

# Breakfast Bars

Let's face it, there are days when we don't have the time to take a long leisurely breakfast and I have been known to leave the house without any form of sustenance whatsoever, except, of course, my obligatory cup of tea. It can also be hard to persuade kids to eat what is good for them in the mornings and every now and again you can feel like you really don't want to do battle at breakfast time.

These breakfast bars contain all the same ingredients that you will find in a bag of muesli with the addition of a little butter to make them hold together in the oven. I make at least one batch a week and know that the kids are getting vital wholegrains, vitamins and iron, even if they do end up grabbing a bar as they run out the door for the bus.

The ingredient list is in 'American' cup measures simply because it's not so much a technical list but more an indication and you can add/subtract ingredients according to your family preferences. One cup is equivalent to about the 250ml point in a measuring jug.

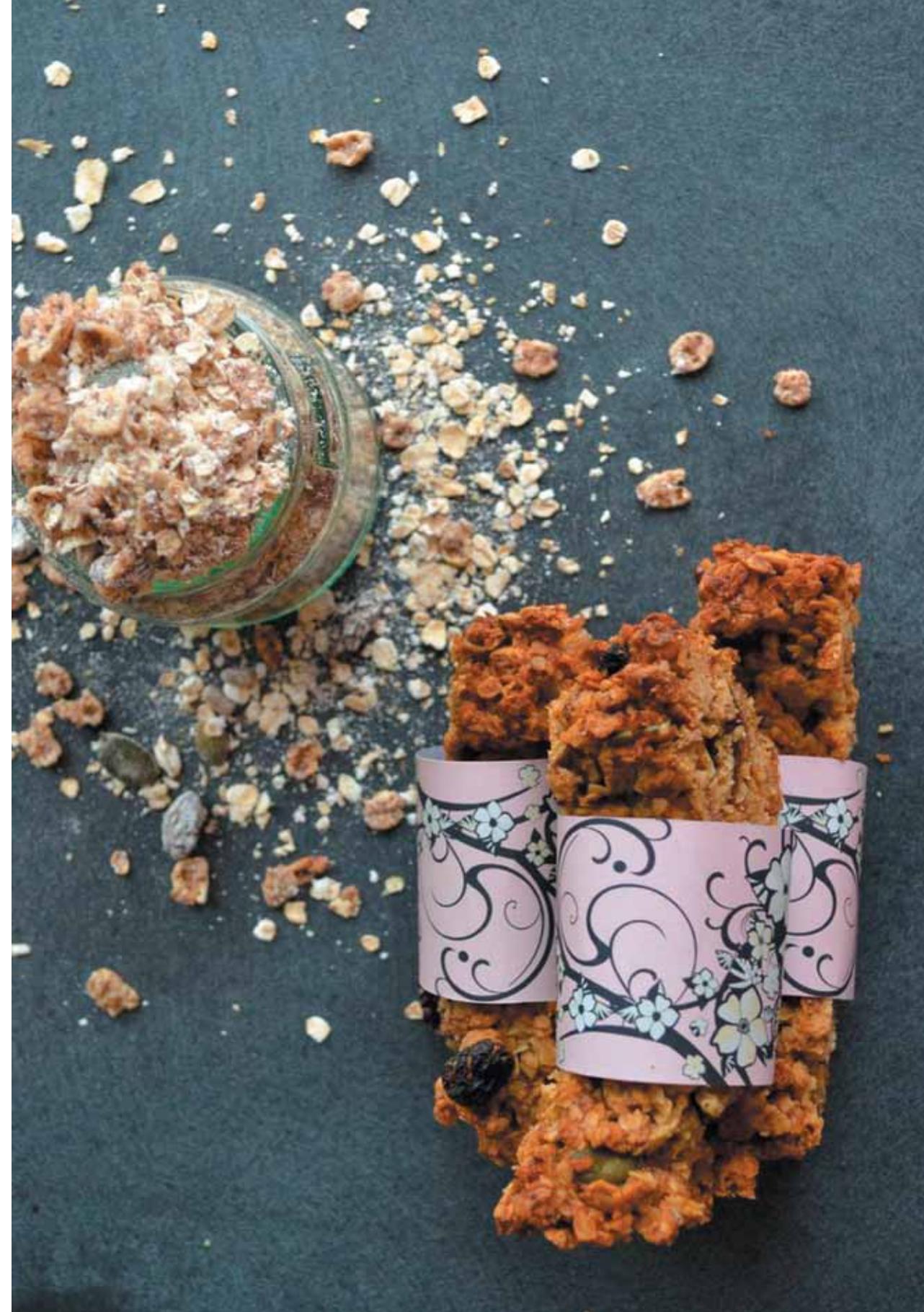
makes 20 breakfast bars



1 cup rolled oats • ½ cup sunflower seeds • ½ cup hulled pumpkin seeds  
½ cup raisins • ½ cup dried apricots • ½ cup dates, chopped  
½ cup flaked almonds • ½ cup melted butter • 1 cup runny honey

## Method

- ❁ Preheat your fan oven to 190°C. Grease a baking tray and dust it with flour.
- ❁ Combine all the dry ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Mix loosely with a wooden spoon. Pour in the wet ingredients (melted butter and honey) and stir until all the dry mixture is coated.
- ❁ Press firmly into the baking tray. Bake until golden brown and crispy at the edges. It should take approximately 25 minutes.
- ❁ Remove from the oven and leave to cool for 10 minutes before scoring the shape of the bars out on the mixture while it is still hot. This makes it easier to break when it is cold and rock solid.
- ❁ Wrap each bar individually in greaseproof paper and they will keep in a sealed container for up to a week in a cool, dry place.





# Fruit Samosa

While these fruit parcels would make for a lovely dessert, we like to pair them up with some low-fat fromage frais for breakfast instead. Because they are baked, not fried, they are low in fat and, by using my reliable stock of frozen fruit and no sugar, they help keep down our sugar intake. The best sort of fruit to use is frozen berries, but peeled and chopped banana, apples, pears, mango, pineapple or plums work just as well.

serves 5 

270g pack of ready-made filo pastry • 100g frozen fruit (no need to defrost)  
30g butter, melted • fromage frais to serve

## Method

- ✿ Preheat a fan oven to 190°C and line two baking trays with non-stick greaseproof paper.
