

Flavours of Hope

Treasured recipes from refugee families





Closing my eyes, I breathed in the aroma of warm syrup and roasted nuts.
 With the very first bite, the layers of pastry began to melt on my tongue.
 I tasted honey, rosewater, pistachio.

It was heavenly.

I was in Jordan, purchasing baklava made by Syrian refugees who had fled the civil war a decade ago and still could not return safely. They had lost so much – their homes, their loved ones, their way of life. But here, in a humble sweet shop, I got a taste of their culture and traditions.

It was a very special experience.

My trip to Jordan with Australia for UNHCR a few years ago was incredible. I met refugee women who, with UNHCR's support, had created food businesses at home to provide for their families. One refugee, Fatima, had received a cash grant from UNHCR to purchase a fridge. This small investment enabled her to expand her business, employ other women and pay for her daughter's education. Her home cooking was a pathway to self-reliance and a more secure future.

Syrians, as you will see from this book, are fabulous cooks. When you think of Syrian food, you might think of kibbeh, or stuffed eggplants, or the delicious baklava I tasted in the refugee camp marketplace.

But now, when I think of Syrian food, I remember Fatima, the business she's built, and the power of her cooking to create a positive future.

These pages contain recipes from all over the world. They also contain a shared dream – to come together with loved ones over a meal, to laugh and to remember.

I hope you enjoy the remarkable stories and dishes in this book. But even more than that, I hope, like me, you gain a new appreciation for how food is intertwined with memory, identity and belonging.

Happy cooking,



Janine
x

Janine Allis
 Founder of Boost Juice
 Australia for UNHCR Ambassador





Whenever I spend time with refugees, I'm struck by their generosity. They take you by the hand, invite you into their home – no matter how modest – and share whatever they have available. All over the world I've experienced this: with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Ukrainian refugees in Poland and Syrian refugees in Jordan.

The spirit of generosity that I've experienced time and again is alive on every page of this book. Although our contributors have survived extremely difficult experiences, the 10 individuals featured in *Flavours of Hope* have not lost the urge to share what they have with others – in this case, their stories, their culture and their food. After all, sharing food brings us together as human beings.

Inside, you'll find treasured family recipes: Mariia's ricotta pancakes, which remind her children of weekends with family in Ukraine (page 58); Thuy's cinnamon-spiced pho, which used to be a treat if she achieved a good exam result (page 72); and Fatima's Afghan flatbread, which made her feel at home after arriving in Australia (page 66).

This book takes us on a culinary journey from Syria to Sierra Leone, Ukraine to Afghanistan. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, works in all those countries and many more, helping people forcibly displaced by war, conflict and persecution.

You may know UNHCR for its life-saving work during humanitarian emergencies, but our dedicated teams also assist refugees long-term. In Jordan, for example, UNHCR helps Syrian refugees find employment opportunities. For years Australian donors have also supported Syrian refugee women with cash assistance, including Mouna (page 36). It's an example of how, with your support, UNHCR can help refugees get back on their feet.

Here in Australia, people from refugee backgrounds contribute so much to our communities. Food is an important part of this. It enriches our culture and builds understanding. Food is also a way of giving back; by starting cafes and restaurants, people like Hamed (page 24) are employing refugees and others who deserve a fair go.

These delicious recipes were chosen by our contributors to nourish and inspire you. I hope you enjoy sharing them with your family and friends.

Yours sincerely,



Trudi Mitchell

Trudi Mitchell
CEO
Australia for UNHCR

Contents

Africa

Akec Makur Chuot 10
South Sudan

Yarrie Bangura 16
Sierra Leone

Middle East

Hamed Allahyari 24
Iran

Nayran Tabiei 30
Syria

Mouna Khaled 36
Syria

Raghda Al Zahlawi 42
Syria

Europe

Vanja Bulut 50
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mariia Mykytiuk 56
Ukraine

Asia

Fatima Yousufi 64
Afghanistan

Thuy Dang 70
Vietnam



54



64



18



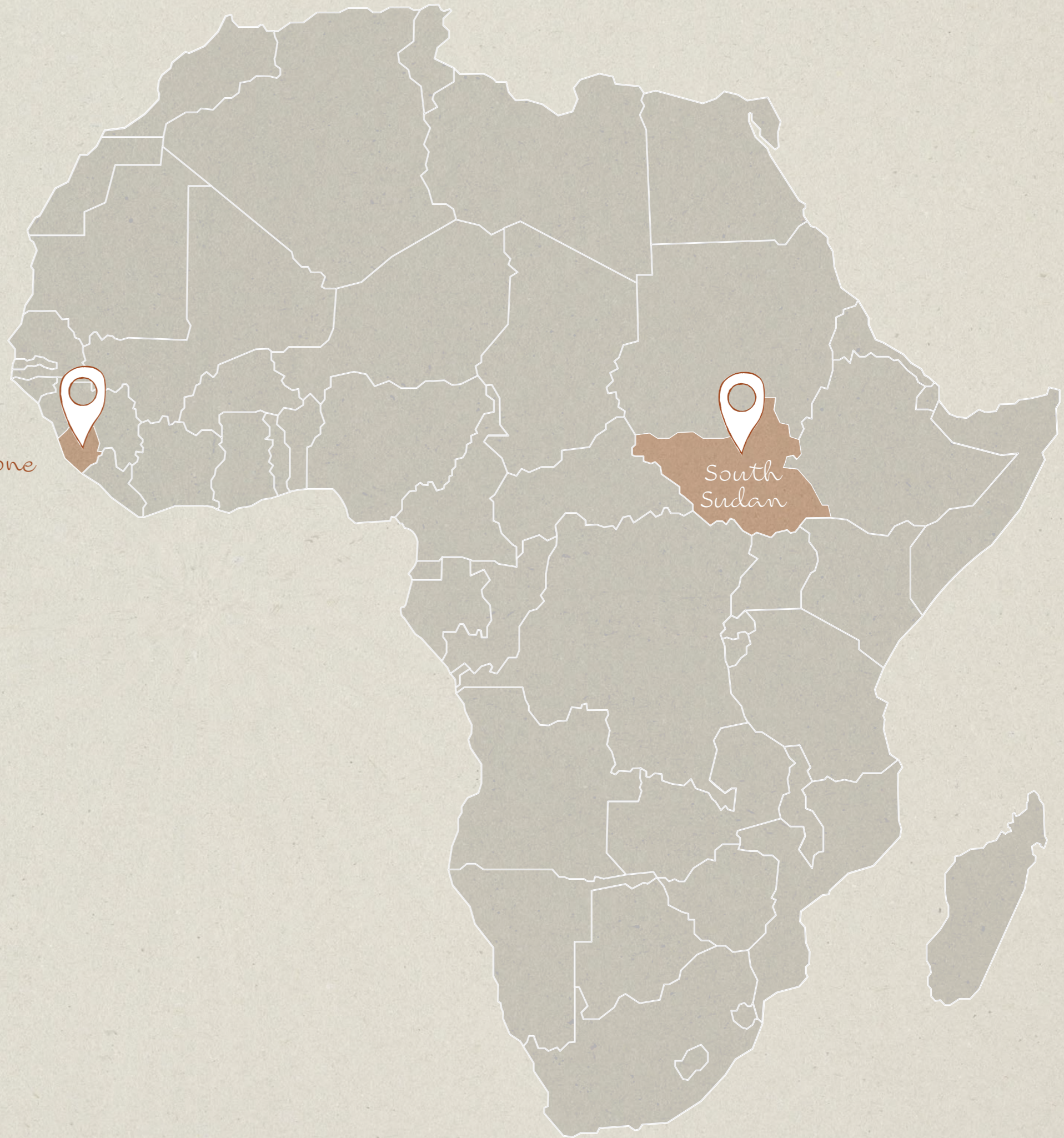
32



14



70



Sierra Leone

South Sudan

Africa

Akec Makur Chuot South Sudan	10
Rijla	12
Lamb shaiyah	14
Yarrie Bangura Sierra Leone	16
Jollof rice	18
Black eye bean stew	20



“Living in a Kenyan refugee camp, food wasn't easily accessible for a lot of people, but my amazing mum worked hard to make sure we always had good food and a full belly.”

Akec Makur Chuot

South Sudan

Akec was born in South Sudan but spent much of her childhood in a UNHCR refugee camp in Kenya. After moving to Perth at the age of 12, Akec began playing sport and went on to become the first woman from an African background to compete in the AFL Women's league. Aside from football, Akec's other passion is food. Her love of cooking comes from her remarkable mother.

My mum is one of my heroes. She fled the civil war in South Sudan with six children and raised us all by herself. My father passed away before I was born. That's why my name is Akec – in South Sudanese culture, when the father passes away this name is given to the last child born that generation. Living in a Kenyan refugee camp, food wasn't easily accessible for a lot of people, but my amazing mum worked hard to make sure we always had good food and a full belly.

