

Vegetarian World Cooking

# **Vegetarian World Cooking**

**International Vegetarian Recipes**

(second edition)

Parama Karuna Devi

Jagannatha Vallabha Vedic Research Center

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ISBN-13: 978-1490941875

ISBN-10: 1490941878

published by:

Jagannatha Vallabha Vedic Research Center

Website: [www.jagannathavallabha.com](http://www.jagannathavallabha.com)

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Parama Karuna Devi

## **The vegetarian tradition in the world**

This book is a new and revised edition of the work first published in the early 1990s. It is still very modest in size and we have not been able to elaborate in much detail, so we want to apologize to all the ethnic groups and cultures that have not been given proper space here.

We have decided to present major cultural areas defined by their climate, geography and ancient history, without being limited by modern political divisions. For example, the cuisine of the Middle East includes several countries such as Turkey, Iran, Irak, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Israel. In the same way we have presented a single entry for the entire Indian sub-continent without separating Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Lanka or Tibet, and a single entry for Indo-China rather than Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Burma, Korea, etc.

Northern Europe and Russia have also been considered as a single group although they comprise a variety of cultures and cookery traditions that deserve special attention. We have also given preminence to the most famous cuisines of the world, although it would certainly be most interesting to explore the traditions and cultures of other vast areas of

the world, such as Australia, Africa and Oceania.

These, and a deeper analysis of less known cultures and ethnic groups, different regional specialties of some major traditions (such as Chinese, Indian, Italian), ancient cultures and newest cultural trends, will have to wait for a future publication dedicated to this purpose.

The basic and more complex recipes in this book have been described extensively, while others simply have a brief list of ingredients and a quick description of the procedure, but those who have already some experience in the kitchen should not have any difficulties in preparing them.

The purpose of this book, rather than trying to turn you into perfectly accomplished cooks in any particular cooking style, is to introduce a deeper understanding of the simplest and most essential activity of human beings. Of course, you may find yourselves so fascinated by these simple, quick and practical recipes that they might become your favorite foods, as they have been for millions of people in the countries and cultures we have discussed.

Most people probably think that culture and food are two very different things. It would seem that culture belongs to the highest, noblest and most intellectual functions of a relatively small section of human society, whereas eating is a very simple and daily matter that every living being does without so much involvement of the mind or the spirit. Even uneducated and unrefined people should be able to cook something for themselves and their families to cater

to such basic animal needs because no academic degree is required, no philosophical reasoning, not even a basic knowledge of science or other subjects. On the other hand, intellectuals have often been portrayed as the stereotype of the absent-minded professors or the austere philosophers and thinkers, abstract, thin and frail people who often forget practical day-to-day matters like food and other "gross" material pleasures and needs because of their absorption in higher thoughts.

What if this idea was wrong? What if simple and basic things like eating and cooking could be done scientifically, artistically and philosophically?

Good cooking does not mean just filling up your belly and giving some taste to food; it means keeping you healthy and fit (or helping you to become healthy and fit), giving an effective digestion, a happy disposition and a clear mind, keeping your environment in ideal conditions, maintaining a good economical balance both in your family budget and in the planet itself. It means appreciating your own ethnic, cultural and philosophical roots and those of your friends and neighbors as well, expanding your understanding of human possibilities and aspirations and promoting peace and cooperation among the inhabitants of this world. It even means working practically to improve the atmosphere of human society, to support moral values and spiritual development.

Is that too much to expect from a meal? No. We are what we eat: this is a very ancient teaching, but it is still quite

valuable.

Not only our body is composed of the elements we consume as food, but the qualities of the food we eat can greatly determine our values, tendencies and likings as well as our physical and mental capabilities. Many research studies have shown that regularly consuming food that is industrially processed, refined (as in white sugar) and containing chemical additives and other pollutants favors aggressive and antisocial behavior in school children. The same results have been observed in people whose diet is socially controlled, as in institutions like hospitals, army, prisons, etc. In particular, non-vegetarian foods (meat, fish, eggs and their derivatives) are necessarily polluted and cause alterations in endorphin levels at the physical level and deviations at the intellectual and emotional levels.

If we eat dead bodies, our subconscious mind must adjust to a lower level of consciousness; a man who eats meat will have to drive his awareness (consciously or unconsciously) away from the sufferings of others and from good sense, and disconnect his subconscious more and more from his conscious mind. He will have to adjust his whole value system and understanding of the world. A vegetarian diet, on the other hand, allows us to see the world and other living entities with a more sincere and loving disposition, and gives us a deep feeling of worth and respect for ourselves and for life.

Cultural differences also have a powerful effect on taste and on how human beings prepare and eat their food.



Industrialized countries tend to prepare and eat their food quickly, like with everything else: speed and mechanical efficiency are valued in traveling, in work and even in entertainment. Cars and trains must run at top speed, factories become automatized and TV and videogames go faster and faster. What will you eat, if not *fast food* which will just keep your body-machine going? These foods will be prepared industrially with refined sugar, stimulants, chemical preservatives and saturated fats, so that they will have a longer shelf life to better suit the production and distribution system and at the same time induce addiction in the consumer, thus ensuring a constant flow of demand on the market.

