with chopped tomato and crumble over the feta. Layer on some oregano/dill/basil leaves and finally top each slice with the olive tapenade and garnish with a few more herb leaves.

***Bonus recipe – to make in advance if you wish**

Veggie stock

I love the idea of making as much as possible from scratch so that you know exactly what goes into each meal and can avoid any additives in processed foods. I find that a simple stock like this adds so much flavour to so many dishes and has the added benefit of lots of goodness and nutrients from all the veggies and herbs that go into it.

Makes approx. 2 litres

Ingredients

2½ litres water
2 leeks
2 carrots
5 stalks of celery
3 shallots
1 bay leaf
A few sprigs of fresh parsley
1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
½ teaspoon coarse salt

Method

Chop up all your veggies, then heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a large pot over a medium heat. Add the leeks, carrots, celery and shallots and sauté for 2 to 3 minutes, until fragrant, then add the herbs, peppercorns and the water. Bring to the boil, then turn the heat to low and simmer for 2 hours. Strain through a sieve, discard the solids, then transfer to a glass jar when cool and keep sealed in the fridge for up to 5 days.

If you're in a hurry here, you can skip the first step and simply add all of the ingredients to the water, and follow the rest of the steps above. You will still have a lovely wholesome stock that will add depth of flavour to stews, soups or many other dishes.

Suggested equipment:

Casserole pot
Wooden spoon
Knife
Chopping board
Sieve or colander (for draining chickpeas)
Citrus squeezer
Teaspoon & tablespoon measures
Scales / cup measures
Food processor or hand blender + container/bowl
Spatula
Garlic press
Oven dish for peppers
thongs/fork
Spoon for removing seeds
Jar/container

Prep:

Have all ingredients weighed out and equipment to hand
Wash the spinach if necessary
Peel the onion and garlic