Some of my earliest memories are of my mother going above and beyond to make sure we had food. She had a restaurant in the camp, which was so commendable for a single mother in such difficult circumstances. She would always bring the leftovers back home and my uncles, cousins and all our friends would come over and eat. That really gave us a sense of unity.

It took nine years for us to receive approval to come to Australia. I couldn't believe they offered sport as a school subject here. I came from a culture where women weren't allowed to play sport. I started playing soccer and later I fell in love with AFL. I'll never forget that the Fremantle Dockers gave me an opportunity to become a professional footballer. I went from Fremantle to Richmond and then Hawthorn, where I finished

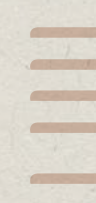
my career. Wherever I was playing, it didn't matter that I was South Sudanese. All the fans cared about was that I could play the game.

I hold onto traditional South Sudanese cooking because there is just nothing like it. When we were living in Perth, if someone was hungry at 2am, my mum would get up and cook. Then the whole family would get up in the middle of the night so they could have some too. We cook a lot of different stews in South Sudan and you could often smell the beautiful aromas of garlic and meat in our house. And the taste! You can taste every element of the dish – the meat as well as all the different spices.

My mum is now living back in South Sudan, but I made sure that I listened and watched her when I was growing up so I could learn. I'd take in the way she went about cooking and the love that she put into it. Now food is one way I'm able to express myself, telling the story of both myself and Mum. It's also a way for me to welcome my friends and introduce them to my culture.

I think we're incredibly lucky in Australia to have so many different cuisines. I particularly love Vietnamese, Japanese and Italian food. We are so spoiled here – the world is in Australia and that is reflected in how people cook.

My mum is sometimes on the phone with me while I cook. It's pretty amazing that we still have that bond. Even though she's not in Melbourne with me, but back home in South Sudan, she knows that I am happy and eating well, which is really important to me. She also knows that all her amazing lessons didn't go to waste.



Rijla

Lamb and lentil stew

The smell and taste of the different ingredients remind me of my mum and they connect me to my South Sudanese culture. I love cooking this dish because it makes me feel like I'm paying homage to my mother.

SERVES 4 | PREP TIME 15 MINS | COOK TIME 80-90 MINS

Ingredients

500g lamb, with or without bones, cut into bite-sized pieces
2 onions, chopped
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp ground pepper
1 tsp salt
2 large cloves garlic, chopped
2 tbsp tomato paste
2 tomatoes, chopped
½ cup (100g) dry red lentils
2 cups water or stock
150g purslane, roughly chopped (substitute with sorrel, watercress, spinach or mustard greens)

Method

Heat the oil over medium-high heat in a casserole or thick-bottomed pot. Add the meat and cook for about 10 minutes, or until very brown on all sides.

Add the onions, coriander, pepper and salt. Cook until the onions are browned.

Add half of the garlic and the tomato paste and cook, stirring often for another 5 minutes or so, allowing the tomato paste to brown a little.

Add the chopped tomatoes, 2 cups of water/stock, and the lentils. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer and cover.

Cook for about 40 minutes, stirring every 10-15 minutes so nothing sticks to the bottom.

After 40 minutes, add the purslane and the other half of the garlic and stir. Bring to a strong simmer and cook uncovered for another 20 minutes, stirring regularly.

Serve on its own or with rice with rice or bread.

This dish can also be cooked with beef.



Lamb shaiyah

Diced lamb

What makes South Sudanese dishes so beautiful is the influence of different cultures, particularly for people like me who called Kenya home for a long time. I love to cook a wide range of diverse foods from Kenya, which connects me back to my time in Kakuma refugee camp.

SERVES 4 | PREP TIME 15 MINS | COOK TIME 80-90 MINS

Ingredients

- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 tsp minced garlic
- 1 green and 1 red capsicum, seeds removed, chopped
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 4 tsp vegetable stock powder (such as Vegeta)
- 2 tsp each paprika, cumin, ground coriander
- 4 tsp beef mchuzi mix (A Kenyan spice mix available from specialty African grocers. If unavailable, substitute with 4 tsp beef stock powder and 1 tsp paprika.)
- 500g lamb leg or shoulder, diced
- Vegetable oil

Method

Heat oil in a large frypan.

Brown the onion until soft, then add the diced lamb and stir to cook evenly.

Once lamb pieces are caramelised, add capsicum, spices, stock powder and mchuzi mix (or substitute).

Stir until all ingredients are well mixed.

Continue stirring until lamb is cooked through and tender.

This dish can also be cooked with beef.





“I learned to cook from a young age, as assistant chef to my mother and aunties... We didn't cook with measurements, but with feel and taste.”

Yarrie Bangura

Sierra Leone

Yarrie had a happy and peaceful childhood in Sierra Leone before civil war forced her family to flee when she was eight years old. She lived in a refugee camp in Guinea before arriving in Australia with her parents and five siblings on humanitarian visas. Today, Yarrie runs a business making ginger tonics, inspired by the country she left behind.

Everything we ate in Sierra Leone was seasonal, fresh from the markets or our own garden. We ate a lot of stews and greens like okra and cassava leaves. We lived next to the ocean, so we would just go to the wharf and buy our seafood directly from the fishermen.

I learned to cook from a young age, as assistant chef to my mother and aunties. They'd ask me to chop the chilli or test if there was enough salt in the sauce. We didn't cook with measurements, but with feel and taste.

We had a comfortable life before the war broke out. Then everything changed. The rebels said they would burn down the whole country. My parents wanted to get us out of the country, but the only option to escape Freetown was by boat. When we got to the ferry, it felt like the whole of Freetown was there because the queue was so long. Everyone was terrified the rebels would come. We managed to get on a boat and crossed the river. From there, we travelled through the bush to get to my grandparents' village. A few days later, the rebels attacked. We fled to the border with Guinea and made our way to a refugee camp.

My uncle was living in Australia and sponsored us to come here. I was told we would no

longer be able to have any of the same food in Australia, and there wouldn't be any rice. So, when my mum cooked a big feast before we left the camp in Guinea, I ate so much that the clothes I was supposed to wear didn't fit me – my belly was too big.

For the first two years in Australia, I felt on top of the world. But, after a while, I started having bad flashbacks about the war. It was a long time before I started allowing myself to think about the good times back in Sierra Leone again. Times like visiting my grandmother's farm, where we'd pick oranges or crack open ripe tamarinds from her massive tree.

I'd also think about my great grandmother, who was known as the Queen of the Herbs and is said to have lived until she was 116 years old. And I'd remember my aunties, who would sit around in their colourful attire and beautiful head wraps making food and drinks.

Revisiting these memories allowed me to start reconnecting and healing. It also gave me an idea about how I could give something back to Australia. I wanted to create something that represented my home and also my new life – that's how the ginger tonics came to be.

The original tonic is tamarind, inspired by my grandmother's tree. I started experimenting with the flavours at home and asking my parents to try it. I also use cloves, which my grandmother would tell me to drink if I had a stomach ache. I wanted to make something which both tastes different and is good for the body, since I grew up eating things which were good for me.

Jollof rice

This is mostly eaten at special events like Eid, weddings, baby naming ceremonies and sometimes funerals. We use lots of spices, like ginger and garlic, with plenty of onions and tomatoes.

SERVES 6 AS A SIDE DISH | PREP TIME 5 MINS | COOK TIME 45 MINS

Ingredients

2 medium brown onions
4 garlic cloves
8cm piece of ginger
2 medium-sized tomatoes, roughly chopped, or 400g tin of tomatoes
1 Scotch Bonnet chilli (or substitute with habanero, jalapeno or bird's eye chilli)
½ cup olive oil
1 red onion, thinly sliced
2 dried bay leaves
½ cup water
3 tbsp tomato paste
1 tsp dried thyme
4 cups uncooked long-grain or basmati rice
5-6 cups stock (vegetable, chicken or beef)
3 carrots
Green and yellow capsicum, thinly sliced, to garnish
Salt, to taste
Black and white pepper, to taste

Method

Roughly chop the brown onions, garlic, ginger and tomatoes. Add to a blender with the chilli. (These ingredients can also be diced if no blender is available.) Blend to a rough consistency.

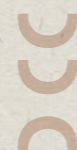
Heat the olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. When hot, add red onions and stir for 5 minutes or until fragrant. Add bay leaves and the blended onion mixture. Add water, tomato paste and thyme, stirring well. Bring to the boil then simmer on low for 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, wash rice and add to the pot. Add the stock, salt and pepper to taste, and mix well. Cover the pot with foil, then add the lid. Cook on low to medium heat for 15 minutes.

Peel and dice carrots, then add to pot. Cook for another 15 minutes.

Serve topped with sliced fresh capsicum, and sprinkle with parsley if desired.

This dish can also be cooked with meat, chicken or seafood.



Black-eyed bean stew

This is a traditional food. Most people eat it with meat, but you can also have it with bread or rice. This is a very interesting food because you can have it for breakfast, like my family does, or for lunch or dinner. My mum cooked it every couple of weeks, but I also had it at ceremonies and special occasions.