At the extreme opposite, we find the long and complicated ritual of tea in Japan, an ancient tradition of simplicity, beauty, elegance, wisdom, meditation and contemplation, where every second is precious and every little gesture is filled with significance. Similarly in India spices are ground at the time of preparing every dish and bread is cooked fresh while the family is sitting for the meal. This spirit is becoming lost with industrialization and globalization.

But in every culture, in every tradition, there is a common foundation, a knowledge and an art of living which roots down to the material and spiritual needs of human beings - the same in all countries and in all races: an essential culture, based on the primary needs of all human beings. This is the most important discovery in this world cookery tour we will make together. In every area of our planet we

will find that grains are at the basis of the diet: rice in the East, wheat in temperate climate zones, millet and sorghum in Africa, rye, barley and buckwheat in the North, corn maize in South America. These cereals - the true basis of life - are accompanied in the ancient traditional diets by beans and pulses, honey and milk, vegetables and fruits, nuts, herbs, spices and even flowers, according to the local production.

All these foods have important medicinal properties which are perfectly suitable for the climatic and environmental conditions of the region; wherever people have started to consume industrial and standardized food and given up their traditional natural variety of foods, considering them "backward" and not sufficiently refined, disease has started to develop. The tendency can be inverted by encouraging the production and distribution of a greater variety of natural foods - even wild foods, like nettles and other herbs - growing in a non-polluted environment and consumed fresh or processed in a traditional and natural way. Modern science has admitted that there are many components of food which are not yet known but still have a very visible effect. The subtle interactions of the different components - the known ones and also the unknown ones - is still an open field for study and ancient traditions may prove very useful in this research.

Really good cooking involves quite a bit of intelligence, artistic talent and knowledge of the laws of nature in many fields: chemistry, physics, biology, physiology, medicine,

economics, and so on. To fully understand and appreciate the food we eat we will also need to history, geography, sociology, ethnology, philosophy and religion. This book wants to open a door on this world of deeper awareness and reconcile the material and practical aspects of life with the spiritual and cultural aspects. Awareness begins with the simplest actions we do every day, and eating is the most basic of them all.

## **A gastronomical look at history**

At school we learn history. We study the rise and fall of great ancient civilizations, the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and then the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome, which studied the previous ones and established the basis for the study of history itself. However, the idea of civilization presented by Greek and Roman historians is unfortunately a biased one, being built on their idea of their own racial superiority and political control.

The same vision has been perpetuated by Christian-based academia through European historians, with an additional tinge of religious bigotry that Greeks and Romans did not have. Cultures having values different than theirs have been depicted as backward or barbarous because those historians were only interested in presenting their external curiosities without caring to deeply understand their meaning; this was

quite natural in nations aspiring to create empires and conquer territories by imposing their own culture. We hope today that this mentality may be replaced by a sincere desire of mutual understanding and pacific coexistence, by the pride human race should get from the wonderful variety of culture and values that can grow on this planet.

Just like scientists and environmentalists are appreciating the great importance of bio-diversity in the flora and fauna of the planet, ethnologists, economists and politicians should strive to save the bio-diversity of human culture. Unlike in botanics and zoology, where extinct species cannot be of any help to us today, ancient human cultures are still valuable and worthy of study because all aspects of human psychology and science can help us to better understand and improve the knowledge of human beings. Our planet is becoming increasingly small, and we need to understand each other and cooperate at our best. So our schools should start to study history from other points of view, too, especially about the native cultures in Europe, Asia, Africa, Americas, Australia and so on. Every people, every culture has something to teach us, even from the gastronomical point of view.

What did ancient peoples eat?

The ancient civilizations of Mediterranean Sea and Middle East (Sumer, Egypt, Greece, Rome) invented the typical diet that today is called "Mediterranean": many types of leavened breads, cereal puddings and gruels made with oats, barley, wheat and spelt (a kind of ancient wheat),

lentils, chickpeas, olive oil and preserved olives, onions, garlic, herbs, almonds, grapes (and naturally wine), honey, apples, figs, milk and cheese. The variety of vegetables and fruits, however, was much greater and included many plants that are now lost.

The Pythagorean school was strictly vegetarian and hygienist, and many great philosophers of the Greek-Roman period have clearly affirmed the superiority of the vegetarian diet for bodily health and intellectual sharpness. Common people usually consumed vegetarian foods, which were economical and easily available, so much that we still use the word *frugal* (“based on fruits”) to describe a modest meal. Meat was consumed mostly on rare occasions, or more frequently by the wealthier classes - priests who could eat it after the animal sacrifices and aristocrats who lorded over large estates where their servants could raise sufficient cattle.