- ✿ Using a sharp knife, divide each sheet of filo pastry into three strips, lengthways. Put a tablespoon of the fruit on one end of a single long piece and fold the end over diagonally to make a triangle. Keep folding the pastry over, turning at a 90° angle with every fold. Once you reach the end of the piece, tuck the loose end to the bottom and place on the baking tray. Repeat with the remaining pastry. You should end up with about ten samosas, allowing for a certain amount of torn pastry along the way.
- ✿ Brush the samosas with melted butter and bake in the oven for 15 minutes until golden brown and slightly bubbly.
- ✿ Allow to cool a little before serving with a dollop of fromage frais – they are just as nice cold as they are warm though!

# 'Guggy' Egg

We enjoy this breakfast dish any time of the day or night. In our family it has magical qualities. I don't know what it is, but both myself and my husband have fond memories of receiving an egg in a cup, or a 'guggy' egg, as a treat and as comfort food when we weren't well. It is easy on the stomach and a good way to get protein into picky eaters.

serves 5 

5 medium eggs • 30g butter • black pepper  
hot buttered toast to serve

## Method

- \* Place the eggs into a pot of cold water and bring the water to the boil. You don't want these eggs to overcook, so the minute the water starts to boil set your stopwatch for 3 minutes.
- \* Line up five mugs and put a knob of butter in each of them, followed by a crack of black pepper.
- \* When the stopwatch reaches 3 minutes, remove the pot from the stove and put it straight in the sink. Don't bother pouring out the hot water. Turn on the cold tap and let the water run directly into the saucepan. Run the tap for 90 seconds.
- \* Carefully remove the wide end of the egg over a mug and, using a teaspoon, scoop out all the contents into the mug. Mash with a fork and stir well.
- \* Serve with buttered toast.





# Home-made Pop-Tarts

If I had the money and I let the kids choose their food in the supermarket, I've no doubt that a version of a Pop-Tart would land in the trolley. I first tasted them in the Middle East, a few years before they landed in Irish stores, and to this day I feel they are far too sweet, not to mention the long list of ingredients on the side of the packet. There is a little preparation involved in making home-made Pop-Tarts, but if you invest in 'toaster pockets' which are extremely cheap to pick up in your local value store, you can freeze the partially cooked tarts in the pockets. Then all you do is pick out a frozen pocket and pop it in the toaster for a quick, wholesome and nutritious option!