SERVES 6 AS A SIDE DISH | PREP TIME 15 MINS | COOK TIME 60 MINS

Ingredients

2½ cups water
1kg pack of dried black-eyed beans
4 tbsp peanut oil
1 medium-sized brown onion, peeled and chopped
1 medium-sized red onion, peeled and chopped
1 garlic clove, peeled, minced
2 tbsp tomato paste
1 fresh green jalapeno chilli, minced
2 vegetable stock cubes
1 tsp salt
Bread and/or fried plantain to serve
Parsley and green onion, chopped, to garnish

Method

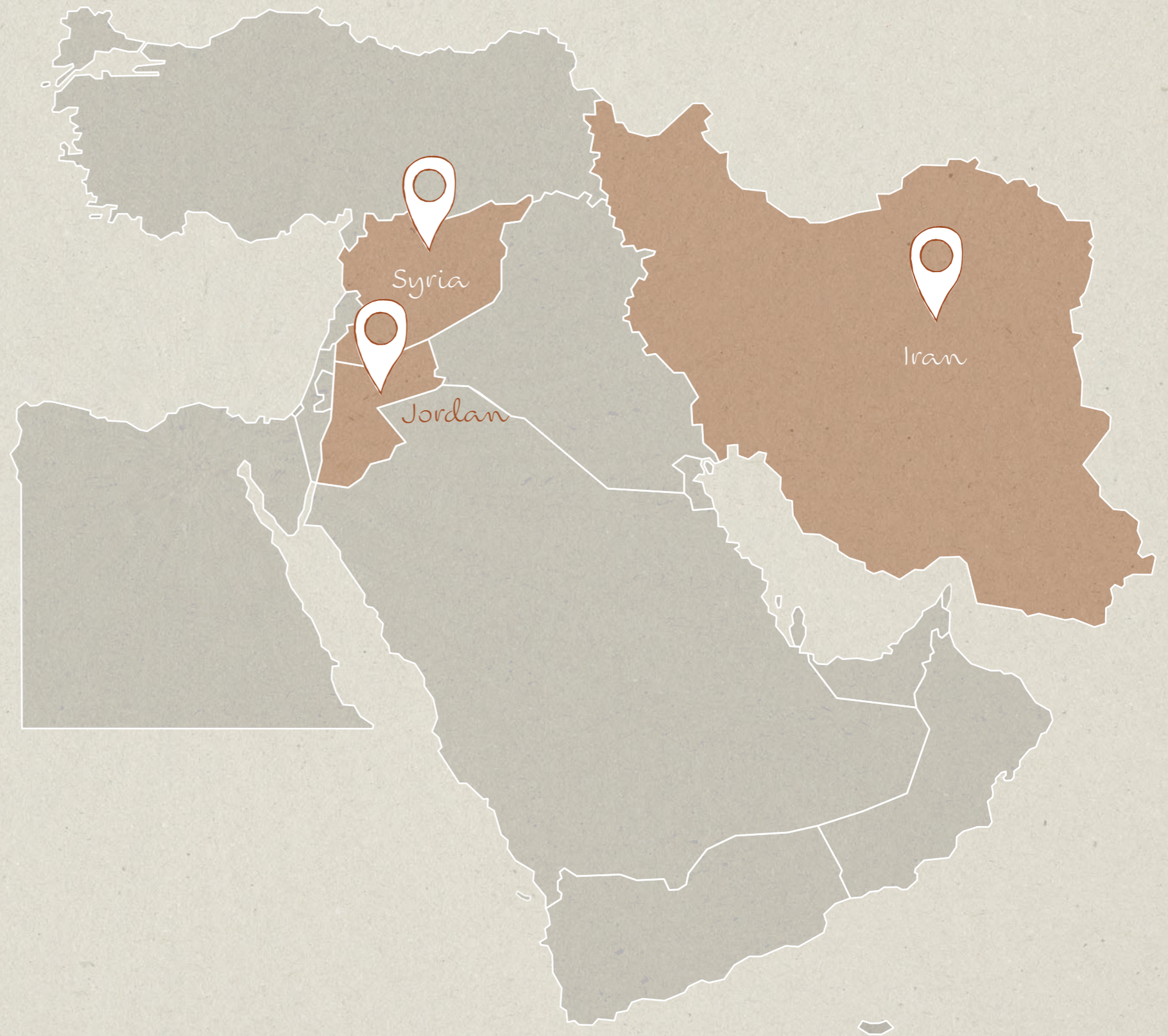
Bring the water to boil in a pot. Add the beans and salt and boil for 40 minutes or until the beans are soft. Once cooked, drain the water and set the beans aside.

Heat peanut oil on medium heat in a pot. Sauté onions and garlic for a few minutes until softened. Add tomato paste, chilli, bay leaves, stock cubes and salt. Stir and cook for 10 minutes. Add the cooked beans and simmer on low for another 10 minutes, adding small amounts of water if the mixture begins to dry out or stick to the pot. Garnish with parsley and green onion.

Serve with bread or fried plantain.



The Middle East



Hamed Allahyari	24
Iran	
Sabzi polow ba mahi	26
Kashk e bademjan	28
Nayran Tabiei	30
Syria	
Basbousa	32
Fatayer sabanekh	34
Mouna Khaled*	36
Syria	
Shish barak	38
Rice pudding	40
Raghda Al Zahlawi*	42
Syria	
Yalanji	44
Tabbouleh	46

*Living in Jordan, which hosts more than 600,000 Syrian refugees



“Cooking gave me energy and I still feel that energy now when I cook for my friends, or in my cooking classes, or in the restaurant when people give me good feedback.”

Hamed Allahyari

Iran

Hamed Allahyari came to Australia in 2012 as an asylum seeker from Iran. After arriving, he began teaching cooking classes at a social enterprise. The work inspired him to open a business: a café and restaurant in Melbourne called Salamatea, which now employs and empowers other refugees and asylum seekers.

Summers in Tehran are very hot, so during the school holidays I'd stay inside with my mum and help cook food for the family. It was satisfying. Sometimes we just made up the dishes with whatever ingredients we had in the fridge, and then it turned out to be very good.

Cooking gave me energy and I still feel that energy now when I cook for my friends, or in my cooking classes, or in the restaurant when people give me good feedback.

When I left home, I joined a share house with friends in Tehran and we agreed that I would cook them food in exchange for rent. I was always calling my mum, asking for tips on how to cook different Iranian dishes. One time, we had 10 or 15 people crammed into that small house eating my ash reshteh, which is a Persian noodle soup. Everyone loved it and I started thinking: 'Ok, I'm good at this'.

From there, I started working in hospitality. I became head of the kitchen of a modern restaurant in Tehran and then opened my own café. We made simple dishes, but it was very successful.

I was forced to flee Iran and come to Australia by boat. When I first arrived here, I thought I'd start working in construction because the security guards at Christmas Island told me there was good money in it and you could be successful. However, instead, I started volunteering at an asylum seeker charity which led to me teaching cooking classes. They became very popular. At the beginning, it was clear Australians didn't know much about Persian food, but after a while that changed and people were coming back to the classes so they could have the dishes.

Persian food is very flavourful. We use very fragrant and unique spices like cardamom and saffron. It's also different depending on where you are in the country. You can take a journey from the north of Iran to the south. In each bite, you have things which taste so different.

I haven't made any changes from what I learned to cook in Iran. The ingredients are the same and the tastes are the same. But I have made changes to how the dishes look. People first eat by the eye, so I care about the garnishes and how the food looks. As some of my friends tell me: 'You paint your plates'.

I feel very proud because I didn't just come to Australia, I brought some of the culture from Iran with me.



سبزی پلو با ماهی

Sabzi polow ba mahi

Fish with herb pilaf

We traditionally have this dish on Persian New Year's Eve. It's very flavourful and the rice, by itself, is so delicious. We've had it for years in our culture. Because it's a special dish, it's something you have together with family and friends.

SERVES 4 | RICE: PREP TIME 15 MINS + 2HRS SOAKING | COOK TIME 30 MINS
FISH: PREP TIME 10 MINS + 30 MINS MARINATING | COOK TIME 20 MINS

Fish ingredients

½ garlic bulb, cloves peeled
2 tsp salt
4 x 250g salmon or trout fillets, skin on
¾ cup (60ml) freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 x quantity saffron liquid
1 x tsp ground turmeric
2 tsp freshly ground black pepper
1 cup (250ml) olive oil
Chopped dill fronds to garnish
Pomegranate seeds to garnish
Lemon wedges, to serve

Pilaf ingredients

2 tsp salt
2 cups (400g) long-grain basmati rice
1 bunch coriander, stalks and leaves finely chopped
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 cup (250ml) olive oil

For the saffron liquid (makes 1 quantity or ¼ cup):

1 tsp saffron threads
1 tbsp granulated sugar
¼ cup (60ml) boiling water

Pilaf method

To make the saffron liquid: Grind the saffron and sugar using a mortar and pestle, then transfer to a heatproof bowl and stir through the boiling water to bleed the colour. Set aside for 5 minutes before use.