The Roman empire expanded over a large geographical zone and imported a number of strange gastronomical delicacies collected in the most exotic and distant provinces: sugar, and spices like pepper, cinnamon and nutmeg were introduced in Europe by them. The tireless and imaginative "gastronomical explorers" of ancient Rome sent to their capital whatever new and interesting food or recipe they could find. In order to impress their guests at banquets and orgies with their opulence the wealthy foodies of that time could eat things we could consider ridiculous or even disgusting. Many historians have

expressed the opinion that the fall of Roman empire was actually due to this decadence and weakening of Roman people, who could not keep their health properly because of their extravagant diet. Those ancient soldiers who had conquered the world marched tirelessly and fought battles were regularly fed on whole grains such as spelt and barley, accompanied by chickpeas and lentils, onions and garlic. When Romans started to eat mostly non-vegetarian delicacies their health became poorer and their enthusiasm in marching and battling also declined, and the great empire started to crumble.

The wealth of the Roman empire was destroyed by the invasions of nomadic peoples who lived mostly on a meat-based diet as hunters and plunderers. Some of them settled in the new region, while the survivors of the original population sought protection from local warriors who then became Lords - small kings and aristocrats who owned the land and the peasants. The conditions of the commoners, exploited by these ruthless chieftains, became so poor that people barely survived. The best food was found in castles and monasteries as well, as the monks actively collected tributes and donations from the entire community and sometimes cultivated orchards.

People joined monasteries because they were attracted by good food, good housing and peaceful living; gradually the rules of the monastic orders were changed to accommodate meat-eaters and even theology finally approved meat eating. Thomas of Aquin formulated the famous theory

according to which animals do not have souls and women and black people have an inferior soul (so they can be sold as slaves or exploited and kept in inferior positions).

Aristocratic and powerful families strived to extend their dominions through wars, alliances and allegiances, creating major royal dynasties and unifying large territories from which the modern concept of nations started to originate. Renaissance saw the development of cities and commerce, finance and enterprise, and the rise of a new middle class, called bourgeoisie. With colonialism, banking, capitalism and the industrial revolution, the employment of professional cooks became trendy to the mercantile and industrialist class, and in the restaurant and catering business. Cooks became increasingly expert and valued for their services.

Originally dedicated cooks had been employed in very rich households and courts, that regularly received taxes from the peasants in the form of “top of the food chain” agricultural products, such as farm animals, as well as deer and other animals killed in the fashionable hunting parties, and expensive exotic products. Furthermore, the amount of complicated work and skills demonstrated by the cook was evidence of a large group of servants attached to the house and this was considered a sign of higher social status.

This is why old cookery books contain so many non-vegetarian recipes, and why in subsequent centuries the bourgeoisie, that wanted to imitate the aristocrats in their opulent lifestyle, considered the consumption of non-vegetarian foods as a status-symbol for prosperity and good

life. The misconception carried on and cookbooks were duplicated and mass-copied to spread this new "opulence" to all sections of society. This may give the impression that European culture has always been a culture of meat-eaters, although actually the great majority of the population had no use for the cookbooks written by Careme and Escoffier (also because very few people could read and write) and their staple food consisted in bread and soup.

Soups were made from any easily available kitchen garden vegetables, roots and herbs of various kinds often picked in the wild, grains and beans left by the tax collector and all available scraps like milk whey or cheese crusts, even bits of leftovers especially from the master's kitchen. Up to the beginning of the 20th century, ordinary people consumed meat only on special occasions to "enjoy the pleasures of eating" in imitation of the "rich" people. By the way, those envied wealthy people were often suffering from diseases like cardiac problems, gout, and other disturbances caused by heavy non vegetarian food.

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance exotic spices were in great demand for their medicinal and preservative properties (as modern refrigeration was still a long way to come) and this encouraged merchants to explore new routes to far countries. Travelers went east as far as China and Japan, and discovered America on the other side; subsequently also various kingdoms and especially Spanish, British, French, Portuguese, Dutch governments created colonies in the new territories and exploited their



enormous resources.

From America, mostly British and Spanish ships carried potatoes, tomatoes, beans, maize, cocoa, coffee, tobacco, pumpkins, peppers, eggplants and several other vegetables, which gradually became staple foods also in other parts of the world. Large cargos from Eastern countries were also flooding European markets with spices, tea, sugar (made from sugarcane), rice, bananas, coconuts, various pulses and beans, peanuts and other foods, which today appear completely normal in European and Western cooking.

Some of these new foods were also successfully introduced in local European agriculture and became staple foods also for the common people, saving entire populations from famine and starvation from the 15th to the 19th century. At the same time, the products that could not be grown in Europe (such as coffee, tea, tobacco, sugar etc) needed to become more cost-effective to give greater profits, so the superpowers of the time turned increasingly towards slave trade and colonisation of Africa when the number of white European slaves (indentured laborers) sent to work in the New World colonies was found insufficient.

The abolition of slavery in the Western world did not stop the industrial and capitalistic mentality of exploitation of the lower classes or weaker sections of society, as still today people are categorized as “resources” in the money-making business - both as laborers and as consumers. The factory mentality expanded to condition all the aspects of life in industrialized countries and is still playing a major role also

in the food we eat, especially in the legislation norms about the production and distribution of foods. The ignorant approximation of the human body as a mechanical machine and of food as mere caloric fuel and raw materials for construction created the disastrous myth of the superiority of “refined foods” such as white sugar and flour, synthetic additives, and animal flesh (which was expected to be more suitable to build flesh and blood in the bodies of the consumers). Finally vitamins were discovered, and then the importance of oligo-elements, enzymes and food fibers, and a better understanding of the basic functions of the body became popular.