I tend to use my store of frozen berries for filling, but you can also use chopped banana, mango, pear, apple, pineapple or plums. To increase the iron and fibre you can chop in some dried apricots as well.

makes approximately 10 

300g shortcrust pastry (see page 242, Jam Tarts – double the recipe)  
plain flour for dusting • 100g frozen berries • 30ml milk in a cup

## Method

- \* Preheat a fan oven to 160°C and line two baking trays with non-stick grease-proofpaper.
- \* On a flat surface, dusted with flour, roll out the shortcrust pastry to a square or rectangular shape about ½cm thick. Using a sharp knife, divide the pastry into ten rectangles.
- \* Using the knife, score a line down the middle of each rectangle so that if you are looking at the rectangles, it may look like a book – with pages on either side.
- \* Divide the fruit evenly between each of the ten rectangles, filling only one side of the scoring line and leaving about a 1cm gap at the edges. Brush the edges with a little milk and then fold the empty half over the full half, before pressing the ends shut with your fingers. Now you have a fruit and pastry parcel.
- \* Bake in the oven for 20 minutes. The pastry will look pale and white but not translucent. Remove the parcels from the oven and allow them to cool before placing each one into a toaster pocket and freezing.
- \* To serve, remove individual pockets from the oven and toast on high.



## Cowboy Beans

Baked beans with horns on! If you're looking for a plain tomato baked beans recipe then you're on the wrong page. These beans have a kick and use up the crunchy bits left over when you're making a roast, although a few rashers of bacon as an alternative is fine. If you're catering for a vegan, then leave all sources of meat and dairy protein out. As with most of my bean recipes, I like to make a big batch of the cowboy beans.

serves 6 hungry cowboys or girls 

100g dried butterbeans • 1 tablespoon sunflower oil

1 large onion, peeled and chopped • 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped

4 stalks of celery, chopped • 4 carrots, peeled and chopped

400g tin of chopped tomatoes • 1 tablespoon Tabasco sauce

1 tablespoon Worcester sauce

50g crispy roasted meat or 5 rashers of bacon cooked and chopped

## Method

- \* The day before you are cooking this recipe put the butter beans into a large bowl with 300ml of cold water to soak. Make sure you leave plenty of room for expansion!
- \* Heat the sunflower oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Fry the chopped onion and garlic until almost see-through/translucent. This takes about 10 minutes. Add the celery and carrots and fry for a further 10 minutes.
- \* Pour in the tomatoes and 500ml of water, mix well, then add the Tabasco and Worcester sauces. Tumble in the beans with any leftover water from soaking, stir and cover the saucepan. Bring to a gentle simmer and leave simmering on the hob for 90 minutes.
- \* Stir every now and again, keep an eye on the water content and if it seems a little dry add some more hot water to the pot. The beans soak up a lot.
- \* Before serving stir in the crispy meat. This is a meal in itself, so it doesn't really need bread, potatoes or another carbohydrate – if you do add them keep the portion size small.

# Moroccan Chicken with Couscous

*After one roast chicken or poached chicken dinner it's easy to spice up the leftovers so that you don't get caught up eating bland food. This meal takes 20 minutes to make from start to finish.*

serves 6 

100g mangetout, sliced • 100g frozen sweetcorn

1 teaspoon butter • 1 teaspoon sunflower oil

½ teaspoon each of ground cumin, coriander, ginger, cinnamon and paprika

200g dried couscous • 3 handfuls of cooked chicken pieces

1 handful of sultanas or raisins • 1 handful of dried apricots

fresh vegetables, diced – e.g. peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes (optional)

## Method

- ❁ Put the kettle on to boil. Weigh out the frozen vegetables and put to one side.
- ❁ Melt the butter in the oil in a frying pan on a low heat. Pour in the ground spices and cook them until their aroma is released.
- ❁ Put the couscous in a large cereal bowl, as it will expand to at least double its volume. Pour hot water over the couscous until it is just about 2cm above the dried couscous. Stir with a fork, cover with a plate and leave it to soak.
- ❁ Add the chicken and dried fruit to the frying pan. Toss until heated through.
- ❁ Uncover the couscous and stir in the sweetcorn, peas and any other fresh vegetables you like.
- ❁ Serve the chicken over the couscous in a large serving dish in the middle of the table.