To make the pilaf: Fill a large bowl with cold water, add 1 teaspoon of the salt and stir to dissolve. Add the rice and leave to soak for 2 hours. Drain.

Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil over high heat. Add the remaining salt, then add the rice and bring to the boil. Leave for 10 minutes. Add herbs and garlic and leave on stove until rice is fully cooked (about 5 more minutes). Drain. Stir the saffron liquid through the rice, then remove from heat.

Fish method

Place the garlic and salt in a mortar and use the pestle to pound the ingredients to a paste.

Place the fish in a baking dish and spread the garlic paste over the top. Combine the lemon juice, saffron liquid, turmeric and black pepper in a jug, then pour the mixture over the fish. Set aside to marinate in the fridge for at least 30 minutes.

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat. Add the fish, skin side down, and cook for 5 minutes, then turn the fish over and continue to cook for 5 minutes, or until just cooked through. Transfer the fish to paper towel to drain.

Place the fish on a serving dish and scatter the dill and pomegranate seeds over the top. Serve with the rice pilaf and lemon wedges for squeezing over.



کشک بادمجان

Kashk e bademjan

Eggplant with liquid kashk

This is the top Persian dish according to people in my cooking classes. In my three years of teaching more than 2,000 people this simple eggplant dish was most popular. I love this dish myself. I used to hate eggplant when I was young, but I love it now.

SERVES 4 | PREP TIME 15 MINS | COOK TIME 40 MINS

Ingredients

3 large eggplants
1 cup (250ml) olive oil
2 large brown onions, 1 finely diced, 1 thinly sliced
6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 tsp ground turmeric
2 tsp freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup (8g) dried mint
2 tsp salt
200ml liquid kashk (available from speciality grocers, or substitute with plain yoghurt), plus extra to serve
Chopped walnuts, to serve

Method

If cooking the eggplants on a barbecue, heat the barbecue grill plate to a high heat. Alternatively, use a gas stovetop. Place the whole eggplants on the grill plate or over a gas flame and cook, using tongs to turn them frequently, until the skins are charred and blackened and the flesh is tender – this will take about 20 minutes on the barbecue or about 5 minutes on the stovetop. Transfer the eggplants to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap and allow to steam for 10 minutes.

Peel and discard most of the charred eggplant skins along with the stalks. It is okay to leave a few small pieces of skin, as this will enhance the smoky flavour. Shred the eggplant flesh into a bowl.

Heat ½ cup of the olive oil in a frying pan over medium heat, add the diced onion and cook for 5 minutes until golden. Add the garlic, turmeric and pepper and sauté for 2 minutes. Add 2 tablespoons of the dried mint and cook for 1 minute, then add the eggplant and cook for 5 minutes or until lightly golden. Remove the pan from the heat and stir through the salt and kashk/yoghurt.

Heat 3 tablespoons of the remaining oil in a frying pan over high heat. Add the sliced onion and sauté for 5 minutes or until dark brown and crispy. Transfer to a plate. Add the remaining oil, along with the remaining dried mint, to the pan. Fry the mint for 15-20 seconds, then remove from the heat.

Transfer the eggplant mixture to a serving plate and top with the fried onion, fried mint and chopped walnuts. Drizzle with extra kashk/yoghurt and serve.

Serve hot, or allow to cool, and enjoy with flatbread.





“I want people who come to my café to feel like they are in Syria – and experience the environment, the smell, the spices.”

Nayran Tabiei

Syria

Nayran fled the Syrian city of Damascus in 2011 after civil war broke out. She now lives in Melbourne where she runs the Flavours of Syria café in St Kilda. She also hosts cooking classes, has a catering business and cooks meals for people who are homeless.

My mother passed away when I was five years old, so I moved in with my grandmother. She was the one who taught me how to cook. She would pick me up from school, put me on a kitchen bench, and we'd start to prepare the ingredients together.

She'd tell me the story, for example, of babaganoush. Then, with the smell of eggplant barbecuing around us, she'd teach me about the right temperatures for food, and about the benefits of different spices such as cardamom.

Many years after that, I had my own café in Damascus where we sold takeaway food like kebabs and tabbouleh. I lived in the city with my husband and children, three boys and a girl, and this was the calmest time of my life.

But then ISIS came and Syria was no longer safe. We left everything behind – the house, my business and my family. It wasn't the first time I'd lost everything, and when we came to Australia by boat I was determined to start again and try my best.

It was in my third asylum-seeker camp in Australia that I was finally able to cook again. We shared one kitchen between four families. Instead of things like clothes and shampoo, all I wanted was ingredients and spices.

I had an open-door policy and the officers also started to come – they loved the coffee and were getting the best basbousa and baklava.

This was when I learned the tastes of Australians, which are different from our tastes back in Syria. In Syria, we love garlic, we love lemon and we love salt. Now, when I cook for Australians, I don't add salt anymore – I just bring the shaker with me.

I was using spices like cardamom and cinnamon, and I was being told by people in Australia they hadn't had them before. They were wanting to know the names. They also wanted to know the stories behind the food I was making for them.

Now I have my own café again – Flavours of Syria in Melbourne's St Kilda. It's beautiful when I go there, I feel like I'm flying. I tell my customers to please come to see me even if they don't want to eat.

For me, it's about sharing the culture. I want people who come to my café to feel like they are in Syria and experience the environment, the smell, the spices. You can see me cooking, smell the food and see the baklava come from the oven.

I also have people from Syria come and enjoy the food. They sometimes say it's yummiier than their mum's cooking and that makes my day.



بسبوسة

Basbousa

Sweet semolina cake

Basbousa is very famous in my café and everyone loves learning how to cook it. The smell of the rosewater syrup reminds me of my grandma. Even if you're at the far end of the house, you can smell the rosewater and orange blossom. That aroma makes my heart beat faster.

SERVES 10 | PREP TIME 40 MINS | COOK TIME 40 MINS

Cake ingredients

2 cups semolina
½ cup sugar
¾ tsp baking powder
½ cup shredded or desiccated coconut
¾ cup yoghurt
1¼ (312g) butter block, melted
¾ tsp salt
A few drops vanilla extract
10-15 blanched and peeled almonds
(substitute with cashews)

Sugar syrup ingredients

1 cup sugar
½ cup water
1 tsp lemon juice
¼ tsp rosewater essence (substitute with
orange blossom water)

Syrup method

Heat water and sugar in a saucepan. Boil them until the sugar dissolves completely and it starts bubbling. Add lemon juice and stir. Turn off the flame and add the rosewater. Cool the syrup to room temperature.

Cake method

In a large bowl, add semolina, baking powder, coconut, sugar and salt, and mix well. Add melted butter and yoghurt to the mixture and stir them until well combined. The batter should be thick but not too dry.

Grease a 20-25 centimetre cake tin, then line with baking paper. Pour the batter into the tin. Level the batter with the help of a ladle or spoon. Allow the batter to rest in the refrigerator for 20 minutes.

Remove the tin from the refrigerator and cut the cake into approx. 10 diamond or square shapes. Place an almond on each piece.

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Bake for 25-30 minutes. Prick cake with a toothpick to test whether it comes out clean. If it comes out wet and/or crumbly, return to oven for another 5-10 minutes or until the crust becomes crisp and light brown.

When the toothpick comes out clean, remove the pan from the oven and re-cut the cake following the same diamond or square cuts as before.

Pour the sugar syrup slowly over the hot cake. Allow the cake to cool and soak in the syrup for hours, then enjoy this soft and yummy treat.



فطائر صبانخ

Fatayer sabanekh

Spinach pastries

We have many kinds of fatayer. It comes with cheese, with spinach, with meat – lamb, of course, because we love lamb in Syria. We can also have it with capsicum, which is traditional. We have it as street food, and when guests come we make it in advance so we are ready and have something hot as a starter.

SERVES 10 | PREP TIME 90 MINS | COOK TIME 30 MINS

Dough ingredients

2¼ tsp instant yeast
1 cup warm water (not hot)
3 cups all-purpose flour
½ tsp sugar
1½ tsp salt
2 tbsp olive oil
1 egg, beaten, for brushing on triangles

Filling ingredients

800g fresh spinach leaves, chopped
1 medium-sized onion, finely chopped
2 tbsp lemon juice
1 tbsp sumac
A pinch of salt

Method

In a small mixing bowl, add water (make sure it's warm, as hot water can kill the yeast), salt, yeast and half a cup of flour. Stir well and let it sit aside until the mixture gets bubbly.

In another medium-sized mixing bowl, add olive oil, salt and 2 cups of flour, and mix together using a spoon.

Add the bubbly yeast mixture to the rest of the ingredients until it's all combined and forms a dough. Turn dough out onto a lightly-floured work surface. Knead for about 8-10 minutes until smooth and elastic, then place the dough in a lightly greased bowl. Cover with a kitchen towel and leave in a warm place for about 1 hour or until the dough doubles in size. If you don't have time to wait, place the bowl with the dough in another bowl that's filled with warm water (not hot!); the dough rises within 30-45 minutes.