During the last fifty years another major cultural revolution has started on the planet, as a reaction to the obvious damages brought about by the industrial mentality on the personal lives of the people and on the planet as well. The impending dangers of nuclear war and environmental pollution were accompanied by a steep rise in cardiac problems, cancer and other degenerative diseases; the old values of imperialism and money-making started to decline as the beat generation turned to more natural and free ways of living. Of course, natural living also means natural food, hence an increased interest in organic cultivations, farm communities, vegetarian philosophy and so on. Today the natural evolution of the human beings is re-discovering ancient wisdom and knowledge in the fields of philosophy, religion, lifestyle as well as food, expanding into multi-culturalism, and reconciling these with the contemporary demands in respect to taste and convenience.

Yogurt, kefir, seaweeds, tempeh, seitan, different derivatives from soy beans, malt obtained from cereals, cereal flakes, sprouts, quinoa and a wide variety of vegetables, fruits and other ingredients are now available in the market and people try to learn how to use them according to their taste and needs. A great number of cookbooks has appeared on the market. We can take proper advantage from all the experiences of mankind in history and all the enormous variety of ingredients and techniques that are presently available to us. However, a large amount and variety of information could be confusing, if not presented systematically.

This book is a simple and pleasurable first contact with a wider world of tastes, textures, and nutritional ingredients, to give you an introduction to the most popular dishes all over the world.

## Why vegetarian?

### **Environment, economy, sociology**

The mass consumption of meat and non-vegetarian foods requires huge expanses of land for the cultivation of fodder and for pasture grounds - something that the planet is quickly losing because of the increasing numbers of human population and urbanization.

Intensive pasturing and overgrazing, not supported by appropriate perennial plantations (such as trees) causes a quick deterioration of the soil, as the surface layer of fertile soil is not held by long and large roots and gets washed away by the rain or blown away by the wind; also it is not replenished by the falling leaves and other decomposing vegetal and animal debris that can be found around trees. Very soon those beautiful pastures become barren and dry, as clouds do not pour their water over land where no trees are found; trees attract lightning and rain and keep the land from becoming dry.

This is exactly the disaster presently happening in the rainforests especially in South America, where hundreds of different species disappear forever because of deforestation and the destruction of the complex bio-diverse natural system - all to make place for "hamburger pastures". The luxuriant rainforest is actually fertile only due to the great number of its animal and vegetal species; without them it becomes a lake of dust. Each fast-food hamburger patty requires the destruction of 55 square feet of tropical forest for grazing. A large part of the ancient forests has already disappeared, and at this rate the rest will soon be gone as well, with devastating effects on global climate changes.

Very valuable resources such as fodder made from soya beans, wheat, maize, peanuts and other grains, as well as water, manpower and machinery (including fossil fuel and connected resources) are routinely used in the industrial farming - breeding, fattening, transporting, slaughtering and

preparing the meat. This serious depletion of resources also is accompanied by an appalling amount of pollution in the environment, with such a negative financial impact that producing a kilogram of non-vegetarian food is 10 to 35 times more expensive than producing a kilogram of vegetarian food (with same nutritional values). Besides the direct pollution caused by slaughterhouses and industrial sheds (with chemically loaded sewage), there is an indirect agricultural toll, as the huge quantities of fodder required are grown without so much preoccupation for the residues of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which are often washed into water reservoirs.

As average, staple vegetarian foods such as grains and pulses contain 10 times more energy, 8 times more protein and much more vitamins and oligo-elements than non-vegetarian foods, also because groceries are often calculated in dry weight while non-vegetarian foods usually contain large amounts of water. The percentage of water is only higher in fresh fruits and vegetables, but these are extremely easy to grow at a minimal cost locally and even individually in small kitchen gardens or terraces. Vegetarian staples have a much longer shelf life in their natural form and do not require additives or complicated and expensive transformation.

How then is meat industry surviving, if meat production is so expensive compared to vegetable protein production? How can meat producers keep their prices low enough for common people to afford meat?

The explanation is simple: tax money goes to their lobbies in the form of contributions and financial help from the Government. The real cost of meat will not be written on the package, but you will pay it anyway. Not only it is a direct financial support to meat producers, but also an indirect burden as intensive factory farms are one of the major causes for environmental pollution, both for water and for soil, and for public health as well.

Another major problem in this connection is the intensive exploitation of developing countries. The best agricultural lands and the harvests in "third world" countries are sold to industrialized countries to produce fodder for factory farms animals, even in years when the harvest has been poor and the local people are suffering from famine. In this way, about 20% of the planet population is eating up 80% of the planet resources, perpetuating the problem of food scarcity in many areas and creating social and political unrest.

