

Ottolenghi's VEGETARIAN FEAST

YOTAM OTTOLENGHI'S FRESH TAKE ON INGREDIENTS HAS PRACTICALLY REINVENTED THE TERM 'VEGETARIAN'. HE REVEALS HIS INSPIRATION AND RECIPES FROM HIS NEW COOKBOOK, *PLENTY*

RECIPES YOTAM OTTOLENGHI PHOTOGRAPHS JONATHAN LOVEKIN INTERVIEW ANDREA CHILDS
CREATIVE DIRECTOR MARY NORDEN

Readers of the *Guardian's* *Weekend* magazine and his eponymous first cookbook will be familiar with Yotam Ottolenghi's recipes – the way he can turn 'unsexy' cauliflower into a veritable vegetable glamourpuss; the tastebud-tingling array of spices; the salads that forgo limp lettuce for the protein punch of chickpeas and lentils. 'My cooking is ingredient based,' he says. 'Rather than imagine a finished dish, I start with a single item and build from there – so, if it's butterbeans, which spices do I associate with them?'



'It's food that sates the senses as much as the stomach'

The result is a style of food that sates the senses as much as the stomach. You have only to walk into one of Ottolenghi's four London takeaways-cum-restaurants to experience the seductiveness of his cooking. Display counters glow with platters of roasted vegetables; vibrant green herbs spike the air with their freshness; meringues the size of clutch bags beg to have their gooey middles scooped out.

'I'm from Jerusalem, but my father's background is Italian and my mother's is German. I grew up eating pasta and ragu, with the Parmesan my grandmother brought back from Italy, plus the northern European cabbage and potato dishes my mother cooked. And as soon as I stepped out of the house, I was surrounded by Middle Eastern street food – houmous, pitta breads and spices. I've always loved eating,' laughs Ottolenghi. As an adult, he has added more layers of flavour to his cooking inventory. 'Every trip turns into a working holiday,' he admits. 'In Malaysia, I couldn't believe there were so many different things to do with chilli.'

It was New York that provided the biggest influence, giving him the idea to transform London's lunchtime takeaways into

something special. 'I'd studied for an MA in philosophy and literature, and came to London for a break. While there, I did a Cordon Bleu cookery course, and then became a pastry chef,' he explains. 'Back then, in the early 1990s, no-one took the takeaway market seriously. I felt there was the potential for a chain of New York-style delis, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner that you could eat in or take home.'

The concept's success hasn't surprised him, but the popularity of some of the dishes, created with his executive chef, Sami Tamimi, has. 'We can never have too much aubergine,' he says. 'Perhaps it's because it's so versatile. You can mash it, grill it, roast it, and it takes on other flavours well.' (For evidence, just look at the recipe for Aubergine With Buttermilk Sauce, page 235.) Ottolenghi has even created a mini 'Delia effect' – Waitrose started selling the spices sumac and zatar after he began featuring

them in recipes. 'I'm trying to bring in Iranian lime now,' he laughs. 'People want to try something different.'

His new book, *Plenty*, will give us the opportunity to do just that. Filled with recipes culled from his column, plus lots of new dishes for devotees, it is a book of vegetarian cooking that will tempt meat lovers, too. 'I've included quick-to-make dishes, but people shouldn't be put off even if there is a long list of ingredients – most will simply be spices,' says Ottolenghi. He also gives a great tip for demystifying recipes: 'If you like the look of a dish, read the instructions a couple of times. Often, you'll find that preparing it can be broken down into a couple of stages – you might make a salsa and chargrill some fish in advance, then just put it in the oven to finish.' And for everyday suppers that taste amazing, there are the recipes here. Enjoy! 🍴



Aubergine with buttermilk sauce (see page 235 for recipe)

EXCLUSIVE

Roasted parsnips and sweet potatoes with caper vinaigrette (see page 235 for recipe)



‘Rather than imagine a finished dish, I start with a single item and build from there’