# Chard Potatoes

When new potatoes are in season they're good value and the baby potatoes in particular are so fresh, I like to buy them in bulk. Steaming potatoes is a quick and easy way to cook them with minimal mess. Steam twice as many as you need for a meal because this recipe for cold leftover spuds is a real treat.

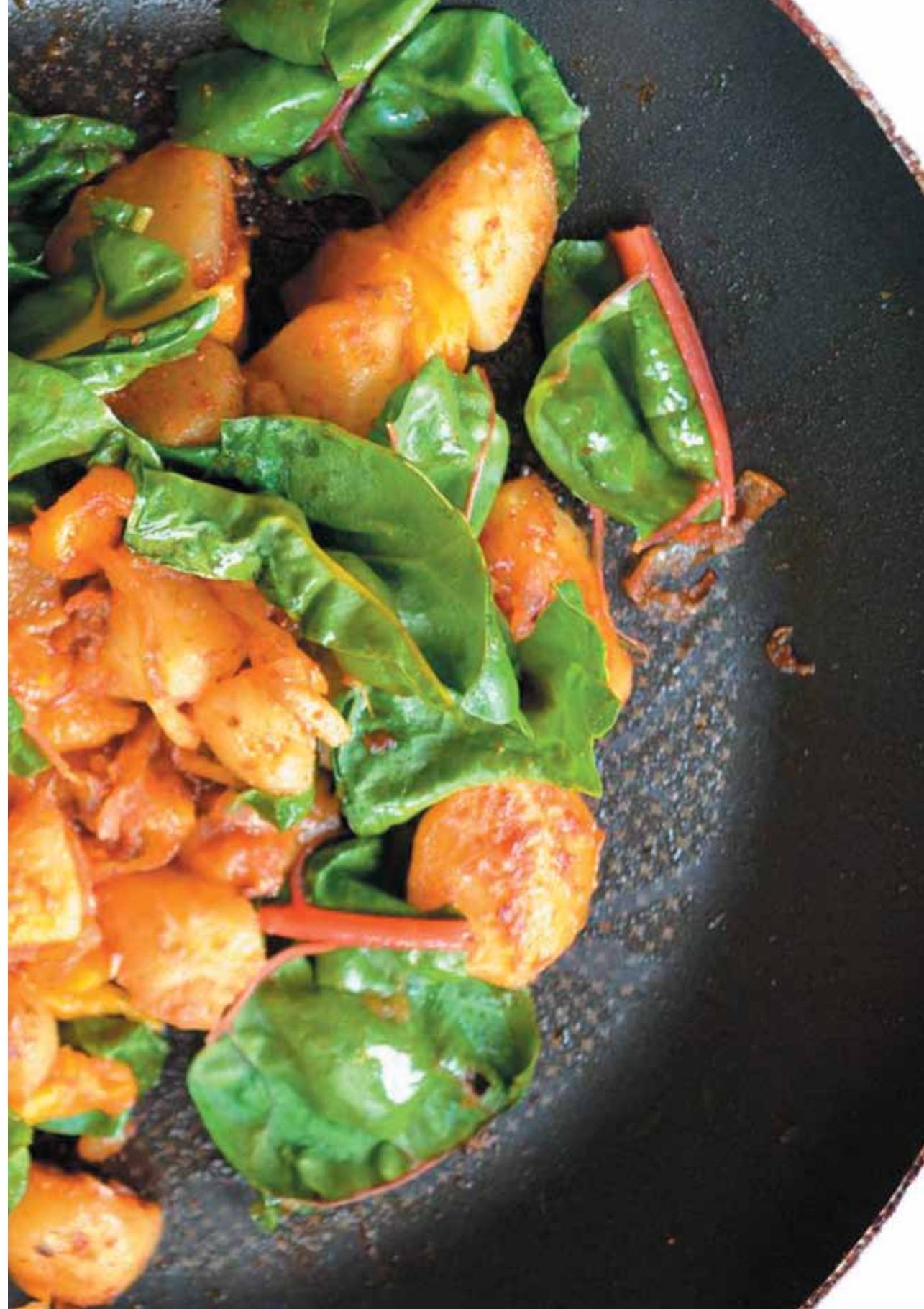
serves 4



- 1 tablespoon sunflower oil • 1 onion, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon harissa powder (or a pinch each of paprika, ground cumin, dried coriander and oregano) • 500g cooked potatoes, chopped into chunks
- 10 leaves of fresh chard, stalks removed and finely chopped, leaves roughly torn
- poached eggs to serve (optional)

## Method

- ✿ Bring a large frying pan to a medium heat and pour in the oil. Add the onions and fry until soft and golden.
- ✿ Add the harissa powder to the pan and stir around to release the aroma into the oil.
- ✿ Toss the cooked potatoes in the oil and move gently every couple of minutes so that they get a red hue. After 10 minutes stir in the chard leaves and stalks. These will cook in about 3 minutes.
- ✿ Serve immediately and top with a poached egg if you like.





# Fish Scale Pie

Involving the kids in making this tasty dish is the key to making sure they eat it! While they may not relish dealing with the fish and the sauce, there isn't a child in my house who will say no when it comes to rolling and cutting pastry! By layering some simple circles, the pie looks like it has 'fish scales' so it's a feast for the eyes and for the belly.

serves 4 

200ml milk • 1 bay leaf • 2 whole peppercorns • 200g fresh or frozen fish  
30g butter • 50g plain flour, plus extra for dusting  
75g frozen sweetcorn • 75g frozen peas  
200g shortcrust pastry – ready-made or see Jam Tarts recipe (see page 242)  