### **What meat does to your body**

The nutritional value of meat is poor: as an average in its raw (uncooked) form it contains about 70% of water, 15% of complex proteins (which are more difficult to digest and utilize than simpler vegetable proteins), 15% or more of saturated fats and bad cholesterol, no carbohydrates, no food fibers, little minerals and vitamins, but a quantity of chemical residues such as disinfectants, insecticides, pesticides, fertilizers, heavy metals and various pollutants

accumulated in the bodies of animals, absorbed from fodder, water, and living environment.

Non-vegetarian foods also contain abundant residues of antibiotics and allopathic medicines such as tranquilizers, hormones and drugs used to whiten meat in veal and chicken (by causing anemia in animals), and also the natural toxins produced by any organism under stress conditions. The meat and blood of slaughtered animals also contain a certain percentage of endorphins produced by the animal's body at the time of death; endorphins (such as adrenaline) are toxic substances comparable to street drugs which are intended to stimulate the body's response to emergency situations and cause aggressiveness, suffering, alienation, desperation and panic. These substances are absorbed by meat eaters and also condition their behavior and feelings.

Many people will say that we need to eat proteins. So let's see how much protein and what kind of proteins we can get from meat.

Our body is not capable of utilizing complex proteins as they are, but it needs to break them down into simple aminoacids and then re-build afresh the proteins needed to form its tissues and other parts. During this process, toxins and other waste substances are released in the blood. All the essential aminoacids contained in the complex proteins of meat and needed to build our tissues are also available for example in soya beans, peanuts and even nettles, or they can be collected from a simple combination of vegetarian foods contributing different aminoacids each.

For example wheat, rice or other grains consumed in the same meal with pulses beans or seeds can easily supply all the essential aminoacids required for human health, plus a variety of minerals and vitamins.

Even in regard to the percentage of protein contents, meat and other non-vegetarian foods are inferior to staple vegetarian foods: soya beans for example contain 3 times more proteins than meat, wheat contains as much protein as meat, and even potatoes, leafy greens and other vegetables contain some protein. For a normal adult, 50 to 60 grams of protein are sufficient in the daily diet: this amount can be easily provided by normal servings of nuts, beans, grains and leafy greens. Just 150 grams of soya beans are perfectly sufficient to cover the entire recommended daily allowance.

True, we *can* eat meat, but it is not a suitable food for human beings. We should compare the general health conditions and life expectancy of traditionally vegetarian populations (like the famous Hunzas in Kashmir) and traditionally non-vegetarian populations (like the Eskimos). Many studies on this issue have shown results that are invariably favorable to the vegetarian diet. But why?

Let's see how the bodies of carnivorous animals are equipped, compared to human beings.

- 1) Human intestines are much longer (12 times the body length) than those of the carnivorous animals (3 times the body length). Grains, fruits and other plant foods do not



decay as rapidly as meat and can pass more slowly through the body without problems. A short intestine is required for meat, fish or eggs residues to be quickly expelled before they putrefy and damage the intestine itself and poison the blood with toxins. This is why among meat-eaters there are so many more cases of bowel cancer, colitis, diverticulitis and so on. Besides, non-vegetarian products contain no food fibers, so they almost always cause constipation and connected problems.

2) The hydrochloric acid normally produced by a human stomach is 20 times less than the amount produced by the stomach of carnivorous animals. This gastric acid is needed to dissolve the meat fibers, which are not easily broken down by chewing or saliva enzymes. It is very interesting to notice that carnivorous animals just tear the flesh off their prey and gulp it down without bothering to chew. To try to cope with this excessive requirement, the bodies of meat-eaters tend to increase the acid contents of their stomach by drinking alcohol and consuming a lot of refined sugar and other acid-forming substances. Gastric ulcers and bad digestion are also a consequence of this imbalance of acid contents in the stomach.

3) There are also other anatomical characteristics which demonstrate that human beings are not carnivorous by nature: for example, human beings sweat through millions of skin pores while carnivores sweat through their tongue. This prevents the toxins of meat to enter the blood, as they are directly expelled by the digestive system.

Carnivores also have very small salivary glands and an acid saliva while human beings have well-developed salivary glands, alkaline saliva and an important enzyme called ptyalin (absent in carnivores), necessary to pre-digest starches; besides carnivores do not need many of the vitamins which human beings must consume through diet. Foods rich in vitamin C can literally kill a cat!

Carnivores have very developed, sharp and pointed front teeth (some have very sharp and pointed teeth also in the back) and claws that are a natural weapon to kill their prey and tear its flesh, and no back flat molar teeth to grind seeds and grains. With the natural physical equipment of their own teeth and nails, human beings would never be able to kill and eat large animals without having to use weapons and instruments.

### **The quality of life**

Unnecessary violence committed on weak and helpless creatures causes its perpetrators to destroy their own respect towards life, sensitivity and compassion, as well their sense of reality and justice. The terrible life and death conditions imposed upon millions of animals destined to meat production in intensive factory farming (such as callous transportation and general treatment, segregation in cramped and artificial environment, forced reproduction, physical and genetic modifications) painfully remind us of the conditions of concentration camps and have no other

reason except economical profit for a small group of people, and therefore they constitute a real crime to the eyes of ethical vegetarians. All great religions advise man not to feed on death and violence, but already the natural perception of one's conscience should be sufficient to give us this awareness.