Royal potato salad (page 235)



Soba noodles with aubergine and mango (page 237)



Surprise tatin (page 237)



Saffron cauliflower (page 237)



Celeriac and lentils with hazelnut and mint (page 238)



Marinated mushrooms with walnut and tahini yoghurt (page 238)



AUBERGINE WITH BUTTERMILK SAUCE

SERVES: 4 as a starter

PREPARATION TIME:

15-20 minutes

COOKING TIME:

35-40 minutes

I can't think of a more rustically elegant (is that a contradiction in terms?) starter. Serve with some robust white bread or pitta and you are, literally, in food heaven.



2 large and long aubergines
80ml olive oil
1½ tsp lemon thyme leaves, plus a few whole sprigs to garnish
1 pomegranate
1 tsp zatar (a mixture of herbs and spices, usually including oregano, thyme and sesame seeds.
Available from Waitrose, as well as online at steenbergs.co.uk)
Sea salt and black pepper

For the sauce:

140ml buttermilk
100g Greek yoghurt
1½ tbsp olive oil
1 small garlic clove, crushed
Pinch of salt

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas mark 6. Cut the aubergines in half lengthways, cutting straight through the green stalk. Use a small sharp knife to make three or four parallel incisions in the cut side of each aubergine half, without cutting through to the skin. Repeat at a 45-degree angle to get a diamond-shape pattern.
2 Place the aubergine halves, cut-side up, on a baking sheet

lined with baking parchment. Brush them with the olive oil – keep on brushing until all the oil has been absorbed.

3 Sprinkle with the lemon thyme leaves and some salt and pepper. Roast for 35-40 minutes, at which point the flesh should be soft and nicely browned. Remove from the oven and allow to cool.

4 While the aubergines are in the oven, prepare the pomegranate and sauce. Cut the pomegranate in two, horizontally. Hold one half over a bowl, with the cut side against your palm, and use the back of a wooden spoon to knock on the pomegranate skin. Continue beating until the seeds start coming out naturally and falling through your fingers into the bowl. Once all are there, sift through the seeds to remove any bits of white skin or membrane.

5 For the sauce, just whisk together all of the ingredients. Taste for seasoning, then put aside until needed.

6 To serve, spoon plenty of buttermilk sauce over the aubergine halves without covering the stalks. Sprinkle the zatar and pomegranate seeds on top and garnish with lemon thyme. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil.

ROASTED PARSNIPS AND SWEET POTATOES WITH CAPER VINAIGRETTE

SERVES: 4

PREPARATION TIME:

10-15 minutes

COOKING TIME:

60-70 minutes

You can use any of your favourite vegetables here – swede, potato, carrot, salsify, beetroot, cauliflower – and many other refreshing seasoning combinations at the end: chopped herbs, such as basil or mint, grated lemon zest, harissa paste, crushed garlic or a mellow vinegar.



4 parsnips (700g in total)
4 medium red onions
150ml olive oil
4 thyme sprigs
2 rosemary sprigs
1 head garlic, halved horizontally
Salt and black pepper
2 medium sweet potatoes (600g in total)
30 cherry tomatoes, halved
2 tbsp lemon juice
4 tbsp small capers (roughly chopped, if large)
½ tbsp maple syrup
½ tsp Dijon mustard
1 tbsp toasted sesame seeds (optional)

1 Preheat the oven to 190°C/375°F/Gas mark 5. Peel the parsnips and cut into two or three segments, depending on their length. Then cut each piece lengthways into two or four. You want pieces roughly 5cm long and 1.5cm wide. Peel the onions and cut each into six wedges.

2 Place the parsnips and onions in a large mixing bowl and add 120ml of the olive oil, the thyme, rosemary, garlic, one teaspoon of salt and some pepper. Mix well and spread out in a large roasting tin. Roast for 20 minutes.