While the dough is rising, prepare the filling. Place the spinach, onion and salt in a colander and stir to combine. Set aside then squeeze out excess moisture from the mix. Place in a bowl, add the lemon juice and sumac, and stir to combine.

After the dough doubles in size, cut into small balls (size of an egg) and keep under a towel so the dough does not dry out. Roll out each ball into a circle. Place a tablespoon of spinach mixture in the centre of each circle. Fold two sides of the dough over the filling, then fold up a third side to form a triangle. Lightly press the edges together to seal well.

Preheat oven to 200°C. Transfer triangles onto a greased baking tray and brush the pastries with the beaten egg (so they turn golden while baking). Bake on the middle rack for about 30 minutes or until the tops are golden.





“My daughter was diagnosed with cancer and that's when I really began understanding the importance of nutritious food. I started learning about therapeutic cooking and what would be good for her.”

Mouna Khaled

Syria

Mouna is from Syria. She was living in the capital, Damascus, when civil war broke out. Her daughter then fell seriously ill, so they moved to Jordan as refugees to seek medical treatment in safety. They received cash assistance from UNHCR to pay for essentials. Mouna also started a cooking business at home to support her family. She now dreams of opening her own restaurant.

As a child, I always wanted to create things. Whenever my mother left the house, I would jump at the chance to make food for my father and siblings. My dad used to tell me that my food was the best.

Whenever someone made delicious food, I would ask them how they prepared it. I also loved making the food look good, as I believe your first glimpse of a dish is really your first bite.

Many years later, my daughter was diagnosed with cancer and that's when I really began understanding the importance of nutritious food. I started learning about therapeutic cooking and what would be good for her.

The civil war had already broken out in Syria when she became sick, so we sought asylum in Jordan as a safe haven in order to seek medical treatment for her. My husband fell very ill as well, which meant I was facing big medical expenses while also not being able to commit to a job because I had two people at home to look after.

I decided to open a home-based business and started to cook and sell traditional Syrian

dishes. I also tried to learn dishes from other cultures, including Egyptian and Indian. Cooking is something I believe Syrian women are very skilled at. I used social media to market my dishes and had a lot of positive responses.

By working from home, I was able to stay around my daughter and also take her to appointments.

Unfortunately, my husband passed away due to cancer, may he rest in peace. He used to love my cooking and encouraged me a lot. Then, in late 2023, my daughter also passed away. She was 15 years old.

I couldn't just sit down and live in grief, so I decided to develop my business and accomplish one of the dreams that my daughter had, which was to go to university.

I registered to do a diploma at Philadelphia University to become a certified chef. I work in a big restaurant after my classes are finished for the day and try to keep as busy as possible. I work and study 15 hours every day.

My dream is to one day open my own restaurant. I would like to cook only healthy food, like I did for my daughter.



شيش برك

Shish barak

Dumplings in yoghurt

Shish barak is a very old Syrian dish, and all Syrians love it. White dishes with ingredients like yoghurt mean purity. To show love to our guests, we offer white dishes. It's like opening a new page with them.

SERVES 6 | PREP TIME 40 MINS | COOK TIME 40 MINS | MAKES APPROX 60 DUMPLINGS

Dough ingredients

2 cups all-purpose flour
½ cup water
¼ tsp salt
¼ cup corn or vegetable oil

Filling ingredients

500g minced lamb
1 white onion, finely chopped
A little salt and pepper
Coriander, finely chopped
2 tbsp corn or vegetable oil

Sauce ingredients

4 cups yoghurt
2 tbsp cornflour
½ tsp salt
Pine nuts and coriander leaves to garnish

Method

For the dough: In a bowl, mix the flour, water and salt, and knead them well for 5 minutes. Add the oil and continue kneading for 3 more minutes until you get a soft dough. Cover the bowl and set it aside to rest.

For the filling: Heat the oil in a medium-sized pot, add the onions and meat, and stir over medium heat for 5 minutes. Add salt, pepper and coriander, and continue stirring for 2 minutes. Turn off the heat and allow the filling to cool.

For the dumplings: Spread the dough on a surface to a thickness of half a centimetre, then cut it into small circles with a diameter of 3 or 4 centimetres. Place 1 teaspoon of filling into each circle. Close them in the shape of a half moon, then bring the two corners together, to make the shape of a hat.

Cover the finished dumplings with a tea towel and move on to the final stage.

Place the milk and cornflour in a medium-sized saucepan and stir well with a wire whisk, then place on medium heat and continue stirring in a circular motion in one direction without stopping until the mixture begins to boil.

Once it reaches boiling point, reduce the heat slightly and add the salt. After 2 minutes, add the prepared dumplings and leave them to boil without stirring for 10 minutes. Then place them in a deep dish for serving and decorate the top with pine nuts and green coriander leaves.

Serve hot or cold.



الأرز باللبن

Rice pudding

When a baby is able to have their first bite, this will be the first dish they are given. This dish takes us back to the good old days. And serving an essential element like rice shows a guest how precious and vital they are in our life, according to our traditions.

SERVES 5 | PREP TIME 5 MINS | COOK TIME 25 MINS

Ingredients

1 litre milk
½ cup white sugar
6 tbsp cornflour
1 cup medium-grain rice, such as arborio or jasmine, uncooked
Vanilla, rose or orange blossom water for flavour, as desired
Red cherries and chopped pistachios to garnish

Method

Bring two cups of water to boil in a pot, then add the rice. Boil gently until rice is semi-cooked (approx. 10 minutes). Strain the rice.

Heat a pot on the stove. Add the milk and, when it boils, add the semi-cooked rice. Continue to boil for 5 minutes until the rice is completely cooked. Add the sugar, stirring a little until it dissolves completely.

In a separate bowl, dissolve the cornflour with a little added milk or cold water. Then add to the boiling mixture, continuing to stir for 4 minutes until the mixture has become a little thick.

Turn off the heat and add flavouring, such as vanilla, rose or orange blossom water, to taste. Pour the rice mixture into small, deep serving dishes. Leave to cool. Decorate with pieces of red cherry and chopped pistachios. Place in the refrigerator until serving.

Serve cold.





“Food is very important for me now – it’s the lifeline that allows me to live with dignity. My wish is to receive more orders so I can employ more women to help me cook and to bring in an income for them too.”

Raghda Al Zahlawi

Syria

Raghda and her family sought asylum in Jordan as devastating conflict escalated in their Syrian hometown of Homs. More than a decade later, Raghda lives in a rented apartment in the Jordanian capital, Amman, with her husband and four of their children. She now makes a living by cooking food and selling it to both locals and foreigners. UNHCR supports training programs to help refugees like Raghda start small businesses and become self-sufficient.

I miss the smell of traditional food grilling in the streets of Homs, especially the grilled kubbeh. The festival food, kaek, also has a very special smell. So too the lunches during Eid. Their smells are very unique.

Food was an important part of my childhood and something we celebrated every day. My first memory of cooking was getting the ingredients to make betefour cookies, which are famous in Syria and very delicious. I was 12 years old, and my family was very impressed.

My mother and father had excellent cooking skills and created the most amazing flavours from our traditional Syrian and Damascene dishes. But then the war broke out in Syria and, in 2012, my husband, my children and I crossed the border into neighbouring Jordan seeking safety.

We were finding it financially very difficult to meet our needs, as my husband and sons were unable to find work. That’s when I decided I could use my cooking skills to help support us. I started cooking food at home to sell, and people loved it.

The money from that has allowed me to keep a roof over my family’s head by paying rent. That was the most urgent thing, but another priority was being able to send my children to school.

Food is very important for me now – it’s the lifeline that allows me to live with dignity. My wish is to receive more orders so I can employ more women to help me cook and to bring in an income for them too.



يلنجي Yalanji

Grape leaves with oil

Yalanji is the most famous dish in Syria and the identity of Damascus. It is a big part of the tradition and culture. It's my favourite dish and everyone orders it for their loved ones during get-togethers and feasts.

SERVES 6 | PREP TIME 30 MINS | COOK TIME 120 MINS

Ingredients

250g green grape or olive vine leaves
1½ cups medium grain rice, washed and drained, uncooked
2 medium onions, chopped
4 tomatoes, chopped
1 tomato, sliced
1 potato, sliced
¼ cup mint, finely chopped
½ cup olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
¼ cup pomegranate molasses
½ cup lemon juice, plus extra for squeezing over cooking pot
1½ tbsp salt, plus a pinch extra

Method

If vine leaves are raw, they will need to be cooked to be edible (some leaves are available pre-cooked, so please check). Place a little water in a pot and bring to boil. When the water boils, gradually add the vine leaves and boil for 2 minutes. Remove them from the water and place them in a strainer.

To make the filling, add the washed and drained rice into a mixing bowl. Place the chopped onions on top. Then add the chopped tomatoes, parsley and mint to give your ingredients a special flavor.