We can boldly say that being vegetarian is much more pleasurable than eating meat and other non-vegetarian foods. Sometimes people imagine that a vegetarian diet is about scarcity, poverty, prohibitions, renunciation and restrictions but one can easily enjoy an unlimited number of different preparations and combinations of the various parts and products of about 80,000 known edible plants. Even the tastes and textures that are considered attractive and are generally associated with famous non vegetarian dishes can be successfully duplicated with all-vegetarian ingredients. Why call them meat, fish or egg substitutes? Taste, texture and nutritional values of these recipes are valid in themselves and can be appreciated also by those who have never tasted their non-vegetarian counterparts.

Vegetarian foods are a source of pleasure at each stage, from cultivation to harvesting, transportation, purchasing, cooking and eating: their colors, smells, and textures are naturally attractive and pleasing for all human beings, including children. Certainly we cannot say the same thing about non-vegetarian foods.

# Italy

## Ingredients and techniques

Traditional Italian cookery is mostly regional, since for a long time in history Italy has been subject to many different cultural influences, so much that in different regions people used to speak many languages, as different from each other as Italian is different from French, Spanish or Portuguese. This little book cannot deal separately with the various regional cookery traditions and culture, although they surely deserve such attention.

Modern lifestyles have encouraged a trend towards standardization especially in cities, favouring the quickest menus and the industrially prepared foods even in the vegetarian category; this goes together with the gradual disappearance of regional languages. Pre-cooked polenta, readymade breads, biscuits and snacks, jars of pasta sauces, vegetarian stock extracts and frozen vegetables are all easily available and although we cannot say these are very healthy, they can still facilitate those vegetarians who do not have sufficient time to go for a traditional cooking system.

The main course for an Italian meal will be a grain-based dish: in the South it will obviously be pasta (durum wheat dough shaped in an enormous range of types and carefully dried) while in the North it may also be risotto (slightly

creamy rice with different ingredients) or polenta (maize flour gruel, that can be served with vegetable sauce or cheese). In the coldest areas, near the Alps, we will find interesting dishes prepared with chestnuts (small starchy fruits also used in soups) or buckwheat, which is very good in cold climates.

Sweets are also interesting: we can mention the famous Marzipan, a specialty from Sicily made with almond paste and syrup, often shaped in form of fruits and other artistic figures; many other Sicilian sweets like the famous Cassata (ice-cream cake made with ricotta cheese and milk cream, candied fruits and bits of chocolate), the Pastiera from Naples inherited from a very ancient tradition of Greek colonizers (whole wheat berries, boiled and then baked with sugar, raisin, almonds, walnuts, aniseed and distilled water from orange tree flowers); the Panettone of Milano (a tall sweet bread loaf with raisins and candied fruits, topped with a sugar glaze) and the Panforte from Siena (a thick baked layer of mixed nuts and candied fruits, kept together with a little flour and sugar), just to make a few examples.

Pizza deserves a special mention as it has become an international favourite. The crust is a thin dish of bread dough, best baked in a firewood oven with a topping of tomato sauce, fresh mozzarella cheese and a few basil leaves or a pinch of dried oregano leaves; when served, it is usually sprinkled with a little olive oil.

The possible variations for pizza are innumerable; we suggest you to try some of the following toppings:

- tomato sauce, mozzarella, fresh basil, bits of fried eggplant, chopped bell pepper and pitted black olives
- tomato sauce, capers, oregano, bits of fried eggplant
- mozzarella, ricotta, parmesan, fresh basil
- fresh basil sauce (pesto), mozzarella

### **Antipasto in pinzimonio (fresh vegetables with olive oil dressing)**

The ancient tradition of the medicine school in Salerno (near Naples, in the ancient Greek colony of South Italy) advised to eat fresh raw vegetables at the beginning of meals to stimulate digestion: a very good advice indeed, which is still very valuable and which gave origin to the appetizer course. This recipe goes well for a sunny summer lunch.

*You will need:*

- 2 artichokes, preferably without thorns
- 2 lemons in wedges
- 2 fennel bulbs, 2 small cucumbers, 1 celery stalk
- 1 kg of bell peppers (red, green, yellow)
- a small bunch of red radishes
- 300 grams of small tender carrots
- 300 grams of other local fresh vegetables (for example, small tender zucchini)
- 200 grams of fresh ricotta cheese (*or* soft tofu)
- 250 grams of fresh plain yogurt (*or* soya yogurt)
- 300 grams of black and green olives, pitted
- extra virgin olive oil, salt, chili pepper
- a small bunch of parsley and/or mixed fresh herbs
- your favourite bread

Start by washing the bell peppers; do not cut them but put them in a baking pan. Keep aside three (one green, one red, one yellow) for the raw vegetables platter. Bake the rest for about 20 minutes at 200 C, until the skin starts to turn black. Turn off the oven and let the peppers cool slowly. In the meantime, prepare the dip by blending together ricotta cheese and yogurt, about one teaspoon of salt and a little oil. You can add fresh herbs, chili pepper or other spices according to your taste and need. As soon as the bell peppers are cold enough to handle, clean and peel them, then arrange them in slices in small individual bowls, season with chopped parsley and chili pepper if you like, then cover with olive oil and let them sit for some time.