3 While the parsnips are cooking, top and tail the sweet potatoes. Cut them (with their skins on) widthways in half, then each half into six wedges. Add the potatoes to the tin with the parsnips and onions and stir well. Return to the oven to roast for a further 40 minutes.

4 When all the vegetables

are cooked through and have taken on a golden colour, stir in the halved tomatoes. Roast for 10 more minutes. Meanwhile, whisk together the lemon juice, capers, maple syrup, mustard, remaining two tablespoons of oil and half a teaspoon of salt.

5 Pour the dressing over the roasted vegetables as soon as you take them out of the oven. Stir well, then taste and adjust the seasoning. Scatter the sesame seeds over the vegetables (if using) and serve at the table in the roasting tin.

ROYAL POTATO SALAD

SERVES: 4-6

PREPARATION TIME:

10 minutes

COOKING TIME:

20-25 minutes

Jersey Royals are at their peak in spring and early summer, which is just as well, since they make a stunning picnic salad. This one is a poshed-up version.



15 quails' eggs
150g petits pois (frozen)
800g Jersey Royals (or new potatoes), washed but not scrubbed
20g basil leaves
20g parsley leaves, plus a little extra chopped to garnish
60g pine nuts
60g Parmesan, grated
2 garlic cloves, crushed
200ml olive oil
½ tsp white wine vinegar
Bunch of sorrel (or mint) leaves, finely shredded
Salt and black pepper

1 Place the quails' eggs in a saucepan, cover with cold water and bring to the boil. Simmer for between 30 seconds (semi-soft) and two minutes (hard-boiled), depending on how you like them cooked. Refresh in cold water, then peel.

2 Blanch the peas in boiling water for 30 seconds, then drain and refresh. Set aside.

3 In a separate pan of boiling water, cook the potatoes for 15-20 minutes, or until they are soft but not falling apart. While the potatoes are cooking, place the basil, parsley, pine nuts, Parmesan and garlic in a food processor and blitz to a paste. Add the oil, then pulse the mixture, until you get a runny pesto. Pour into a large bowl.

4 Drain the potatoes, then cut in two as soon as you can handle them (they will absorb more flavour when hot). Add to the bowl and toss with the pesto, vinegar, sorrel and peas. Mix well, even crushing the potatoes slightly, so all the flavours mix. Season to taste.

5 Cut the eggs in half and gently fold into the salad. Garnish with chopped parsley.

SOBA NOODLES WITH AUBERGINE AND MANGO

SERVES: 6

PREPARATION TIME:

10 minutes

COOKING TIME:

20-25 minutes

It's the refreshing nature of the cold buckwheat noodles, the sweet sharpness of the dressing and the muskiness of mango that make this so pleasing. Serve this as a substantial starter or turn it into a light lunch by adding some fried firm tofu.

120ml rice vinegar

40g caster sugar

½ tsp salt

2 garlic cloves, crushed

½ fresh red chilli, finely chopped



1 tsp toasted sesame oil

Grated zest and juice of 1 lime

220ml sunflower oil

2 aubergines, cut into 2cm cubes

250g soba noodles

1 large ripe mango, cut into 1cm cubes or 5mm thick strips

40g basil leaves, chopped (or use Thai basil, but much less of it)

40g coriander leaves, chopped

½ red onion, very thinly sliced

1 First, make the dressing.

In a small saucepan, gently warm the vinegar, sugar and salt for up to one minute, just until the sugar dissolves. Remove from the heat and add the garlic, chilli and sesame oil. Allow to cool, then add the lime zest and juice.

2 Heat the sunflower oil in a large pan and shallow-fry the aubergine in three or four batches. Once golden brown, remove to a colander, sprinkle liberally with salt and leave there to drain.

3 Cook the noodles in plenty of boiling salted water, stirring occasionally. They should take five to eight minutes to become tender, while still retaining a bite. Drain and rinse well under running cold water. Shake off as much of the excess water as possible, then leave to dry on a tea towel.