Add the olive oil, salt, pomegranate molasses and lemon juice. Stir the mixture well and leave for 10 minutes to combine.

Next, spread the cooked vine leaves out on a table and spoon the filling onto them. Wrap up the leaves and set aside.

Add the potato and tomato slices into a large pot. Place the wrapped leaves one by one on top of the slices. Sprinkle with table salt, lemon juice and olive oil.

Place a tray or plate on the wrapped leaves (with a diameter smaller than the pot) so that you can compress them as much as possible. Pour water over the the wrapped leaves, covering them by 2 centimetres. Cook on a low heat for 2 hours.



تبولة Tabbouleh

Tabbouleh is a very special dish to me and the most ordered among my customers from all nationalities. It's vegetarian, savoury and very yummy.

SERVES 4 AS A SIDE DISH | PREP TIME 15 MINS

Ingredients

2 bunches parsley, washed
3 tomatoes, finely chopped
1 cup fine bulgur
1-2 lemons, juiced, for soaking the bulgur
1 lemon, juiced, for the salad
½ tbsp salt
½ tbsp dried mint
½ cup olive oil

Method

Combine the fine bulgur and lemon juice and soak for 10-15 minutes.

In a bowl, add the parsley and tomatoes.

Place the pre-soaked fine bulgur on top. Now add the lemon, salt, dry mint, a little table salt and olive oil.

Stir the mixture and serve.



Europe

Vanja Bulut	50
Bosnia and Herzegovina	
Šape	52
Prebranac	54
Mariia Mykytiuk	56
Ukraine	
Syrnyky	58
Deruny	60





“Whenever I go back to Bosnia and Herzegovina, particular smells trigger very strong memories. For me, the smell of capsicums, in particular, reminds me of the rural part of the country where my parents are from.”

Vanja Bulut

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Vanja was born in Bosnia. She was a young girl when war broke out and food became very difficult to find. When Vanja and her family arrived in Australia, she started learning to cook traditional Balkan cuisine from her mum. Vanja now works as a barrister with a focus on employment, industrial and discrimination law.

I have a very mixed history with food because I was five when the war in Bosnia started and we were in the thick of it for three years with very little food. We survived on basic things we could make with flour and water, or on the green leaves we would pick outside. We didn't really have fruits or vegetables, or any meat. We were malnourished and my sister and I were very small for our ages.

We then managed to get to Serbia and, while food wasn't exactly plentiful, it was available all of a sudden. My dad got some work at the local farmers' market, and he would typically be given a bag of fruit as well as a small amount of money. Because we basically hadn't had any fruit in three years, I remember going crazy – with bananas in particular.

I was nine when I came to Australia and grew up in Darwin, which is very multicultural. It's a city where you can find laksa at 9am on a Saturday at the local market, despite it being 32 degrees with 80 per cent humidity.

All these Asian flavours were so unfamiliar to me and, for a long time, I stayed clear of them. I was used to south-eastern European food,

which is very meat-heavy, with lots of stews and stuffed capsicums. It wasn't until I moved to Sydney for university that I tried chicken satay for the very first time. I was amazed at how delicious it was.

My mum was very much a home cook and, when we moved to Australia, she ended up retraining as a chef and working at a restaurant. I developed a passion for food and for cooking, and that came from her. She taught me to cook by sight, smell and taste, as opposed to using recipes. You'd smell and taste the food as you cooked and then adjust it as necessary. It's the old school way.

The only downside to the Balkan way of cooking is that most of the dishes are very time-consuming; most of them require hours of stewing or slow cooking. That didn't really suit student life so, during that period, I'd go home for Mum's cooking. Now, with two young children and a busy career, traditional food is more for special occasions, as opposed to everyday cooking. Often, my mother, my sister and I will all bring a dish or two to family gatherings.

Whenever I go back to Bosnia and Herzegovina, particular smells trigger very strong memories. For me, the smell of capsicums, in particular, reminds me of the rural part of the country where my parents are from. That smell is so strong when the capsicums are ripe, quite unlike what you find in most supermarkets here in Australia.

Šape

Balkan shortbread cookies

You don't typically see cakes in Balkan homes during big celebrations, like Christmas or Easter. Instead, what you see are platters of small cookies, typically between five and 15 different types of them. Šape is one of those standard cookies that you'll find on a platter in any Balkan house during a celebration. It's a classic biscuit and it's delicious.

MAKES 60 COOKIES | PREP TIME 15 MINS | COOK TIME 15 MINS

For this recipe you will need stainless steel decorative biscuit moulds.

Ingredients

500g all-purpose flour
250g unsalted butter, at room temperature
250g walnuts, finely ground
250g caster sugar
3 eggs
Powdered icing sugar (for coating cookies once baked)
Cooking oil, for coating moulds
Extra flour for dusting

Method

Preheat the oven to 200°C.

In a large mixing bowl, using a hand or stand mixer, cream together the butter and sugar. When nice and fluffy, add in the eggs, one at a time.

Add walnuts and flour to the bowl and stir (or use hands) until dough is formed. Add extra flour (if needed) until hands are not sticky.

Take moulds and coat them with some oil (using a spray, cloth or brush), and then dust some flour on the moulds.

Fill the moulds with the dough, making sure not to overfill (at level or below level, as they will rise). Place moulds on a tray and then in the oven for 15 minutes, or until they start to turn golden.

Take the tray out of the oven and let the moulds cool for a few minutes.

Tip the cookies out of the moulds and, when cool, roll them in a plate of powdered icing sugar. You may need to reuse the moulds for the rest of the dough. If you do, no need to re-coat in oil or dust with flour.



Prebranac

Serbian baked beans

This is a bean dish with onion, oil and, typically, quite a bit of chilli, depending on how tolerant you are to it. Then you bake it in the oven for a long period of time. It's typically a side dish, but it can very much be a main meal in itself as well. It's relatively easy to make and very, very delicious.

SERVES 8 AS A SIDE DISH | PREP TIME 15 MINS | COOK TIME 50 MINS

Ingredients

8 cans of butter beans
2 large onions, chopped
4 cloves garlic, diced
2 cups extra virgin olive oil
2 tbsp paprika
8 bay leaves
Chilli flakes (to desired level of heat)
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Preheat oven to 200°C.

Fry onion and garlic in a pan with some olive oil. Add the paprika and stir until onion is soft. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Drain two cans of butter beans and layer the beans in a baking tray. Take 2-3 tablespoons of onion and garlic mix (a quarter of the mix) and spread across the beans evenly. Add two bay leaves, chilli flakes and pour over ½ cup of extra virgin olive oil. Spread evenly. Repeat the layering steps three more times (four layers in total). Add salt and pepper to taste.

Cover baking tray with aluminium foil and bake for 30 minutes.

Uncover tray and bake for 20 more minutes, or until a nice brown crust forms on top.

Optional: Add smoked meat or sausage for a meat version of the dish.

Serve with crusty bread.





“It’s not just about cooking, it’s also about connection. Together, we talk about everything and it helps us take care of each other.”

Mariia Mykytiuk

Ukraine

When war broke out in Ukraine, Mariia managed to get her kids to safety before she returned to the Russian-occupied town of Bucha to help the sick and injured. Now reunited in Australia, Mariia and her children love to cook. Mariia’s husband is still in Ukraine, fighting on the frontlines.

Before the war broke out, we lived in a very beautiful town where we had a lot of family and friends. We knew all our neighbours and we always said hello to each other on the street. We also had beautiful gardens where we grew flowers, vegetables and fruit. It was a free and happy life. Never in a single moment did I think I’d have to leave my life there, become a refugee and learn a new language.

But that’s exactly what happened.

Our town of Bucha was very quickly captured by Russian soldiers and, after that, it was a very different place. Lots of houses were destroyed. People we knew were killed. I had to get my children to safety, but soldiers shot at us when I tried to drive them out of Bucha. I crashed my car so they would think we were dead. We had to sleep in the forest for a night before we found someone to help us. It was so cold.

Once the children were safe, I returned to Bucha. I’m a veterinarian and it was my duty to help the animals. I took care of humans, too, as there were no doctors left in my area. By then Bucha was a city of fear but I would think to myself: ‘I have 300 animals, I have patients, I just don’t have the right to die’.

After the Russian forces withdrew, I left Bucha and flew to Australia to join my children. During my first year here, we really wanted to try as many foods as possible. We had survived two months of hunger – so in Australia, we wanted to eat all the time! The foods were very unusual for us.

After I arrived, my kids decided to play a joke on me with Vegemite. They put it in a sandwich and told me it was chocolate cream. I quickly realised it wasn’t sweet, like I was expecting, but very salty. I really liked it though, and I began eating it with everything.

After a year or so, my neighbours started asking me to cook something Ukrainian for them. That’s when I began to understand how important it is to maintain our Ukrainian traditions in another land. Now I’ve found very good shops where I can buy Ukrainian ingredients and cook the same dishes I did before our lives were uprooted.