Cut and clean the artichokes by removing the inedible parts especially the thorns and the hard outer leaves, then cut the artichoke hearts in wedges; peel the stalks and soak everything in a little water with some lemon juice in it. Clean and cut all the fresh raw vegetables and arrange in a platter; you can even cut them in shapes of flowers or other artistic forms and leave them soaking in water in your refrigerator for about 1 hour: they will "bloom" very nicely. Arrange all fresh vegetables on platters together with lemon wedges and olives. Divide the ricotta and yogurt dip in small individual bowls. For each person arrange a dip bowl, a bowl with baked peppers, a small plate for bread slices, and another plate on which to serve the fresh vegetables. Do not forget to keep extra oil, salt and black pepper the table.

## **Linguine in salsa di noci (noodles with walnut and cream cheese sauce)**

Pasta is a world-wide known specialty that requires a short cooking time and can be associated with a very large range of ingredients. It can have a great variety of shapes and be prepared in hundreds of recipes, each of them coming in several versions.

The really important thing about cooking pasta is to put a large pot of water on the fire, adding a little salt and then throwing the pasta when the water is really boiling. Stir well and let cook for the amount of time specified on the package label. As a rule, for 500 grams of pasta, at least 4 or 5 liters of water are required in order to cook pasta in a good way. To test the cooking, cut a piece of pasta: if it keeps its shape well but has no hard center, it is cooked. Drain immediately and serve without delay.

How to season pasta? The most traditional sauces are tomato-based, simmered very slowly with olive oil, salt and herbs like basil or oregano, but there are innumerable recipes to try. Here is an example.

*You will need:*

500 grams of durum wheat pasta

300 grams shelled walnuts

200 grams fresh ricotta cheese, plus 100 grams fresh milk cream, *or* 300 grams fresh cream cheese

100 grams grated parmesan

extra virgin olive oil, salt,

black pepper



a little garlic (optional)

your favourite spices: marjoram or nutmeg or cinnamon

Boil and drain the pasta as usual. Trenette are a special kind of noodles with slightly curled edges and linguine are very thin noodles, but any shape of pasta will also do well. While the pasta is cooking, put all the other ingredients in a food processor and mix nicely; the walnuts should be finely ground.

If you like a lighter sauce, skip the milk cream and increase the amount of ricotta cheese; if you want to cut on all fats substitute oil with the little milk. If you are vegan, you can use soft fresh tofu instead. When the pasta is properly cooked and drained, season it immediately with half of the sauce, then pour the rest of the sauce on the individual servings according to taste or keep it handy on the table.

Here are some other ideas for a pasta-based main course:

\* *Quick eggplant and black olive sicilian sauce*: clean and cut one large eggplant in small cubes, deep fry and drain. Heat the tomato puree in a small saucepan, add the eggplant cubes, a handful of pitted black olives and a teaspoon of oregano. Simmer while pasta is cooking. Do not add grated cheese.

\* *Basil Pesto*: a very quick sauce that does not require any cooking, it is also good as a spread on plain bread or focaccia (olive oil thin bread). Wash and drain a large bunch of fresh basil leaves, grind them (traditionally in a mortar, but a blender will do) with a handful of pine nuts, salt, olive oil, and parmesan cheese to make a paste. If you

like you can also add a mashed garlic clove. Mix with a teaspoon of the cooking water of pasta; add to boiled and drained pasta. You can serve with extra grated cheese.

\* *Vegetarian ragout with chickpeas*: you can choose among different basic ingredients (chickpeas or textured protein mince or seitan) for the vegetarian version of the traditional sauce for noodles.

For the chickpeas: boil well and drain, mash partially and stir-fry them in olive oil with a pinch of herbs (rosemary, sage, laurel, juniper, thyme etc.) for at least ten minutes, then add the tomato puree and simmer slowly.

\* *Vegetarian ragout with meat substitutes*

For textured protein: soak, wash and squeeze the textured soya protein, stir-fry in oil with herbs and a little natural soya sauce, then add tomato puree and simmer. For seitan: mince the boiled seitan, stir-fry and proceed as above.

\* *Baked pasta*: you can bake practically any kind of pasta. Boil pasta as described in the basic recipe, then drain and transfer into a deep baking pan. Prepare a sauce with tomato puree and/or with stewed vegetables. Prepare a cup of white sauce and add grated melting cheese (mozzarella, parmesan or other similar cheese). Make layers of pasta and sauces in the baking pan, cover with foil to avoid drying out, and bake for about 20 minutes. It is important to prepare baked pasta well ahead of time so that it has the time to settle in the pan and you can cut nice slices which will hold together; you can even cook it a day in advance

and keep the pan in the fridge or in the freezer. Before serving, reheat for a few minutes in hot oven without the foil covering.

\* *Pasta salad*: mix the boiled, drained and cooled pasta with your favourite salad ingredients and serve cold. You can season simply with olive oil or use yogurt or light salad sauces.