4 In a mixing bowl, toss the noodles with the dressing, mango, aubergine, the onion and half of the herbs. You can now leave this aside for one to two hours. When ready to serve, add the rest of the herbs and mix well, then pile on a plate or in a bowl.

SAFFRON CAULIFLOWER

SERVES: 4 as a side dish

PREPARATION TIME:

5 minutes

COOKING TIME:

40-45 minutes

Cauliflower may seem dull, but it's actually wonderfully versatile. It is one of those singular vegetables, like potato or aubergine, that can take on big flavours without losing its character.

1½ tsp saffron strands

75ml boiling water

1 medium cauliflower, divided into medium-sized florets

1 large red onion, sliced

100g sultanas (if they are very dry, soak them in water first)

90g good-quality green olives, pitted and cut lengthways in half



4 tbsp olive oil

2 bay leaves

4 tbsp roughly chopped parsley salt and black pepper

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°C/Gas mark 6. Put the saffron strands in a small bowl and pour over the boiling water. Leave to infuse for a minute, then pour the saffron and water into a large mixing bowl. Add the remaining ingredients, except the parsley, and mix everything together well with your hands.

2 Transfer the mix to a medium ovenproof dish, cover with foil and place in the oven. Cook for 40-45 minutes, or until the cauliflower is tender but still a bit firm, not soft. Halfway through the cooking

time, remove the dish from the oven and stir well, then cover again and return to bake.

3 Once the cauliflower is cooked, take it out of the oven, remove the foil and allow to cool slightly before stirring in the parsley. Taste and adjust the seasoning, then serve warm.

SURPRISE TATIN

SERVES: 4

PREPARATION TIME:

15-20 minutes

COOKING TIME:

1hr 25-30 minutes

Filling a tart with potatoes is a real treat for potato-lovers. Serve it with a green salad and you don't need much else. You can use sunblush tomatoes in oil to save yourself making the oven-dried tomatoes.

200g cherry tomatoes

2 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for drizzling and for the tin

500g baby potatoes (skins on)

1 large onion, thinly sliced

40g sugar

10g butter

3 oregano sprigs

150g hard goats' cheese, sliced

1 puff pastry sheet, rolled thinly

Salt and black pepper

1 Preheat the oven to 130°C/240°F/Gas mark ½. Halve the tomatoes and place them skin-side down on a baking sheet. Drizzle over some olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Place in the oven to dry for 45 minutes.

2 Meanwhile, cook the potatoes in boiling salted water for 25 minutes. Drain and



let cool. Trim off a bit of the top and bottom of each potato, then cut into 2cm-thick discs. Sauté the onion with the oil and some salt for 10 minutes, or until golden brown.

3 Once you've prepared all the vegetables, brush a 22cm cake tin with oil and line the bottom with baking parchment. In a small pan, cook the sugar and butter on a high heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, to get a semi-dark caramel. Pour the caramel carefully into the cake tin and tilt to spread evenly over the bottom. Scatter the oregano leaves over the caramel.

4 Lay the potato slices close together, cut-side down, on the bottom of the tin. Press the onion and tomatoes into the gaps and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Spread the slices of goats' cheese evenly over the potatoes. Cut a puff pastry disc that is 3cm larger in diameter than the tin. Lay the pastry lid over the tart filling and tuck the edges down around the potatoes inside the tin. (You can chill the tart for 24 hours.)

5 Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas mark 6. Bake the tart for 25 minutes, then reduce the temperature to 180°C/350°F/Gas mark 4 and continue baking for 15 minutes, or until the pastry is cooked. Remove from the oven and let it settle for two minutes. **6** Hold an inverted plate firmly on top of the tin and turn them over together, then lift off the tin. Serve the tart hot or warm.