Ukrainian food is very delicious and, when I start to cook it at home, my kids always come to the kitchen and tell me they’re hungry. Sometimes it’s a dish I only ever made for them in Ukraine when they were sick. It was like a treat for them. So now, when I feel like they are sad or starting to miss Ukraine, I decide to cook it and they feel happy.

In Ukraine, there is a tradition of cooking together on the weekends or on holidays. And that includes everyone – grandparents, small kids and husbands. It’s not just about cooking, it’s also about connection. Together, we talk about everything and it helps us take care of each other.



Сирники Syrnyky

Ricotta pancakes

Traditionally, our family prepared cheese pancakes on weekends so that all family members could participate in the preparation: women made the dough and cooked, children decorated. The dish connects us to our life in Ukraine before the war displaced us from our home and we moved to Australia to be safe. The food reminds us of being together as a family in Ukraine. We'd eat it together on weekends with my husband who is still in Ukraine fighting in the war.

SERVES 4 (3 PANCAKES EACH) | PREP TIME 10 MINS | COOK TIME 20 MINS

Ingredients

500g ricotta
2 eggs
2 tsp flour
2 tsp sugar
Handful of raisins
Extra flour to dust board/bench
1 tbsp butter
Icing sugar to dust
Raspberries/blueberries, sour cream and mint to serve

Method

Separate the egg yolks from whites. Discard the egg whites. Add ricotta and egg yolks to a bowl and mix together well. Add flour followed by sugar and raisins and mix together.

Flour a board or bench. Use your hands to form small, round cakes (roughly 5 centimetres wide) from the batter. Lightly pat both sides of the cakes in the flour.

Add butter to a pan on low heat. Add cakes. When lightly browned, flip over to cook the other side.

Decorate finished cakes with dusted icing sugar, raspberries/blueberries and sour cream. Garnish with mint.



Деруни Deruny

Ukrainian potato pancakes

My friend and I once went to a small Ukrainian city called Korosten for the Deruny Festival, which happens there every year and has become a tradition. People from all different parts of Ukraine go to Korosten to try some of the famous deruny. That day, I met my future husband and now it's part of our family tradition. Whenever my husband wants to make me happy, he makes deruny.

SERVES 4 (3 PANCAKES EACH) | PREP TIME 15 MINS | COOK TIME 20 MINS

You will need a fine vegetable grater for this recipe.

Ingredients

5–6 potatoes, peeled
1 onion, peeled
1 egg
2–3 tbsp flour
Salt and pepper to taste
Vegetable oil for frying
Sour cream

Garnish suggestions: Chopped dill, fried mushrooms and small pickled cucumbers.

Method

Grate onion and potatoes and mix together. Beat the egg into the potato and onion mixture, then add flour, salt and pepper, and mix.

Heat the oil in a frypan. Scoop a portion into the pan and fry on both sides. If you want the pancakes to be soft, cover with a lid. If you prefer them crispy, leave uncovered and use more vegetable oil to fry. Serve with sour cream.

Garnish with chopped dill, fried mushrooms and small pickled cucumbers.





Afghanistan

Vietnam

Asia

Fatima Yousufi Afghanistan	64
Bolani Kabuli pulao	66 68
Thuy Dang Vietnam	70
Pho bo Banh beo	72 74



“Afghan food has a very special taste... Eating Afghan food in Australia has allowed me to feel much more alive and connected.”

Fatima Yousufi

Afghanistan

Fatima is the captain of the Afghan Women’s National Football Team. When the Taliban seized Afghanistan in August 2021, her life was immediately in danger. She buried her trophies and jerseys in the backyard of her home and rushed to the airport with her family. Fatima managed to evacuate with her teammates but, in the chaos, she was separated from her parents.

Fatima now lives in Melbourne. Her team is sponsored by Melbourne Victory and competes in the state league. After more than two years apart, Fatima has been reunited with her family and is enjoying her mum’s home cooking again.

When I first arrived in Australia, we didn’t have access to Afghan food. We were new and we didn’t know where to find it. I was really missing it, particularly the bread – you can’t forget a taste like that.

After a month or so, some people from the Afghan community brought us kabuli pulao, which is the national dish. It was so exciting. I was thinking: “I’m in Afghanistan again!” It was a very good sign for all of us. It allowed me to remember my previous life, who I was and how I grew up.

In Afghanistan, it was very much the responsibility of girls to learn how to cook, and so my mum taught me. I remember being so afraid of burning things, or making it too salty, or not salty enough, so I’d ask Mum for every tiny detail of a recipe. Sometimes she ended up saying to me: “Stop asking me, I’ll do it myself”.

What I really wanted to do was study to become a businesswoman and play football. I’d go to training at 5am, go to my lessons and then return home at 8pm. I loved my mum’s cooking, but study and sport didn’t leave much time for cooking myself.

After we had that first taste of Afghan food here in Australia, we started finding restaurants and shops where we could get the ingredients. We found a big community in Dandenong, and lots of Afghan shops – it was very helpful.

Afghan food has a very special taste. The flavours are so unique and whenever those smells hit my nose, it takes me straight back to my childhood. Eating Afghan food in Australia has allowed me to feel much more alive and connected.

My mum, dad and one of my siblings were finally able to join us here after more than two years apart. I was so excited to take my mum to the Afghan shops. She had been in Pakistan, where she didn’t have many of the things she wanted to cook. That was hard for her, so it was great to show her that we had those things here.

When my mum and my other family members arrived, it was like the old days again. In Afghanistan, it’s tradition that everybody should be at the table and eating together. It’s a lot of fun. Before, when it was just me and a few of my siblings here in Australia, we felt like something was missing. Now, I feel like we’re complete again and that we have everything we need.

بولانی Bolani

Stuffed flat bread

This is a dish families cook together in Afghanistan, making it more fun. In my family, each of us had a specific task. I was the one who made the dough, then my dad would fry it. While we were cooking, we had so much fun sharing stories! Bolani reminds me of my happy days back in Afghanistan. It's also a popular street food and I have so many memories with my teammates of finishing training and then buying it on the way home.

SERVES 5 | PREP TIME 30 MINS | COOK TIME 6 MINS PER BOLANI

Dough ingredients

2 cups plain flour
1 tsp salt
1 tsp dried yeast
1 tbsp vegetable oil
1 cup lukewarm water
Extra flour for dusting
Oil for frying

Filling ingredients

2 bunches garlic chives (or 2 leeks), stalks removed, finely chopped
1 bunch coriander, finely chopped
½ tsp dried chilli flakes
½ tsp salt
Black pepper, to taste
Yoghurt and chutney, to serve

Method

To make the dough, add the flour, salt, yeast and oil to a mixing bowl. Mix together with fingers. Add 1 cup of lukewarm water slowly until ingredients are combined.

Dust a bench with flour, add the dough ball and knead until flour is incorporated into the dough. The dough should be elastic without being sticky, and with a slight firmness. Dust the mixing bowl with flour and return the dough to it. Cover with plastic wrap and let the dough rest for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare the filling. Rinse chopped garlic chives and coriander in water to remove any impurities. Once drained and dried, add to a bowl with the salt, dried chilli, and cracked pepper to taste. Mix together.

Once dough is rested, it should roll and stretch easily. Separate the rested dough into 5 pieces, rolled into balls. Dust a bench with flour. Flatten dough with fingers and roll out with a pin into a wide, thin pancake (approx. size of a large dinner plate).

Scoop even portions of filling mixture onto one half of each flattened pancake.

Fold the pancake in half over the filling and pinch edges to seal.

Heat oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Carefully add bolani one at a time, cooking for approx. 3 minutes each side. Drizzle more oil if not frying enough.

Once cooked, remove the bolani from the pan and place it on a paper towel to drain excess oil. Cut into wedges and serve hot with yoghurt and chutney.

Alternative filling can be made with mashed potatoes seasoned with salt, black pepper, chili flakes and coriander powder.



قابلی پلو با مرغ

Kabuli pulao

Afghanistan's national rice dish

This dish is so popular. Families would prepare this dish whenever they had a guest coming over. It was also served at ceremonies and special occasions, especially weddings. Once, though, I tried to cook it and I burned the raisins and carrots. After that I never tried to cook it again as I thought I couldn't cook it as well as my mum.

SERVES 6-8 | PREP TIME 25 MINS + 2-3 HRS SOAKING RICE | COOK TIME 40 MINS

Ingredients

500g boneless chicken thigh pieces, diced
500g basmati rice, soaked for 2-3 hours in cold water, drained
150ml vegetable oil
1 onion, finely chopped
2 tomatoes, chopped
1 tbsp tomato paste
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ tsp ground cumin
¼ tsp ground cardamon
1 tbsp salt
Black pepper to taste
1 chicken stock cube
1-2 cups water

Garnish ingredients

Vegetable oil for frying
75g crimson/red raisins (from speciality shops) or sultanas
1 large carrot, cut into julienne sticks
½ tsp caster sugar
1 tbsp each slivered almonds and pistachios

Method

To prepare the chicken: Heat oil in a large pot or saucepan. Add chopped onions and sauté until golden brown. Add chicken pieces and cook until they turn golden. Add chopped tomatoes, salt, black pepper, minced garlic, stock cube, and a tablespoon of tomato paste.