milk to brush the 'scales'

## Method

- ❁ Heat the milk, bay leaf and peppercorns to a gentle simmer. Cook the fish in the milk. If it is in small chunks they should only take 10 minutes, for larger pieces allow 15 minutes. Scoop out the fish and set to one side. Pick out the bay leaf and peppercorns and throw away. Pour the hot milk into a mug.
- ❁ Melt the butter in the same saucepan, sprinkle in the flour and cook for 5 minutes. Add the milk from the mug, one quarter at a time, and stir each time until it is well mixed and you have a smooth paste. Add a little hot water until you have a thick sauce.
- ❁ Pour the sweetcorn and peas into the sauce. Turn off the heat. Stir in the fish.
- ❁ Preheat a fan oven to 180°C.
- ❁ Grease an 18cm sandwich tin and dust with flour. Dust a flat surface with flour, divide the pastry into two sections and roll out one round to line the bottom and sides of the tin.
- ❁ Pour the fish sauce into the lined tin and roll out the second section of pastry. Cut out lots of small circles with a glass or a biscuit cutter. Combine and re-roll any trimmings as necessary.
- ❁ Layer the 'scales' up to coat the top of the pie. Brush with milk and bake for 90 minutes. Serve immediately for a complete meal.

# Banana Butterscotch Cake

The butterscotch sauce on top of this cake gives it a really decadent feel, but if you're in a hurry, make the main cake and enjoy it on its own, without the sauce. The combination of golden syrup in the cake and the sauce on top make it sticky and gooey – all the things I love for a winter pudding.

## for the cake



60g caster sugar • 125g unsalted butter, softened • 50g golden syrup  
2 medium eggs • 175g plain flour • 75g wholemeal flour • 1 teaspoon baking powder  
2 teaspoons ground ginger • 100g oats • 4 ripe bananas