CELERIAC AND LENTILS WITH HAZELNUT AND MINT

SERVES: 4

PREPARATION TIME: 15-20 minutes

COOKING TIME: 20-25 minutes

Celeriac is probably my favourite root vegetable. It is delicate, yet nutty, and has an elegant oily smoothness.

Serve this warm, with a radish, cucumber and dill salad dressed with soured cream and olive oil.

60g whole hazelnuts (skin on)

200g Puy lentils

700ml water

2 bay leaves

4 thyme sprigs

1 small celeriac (650g), peeled and cut into 1cm chips

4 tbsp olive oil

3 tbsp hazelnut oil

3 tbsp good-quality red-wine vinegar

4 tbsp chopped mint

Salt and black pepper

1 Preheat the oven to 140°C/275°F/Gas mark 1. Scatter the hazelnuts on a small baking sheet and roast in the oven for 15 minutes. Let them cool, then chop roughly.



2 Combine the lentils, water, bay leaves and thyme in a small saucepan. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 15-20 minutes, or until al dente. Drain in a sieve.

3 Meanwhile, in a separate saucepan, cook the celeriac in boiling salted water for eight to 12 minutes, or until just tender. Drain. In a large bowl, mix the hot lentils (if they have cooled down, they won't soak up all the flavours) with the olive oil, two tablespoons of the hazelnut oil, the vinegar, some black pepper and plenty of salt. Add the celeriac and stir well. Season to taste.

4 To serve straight away, stir in half the mint and half the hazelnuts. Pile on to a serving

dish or in a bowl and drizzle the remaining hazelnut oil on top. Garnish with the rest of the mint and hazelnuts.

5 To serve cold, wait for the lentils and celeriac to cool down before adjusting the seasoning and possibly adding some more vinegar, if you like. Add hazelnut oil, mint and nuts in the same way as when serving hot.

MARINATED MUSHROOMS WITH WALNUT AND TAHINI YOGHURT

SERVES: 4

PREPARATION TIME:

15-20 minutes plus 1hr for marinating

With a few elegant endive (chicory) leaves stirred through, this makes a substantial vegetarian main course; as it is, you can put it in a Tupperware container and take it on a picnic, or serve it as part of a spring buffet.

75ml olive oil

1 tbsp white wine vinegar

1 tbsp maple syrup

Juice of 2 medium lemons

200g chestnut mushrooms, sliced

150g buna shimeji mushrooms, large base removed (Shimeji are the clustered small mushrooms that you often get in 'exotic' supermarket selections)

120ml Greek yoghurt

35g tahini paste

1 small garlic clove, crushed

250g shelled broad beans (frozen or fresh)

75g walnuts, toasted and roughly chopped

½ tsp ground cumin

1 tbsp chopped dill

1 tbsp chopped oregano

Salt and black pepper



1 Start by marinating the mushrooms. Whisk together the olive oil, vinegar, maple syrup, half the lemon juice, half a teaspoon of salt and some black pepper. Pour this over the mixed mushrooms in a large bowl and toss well, making sure all the mushrooms are coated. Leave them to marinate for an hour.

2 While you wait, make the tahini sauce. Mix together in a small bowl the yoghurt, tahini paste, garlic, remaining lemon juice and half a teaspoon of salt. Use a fork to whip everything together to a light paste. (You can refrigerate this sauce for up to a day.)

3 Next, pour plenty of boiling water over the broad beans in a bowl and leave for a minute, then drain well and leave to cool down. Now squeeze each bean gently to remove the skin and discard it (if you don't mind the skin, you can skip this stage).

4 Add the beans, walnuts and cumin to the marinated mushrooms and stir to mix. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Serve the mushrooms in small bowls or plates, each portion topped with a dollop of thick tahini sauce and sprinkled with herbs.

READER OFFER

RED READERS CAN BUY PLENTY by Yotam Ottolenghi, published by Ebury Press (£25), for the special price of £22, including free UK p&p. To order a copy, call 01206 255 800 and quote 'Red' to receive the discount.