Pour in 1-2 cups of water, cover with a lid, and bring it to a light boil.

To prepare the rice: Bring a saucepan of water to a boil. Strain the soaked rice and add it to the boiling water. Boil the rice until it's partially cooked (soft on the outside, hard on the inside). Strain the rice and mix it with the cooked chicken, cumin and cardamon.

Reduce the stove temperature to low and cook until rice is soft.

To prepare the garnish: In a separate pan, fry the raisins/sultanas on low heat until they puff up. Fry shredded carrots in the same pan until they are soft. Sprinkle sugar over both the fried carrots and raisins and continue cooking for a few minutes.

Once the chicken and rice are cooked, transfer to a large serving plate. Spread the fried carrots and raisins on top. Sprinkle with the almonds and pistachios.

Serve hot.





“We were adapting to a new environment and learning a new language and, in those challenging times, pho would remind us of home and the strength we carried within us.”

Thuy Dang

Vietnam

Thuy and her family fled the war in Vietnam by boat when she was 13 or 14 years old. They lived in a UNHCR refugee camp in Malaysia before receiving humanitarian visas to come to Australia. Food keeps the family connected, with Thuy making her specialty, pho, for the different generations.

I’ve always loved cooking. While some people eat to live, I’m the opposite – I live to eat. I love trying out different recipes. I love the colours and textures of herbs and vegetables. I have many wonderful memories of being in the kitchen with my family.

I grew up with a Chinese mother and a Vietnamese father, so Mum mostly cooked Chinese food and Dad cooked Vietnamese food. I love the idea of joining the cuisines together, to bring a mix of the two into the family. There are lots of similarities, but there are differences too. For example, Vietnamese people use fish sauce while the Chinese use soy sauce.

Sometimes I would mix things together and everyone would laugh – they weren’t used to the taste. My grandmother, on my mother’s side, would say: “I’m sorry honey, I’ve tried, but I can’t eat fish sauce”.

My family has been through so much. When Dad was away fighting with the South Vietnamese army, Mum raised us alone. After the war, our family’s assets were seized, and Dad was at risk of being sent to a re-education camp. Leaving was the only option for a better future.

We spent about nine months in a UNHCR refugee camp on Pulau Bidong Island after leaving Vietnam. My uncle, who was living in Brisbane, sponsored us to come here. We were very lucky to have been able to come to this country.

Some of my earliest memories in Australia are of food. One is of the lunch bags we were given when we started going to school, which had so many things I couldn’t eat in them. There were often devon or salami sandwiches – foods I’d never seen before.

The other big memory is the smell of pho in my aunty’s and uncle’s house, where we lived after we first arrived. We were adapting to a new environment and learning a new language and, in those challenging times, pho would remind us of home and the strength we carried within us.

Now, after 20 years of cooking pho, I have my own style. People have different preferences, but I love it with cinnamon and ginger. On a cold day, the two ingredients really refresh you.

Because it’s my specialty, I’m always getting requests for it from all my family members, my children and my children’s friends. Making the 12-hour pho is a big time commitment, but you get rewarded with the flavours at the end. Everyone loves it. Pho is like the taste of home and helps keep us connected.



Phở bò ngon bổ

Pho bo

Rare beef noodle soup

Pho is often considered the national dish of Vietnam but, growing up, it was a luxury in my house. We were only fortunate enough to have it on rare occasions, like after a good exam result or for a birthday.

SERVES 4 | PREP TIME 60-75 MINS | COOK TIME FOR BROTH 3-8 HRS | ASSEMBLY OF PHO 15 MINS

Broth ingredients

- 1-3kg beef marrow/knuckle bones
- 1kg beef (outside flank/brisket/cross rib roast)
- 1 tbsp vinegar
- 1 tbsp salt plus a few extra pinches
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 1 thumb-sized piece of rock sugar
- 2 tbsp chicken stock powder
- 2 tbsp fish sauce
- 2 thumb-sized pieces of ginger
- 3 pieces of star anise
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2-3 black cardamon pods (available from specialty grocers), or green if unavailable
- 1 medium onion or 3 shallots, sliced
- Optional: 1 tsp cloves, 1 tsp coriander seeds

Method

Begin preparing broth 3-8 hours before serving. First, wash bones and meat with water mixed with vinegar and salt. Next, soak bones and meat in cold water for 20 minutes. Finally, wash bones and meat again with water until the water runs clear.

Char onion and ginger in a hot pan until there are char marks. Scrape off any burnt bits and rinse the pan. Dry roast star anise, cinnamon sticks, cardamon, cloves and coriander seeds in pan until fragrant. Place all the spices into a muslin bag. In a boiling pot of water, blanch bones for 5 minutes. Rinse bones under cold water and discard the liquid in the pot. Add 5 litres of cold water into a big pot. Add the bones. Let water come to a boil and skim off all the impurities that float to the top. Add in the piece of beef along with onion, ginger, sugar, rock sugar, salt, chicken stock powder and fish sauce. Let pot come to a boil again and skim off impurities. Turn heat down low and simmer broth for 2 hours uncovered.

At the 1 hour mark, check to see if meat is at desired softness and, if it is, take it out and put it into an ice bath. Thinly slice beef and refrigerate until ready to serve pho. After 2 (or more) hours of simmering, turn heat up and add the muslin bag of spices and boil for 15 minutes. Remove bag once done. Adjust seasoning of broth with sugar, fish sauce and salt as desired.

Serving the pho

Place desired amount of noodles in bowl. Arrange a few slices of both the cooked beef and raw beef on top of noodles with the batons of spring onion. Pour over hot broth so it cooks the raw beef slices. Garnish with coriander, raw onion, spring onion, sawfish herbs and chilli on top of bowls. Serve lime wedges, bean sprouts and Thai basil on the side. Can be eaten with desired sauces (hoisin and sriracha).

For bowls & garnishes

- 2kg fresh banh pho rice noodles (available in most Asian grocers) or 1kg dried flat rice noodles (cook per packet instructions)
- 300g raw beef, thinly sliced (eye fillet/filet mignon)
- 1 medium brown onion sliced paper thin and soaked in cold water for 30 minutes and drained
- 4 spring onion stalks (white part separated into batons and green part thinly sliced)
- Ngò gai (sawfish coriander/herb, available in Asian grocers), thinly sliced
- Húng quế (Thai basil, available in Asian grocers)
- Coriander, chopped
- Lime wedges
- Fresh/blanched bean sprouts
- Hoisin sauce and sriracha
- Fresh chilli to garnish



Bánh bèo

Banh beo

Steamed rice cakes

This was my favorite food during my childhood. The presentation is very eye-catching and it's relatively cheap to make. It's easy to eat, very filling and nutritious. Being able to make this dish makes me very happy.

SERVES 8 | PREP TIME 60 MINS | COOK TIME: BATTER PROVING 4 HRS + CAKE COOKING AND ASSEMBLY 30 MINS

For this recipe you will need 8 small bowls or dishes (1 for each serving) and a large steamer pot.

Cake ingredients

500g rice flour
3 tbsp tapioca starch
¼ tsp salt
1 tsp oil (canola/vegetable)
7 cups warm water

Fish sauce ingredients

2 tbsp fish sauce
3 tbsp sugar
1 tbsp vinegar
6 tbsp boiling water

Fillings ingredients

200g dried mung beans
(soaked in water for an hour)
1 tsp salt
200g dried shrimp
1 tsp oil

Method

Place all cake ingredients into a bowl and mix until everything is dissolved. Let the batter rest for 4 hours.

Steam mung beans for 20 minutes until tender and soft. Mash mung beans with salt until a smooth puree consistency.

Wash dried shrimp and soak in water for 20 minutes until soft. Drain water. Blitz shrimp in a food processor until they have a floss like consistency. Dry roast the processed shrimp in a pan with oil until they dry out.

Place all fish sauce ingredients in a bowl and mix together until sugar is dissolved. Set aside.

Add water to the steamer pot. Boil the water until there is lots of steam.

Heat up your banh beo bowls in the steamer for 5 minutes.

Pour banh beo mixture into individual bowls and steam as many as will fit for 7 minutes. Continue until all your batter is finished.

Let cakes cool for 5 minutes before removing from steamer.

Serve cakes with mung bean paste and shrimp floss on top and drizzle with fish sauce. You can also serve with scallion oil, if available.



UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, provides life-saving aid to people fleeing conflict, disaster and persecution. Our dedicated teams are often first in and last out during an emergency, offering shelter, emergency supplies, healthcare and much more.

Right now, many refugees and displaced people don't have enough to eat.

With your support, UNHCR can provide therapeutic food for malnourished children, give families emergency cash so they can afford meals, and empower communities to grow their own crops.

Please support this vital work: unrefugees.org.au/sharethemeal