## for the butterscotch sauce

100g caster sugar • 50g butter • 25ml cream • 1 ripe banana

## Method

- ❁ Preheat a fan oven to 170°C.
- ❁ Grease and flour a 1kg (2lb) loaf tin extremely well. If you do this properly, then the loaf will slide straight out.
- ❁ Beat together the sugar, butter and golden syrup with a hand-held electric mixer until they are well combined. The batter will become light, fluffy and nearly double in size.
- ❁ Add the eggs and beat well: the mixture will curdle slightly, but don't worry as this will be fixed once you add the flour.
- ❁ Pour in the flours, baking powder and ground ginger. Beat well again and you will get a stiff mixture.
- ❁ Add the oats and mix again.
- ❁ Peel and slice the bananas. Mix gently into the batter.
- ❁ Pour the batter into your prepared loaf tin. Use a spoon to make a small well down the middle of the mixture in the tin. This will allow the cake to rise and bake evenly.
- ❁ Bake for 50 minutes in the preheated oven. Test the cake using a skewer or cocktail stick. If it comes out clean it is ready. If the skewer is sticky, bake the cake for a further 10 minutes before testing again.
- ❁ Remove the cake from the oven and allow it to stand in the tin for 20 minutes before tipping out onto a cooling rack.
- ❁ To make the butterscotch sauce, place the sugar in a small saucepan and place on a medium heat, but do not stir it. When the sugar begins to bubble and change to a golden colour, carefully add in cubes of the butter. Stir well and then pour in the cream.
- ❁ Allow to simmer for 3–5 minutes until it becomes thick and unctuous. Remove from the heat.
- ❁ Peel the banana and slice into the sauce and flip until the slices are coated in the butterscotch. Pour over the top of the cooling banana cake and serve as an after dinner treat while the sauce is still warm, with a splash of cream or a dollop of Greek yoghurt.





# Black Forest Cupcakes

I love black forest gateau, but it involves using kirsch, which I never have in the house, and I can't justify buying it for special occasions only. The boys don't really like cream and so they eat these cakes without the topping.

I make these cupcakes rich with the addition of a little rum instead of kirsch. I use fresh cherries when they're in season, but when they're not, the tinned variety works just as well.

**makes 12** 

- 90g butter • 120g caster sugar • 100g golden syrup • 2 medium eggs
- 100g plain flour • 35g cocoa powder • 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 40g ground almonds • 2 tablespoons rum • 70g dark chocolate, melted and cooled slightly • 80g fresh or tinned cherries, pitted

### to decorate

- 200ml fresh cream
- 1 teaspoon rum and 1 tablespoon icing sugar (optional)
- 12 cherries • chocolate chips

## Method

- \* Preheat a fan oven to 170°C and line a twelve-hole cupcake tin/muffin tray with paper cases.
- \* Cream the butter, caster sugar and golden syrup together until light and fluffy.
- \* Add the eggs individually and beat well until you have a light mixture.
- \* Fold in the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder and ground almonds. Mix until well incorporated.
- \* Pour in the rum and stir. Slowly add the melted chocolate while mixing so that you don't end up with scrambled eggs. Stir in the cherries.
- \* Divide the mixture equally between the cupcake cases, taking care not to fill the cases more than three-quarters full.
- \* Bake for 25 minutes. Test with a cocktail stick. If it comes out clean, remove the cupcakes from the oven and leave to cool on a wire rack. If not, bake for a further 5 minutes before checking again.
- \* To serve, whip the cream and spoon or pipe on to the top of the cooled cupcakes. For an extra kick, add the rum and icing sugar when whipping, but if you do this make sure the kids don't get their hands on them! Sprinkle the top of the cream with chocolate chips and serve with a whole cherry on top.

# Mint Chocolate 'Bark'

Do you ever get those sticks of rock from friends and family who have been on holidays? Or those candy canes that linger at the back of the Christmas tree and you wonder how the kids missed them? Well now you have the perfect way to get rid of them.

I love chocolate and mint together. I can't really call this a recipe because it's so simple, but the combination of the sweets and the dark chocolate make for a festive treat or gift.

## ingredients



200g good quality dark chocolate  
1 stick of rock/2 candy canes/200g mint boiled sweets

## Method

- \* Cover a baking tray with cling film and place in the fridge.
- \* Melt the chocolate in a heatproof bowl over a pot of hot water.
- \* Unwrap the rock/canes/sweets, then put in a sandwich bag and bash the bejeepers out of the contents using a rolling pin until you have shards of mintyness.
- \* Remove the tin from the fridge and carefully pour the melted chocolate onto it. Tumble the shards of sweets on top, distributing them as evenly as possible. Once the chocolate has reached room temperature return the tray to the fridge for 30 minutes.
- \* Break the chocolate 'bark' into chunks and eat, wrap up prettily to give as a gift, or return to the fridge for a treat for another day.

