



Food

BY MARTIN BOSLEY

Lunchtime munch

Forget the instant noodles, make a lunch worthy of your appetite.



Cauliflower salad with capers

Because I work surrounded by food all day long, the concept of the packed lunch rarely crosses my mind. I am able to dip in and out of my fridge as my appetite sees fit. Restaurant kitchens generally do not have morning tea breaks, and obviously at lunchtime we are cooking for our guests – so we tend to eat our own lunch in the late afternoon. About as close as I get to a packed lunch dining experience is when I fill my daughter's school lunch box with zip-lock bags, each containing something I hope she will find appealing. She tells me she enjoys working her way through her lunch box to see what I have given her, even though she has dictated most of it to me.

Discussing with some office-worker friends the nature of what goes into their average lunch box left me with feelings of despair. Instant noodles, just-add-water soups and energy bars full of sugar seemed to be the norm, with a token piece of fruit tossed in for good measure. The leftovers from the previous evening's dinner made the occasional sad appearance, to be reheated in the kitchenette microwave.

If I were to pack a lunch, I would treat it as a personal picnic so that, like my daughter, I could look forward to open-

ing the lid of the box. Lunch should be seen as a reward for the day's work already accomplished as well as providing sustenance for the afternoon ahead, and removing the wrapping from something I had made myself would bring personal delight.

The packed lunch is all about simple cooking and much of the weekday lunch box can be easily prepared early in the week, with ingredients providing a couple of options. A lentil and bacon salad made on a Sunday can be mixed later on with some canned baby beetroot and a bit of goat's cheese; cook a few extra vegetables with Sunday night's supper, and you could make a pleasant salad mixed with some flaked smoked fish.

For this salad, I avoid using onions, garlic or spring onions, because you don't want to be scaring off potential clients with the potency of your breath. If you don't care about that, by all means add them – they will be a welcome addition.

CAULIFLOWER SALAD WITH CAPERS

½ head of cauliflower, cut into florets
½ cup black olives, pitted
1 tbsp capers, rinsed

2 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp red wine vinegar
a small handful of parsley, chopped finely
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Cook the cauliflower in boiling, salted water until just tender. This should take about 4 minutes. Drain and allow to cool (without running under cold water). While the cauliflower is cooking chop the olives and capers, put them into a small mixing bowl and whisk in the olive oil and the red wine vinegar. Stir in the parsley and season with salt and pepper. Toss the still-warm cauliflower in the dressing and away you go.

Enough for two days.

PACKED LUNCHES are all about cooking from the pantry, and canned tuna is a classic ingredient, making instant meals that always taste great.

TUNA, TOMATO, SPINACH, CUCUMBER AND ORZO SALAD

400g tuna in spring water, drained
200g orzo pasta
grated zest and juice of one lemon
1 cup young spinach leaves
2 ripe tomatoes
1 small Lebanese cucumber

2 tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 tbsp olive oil
salt and freshly ground black pepper
a few leaves of buttercrunch lettuce

Put the drained tuna into a large bowl. Cook the orzo pasta in a pot of boiling, salted water until just cooked, and then rinse under cold running water. Drain well, tip into the bowl with the tuna and add the zest of the lemon as well as the spinach leaves. Cut the tomatoes into chunks, cut the cucumber in half lengthways and then slice it on the diagonal and gently toss through the tuna and orzo. In a small bowl whisk together the parsley, olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper to make a light dressing. Add to the salad and toss gently, adding more salt and pepper if needed. Line a plastic air-tight container with the buttercrunch lettuce leaves and top with the salad.

Enough for two.

PARSNIPS MAKE ONE of the most luxurious, warming winter soups ever. Keep it warm either in a thermos flask or re-heat it in the office microwave for a couple of minutes on high. I would keep the bacon and chives in a separate container, to add just before eating it.



Tuna, tomato, spinach, cucumber and orzo salad

PARSNIP AND BACON SOUP

2 tbsp unsalted butter
1 onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, peeled and chopped
1kg parsnips, peeled and chopped
1 litre chicken stock
150ml cream
salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tbsp chopped chives
6 rashers bacon, cooked and chopped

Melt the butter in a heavy-based saucepan and cook the onion and garlic for 5-6 minutes until soft. Add the parsnips and chicken stock and bring to a gentle simmer. Cook for 20 minutes, until the parsnips are very tender. Remove the pot from the heat and leave to cool slightly. Blend the soup in small batches in a liquidiser until smooth, finally stirring in the cream and add a little salt and pepper to taste. Reheat the soup and stir in the chopped chives and bacon bits.

Serves 4.

THIS RECIPE MAKES the best, fudgiest brownie ever. We used to serve it at the restaurant still warm from the oven, with vanilla ice cream. You need a good quality chocolate, something really dark. There is no vanilla essence, and even the nuts are



Parsnip and bacon soup



Chocolate brownie

optional; if you don't want them getting in the way, just omit them. The best thing about this brownie is that it keeps its texture and crumbly nature when stored in an air-tight container.

CHOCOLATE BROWNIE

350g dark chocolate (at least 70% cocoa solids)
150g unsalted butter
4 eggs
1 cup light muscovado sugar
1 cup self-raising flour
150g walnuts, chopped

Preheat the oven to 170°C. Line a 30cm x 20cm x 3.5cm baking tin with lightly buttered greaseproof baking paper. Melt the chocolate with the butter in a bowl placed over a saucepan of simmering water. In a separate bowl whisk the eggs with the muscovado until thick and creamy and combine with the melted chocolate mixture. Fold in the flour and walnuts. Pour the batter into the prepared tin and bake for 25 minutes. The top should be firm, slightly cracked, but still feel soft when pressed lightly. Allow to cool in the tin before turning the brownie out and cutting it up.

Makes about 12 pieces. ■