## **Minestrone (mixed vegetable and bean soup)**

During winter, northern Italy has a quite chilly climate and a hearty soup is the perfect choice. In the old times it was traditionally boiled in a large pot over the fireplace and took several hours to prepare, but this also had the effect of heating the kitchen and the house during the cold winter days. Different regions have different versions of this dish: in Tuscany chickpeas or cannellini beans are the favourite, while in Naples the *mammas* in charge of the kitchen prefer borlotti beans. In any case, you can speed up the process by using a pressure cooker, but if you own a fireplace or a firewood stove, it is worthy trying to cook this tasty soup on direct fire in autumn or winter. Just remember you have to start cooking early!

*You will need:*

300 grams of your favourite beans (lentils, chickpeas, broad beans, black beans, cannellino beans, borlotti beans etc.)

1 kg mixed vegetables: cabbage leaves or spinach leaves,

one potato, one or two carrots, a celery stalk, a squash *or* a piece of pumpkin, some string beans, an onion *or* leek  
three tomatoes (or three tablespoons tomato puree)  
your favourite herbs: rosemary, marjoram, bay leaves, fresh basil, etc.

200 grams small size pasta

100 grams grated parmesan cheese

two tablespoons good olive oil

a pinch of red chili pepper or black pepper

bread

Soak and boil the beans in a pressure cooker; in the meantime wash, trim and cut the vegetables. Let the pressure go down, open the pot and add the diced vegetables and herbs, then continue cooking until the vegetables are tender. At this point add the pasta and continue cooking until done. Serve hot or warm with grated cheese, olive oil, chili pepper or black pepper and toasted bread.

## **Cannoli (cottage cheese stuffed pastries)**

Sicily is famous for its great sweets. To make this recipe, you can use the special steel moulds for frying the pastry tubes, or make them the traditional way by wrapping the pastry around pieces of bamboo or wood.

*You will need*

*for the crust:*

200 grams butter *or* margarine

600 grams flour

50 grams icing sugar, *or* 2 glasses vinsanto  
a pinch of salt, water as needed  
sunflower oil for deep frying

*for the filling:*

300 grams fresh ricotta cheese *or* cottage cheese  
100 grams fresh cream cheese  
about 100 grams icing sugar *or* honey (orange flowers  
honey is the best)  
50 grams candied fruits *or* peels, finely chopped  
50 grams pistachio nuts, coarsely mashed or ground  
50 grams chocolate bits

Start by mixing the cold butter or margarine into the flour, adding the salt, then add 50 grams of the icing sugar and a little cold water, mixing well. The traditional recipe calls for a special very sweet white wine, vinsanto, but you can substitute with white grape juice or other clear fruit juice which will not colour the dough, or even plain cold water. Roll the dough to a sheet about 3 mm thick, then cut squares or diamond shapes and roll them around the moulds by pressing the ends very well together so that they will not open up during cooking. If you prefer, you can cut stripes and roll them around the mould, sealing the edges very well. A drop of water will help. Deep fry them quickly, drain and let cool before removing the mould.

While the pastries cool down, prepare the filling by mixing ricotta and cream cheeses, with one third of the sugar or honey, add the candied fruits, half the pistachio nuts and the chocolate bits and mix well. Fill the pastries and top both ends with the remaining pistachio nuts, then arrange in a serving tray and dust with the remaining icing sugar (or glaze with the honey).

## Spain

### Ingredients and techniques

The Mediterranean region includes most of Italy, Spain and southern France on one side. The typical ingredients of Spanish cookery are the rich and tasty produce that grow in warm and dry lands: oranges, figs, pumpkin, tomatoes, string beans, chickpeas, saffron, capers, almonds, onion, bell peppers, hot peppers, parsley and other herbs, and obviously *aceitunas negras* - the wonderful Spanish black olives and their excellent oil. As a drink, you can definitely try Sangria, by leaving in infusion a few red oranges, one lemon, apples, peaches, two cloves and a piece of cinnamon in red wine or red grape juice. Let it sit for a few hours in the fridge before serving.

### **Paella vegetariana (pan fried rice)**

There are innumerable versions of the famous *paella* (literally "flat pan"), as the whole idea of this recipe is to utilize whatever little amounts of mixed ingredients are available: this is a very practical invention and you may enjoy it every day as daily you can change something in it. The main ingredients of the recipe are rice, saffron and green peas.

The version we are presenting here is strictly vegetarian, although perfectly traditional.

*You will need:*

400 grams long grain rice  
three large bell peppers (red, yellow, green)  
a celery stalk, an onion (optional), one carrot  
200 grams of shelled green peas, boiled or frozen  
10 pumpkin flowers  
100 grams shelled almonds  
100 grams black pitted olives  
a good pinch of saffron  
a pinch of red cayenne pepper or paprika  
a bunch of fresh parsley  
extra virgin olive oil  
vegetable broth

Take a big frying pan slowly fry celery, carrot and onion chopped finely, using the amount of oil you prefer, but take care not to overheat olive oil because it will be damaged. After one minute add the green peas and stir for about 5 minutes. If you use brown rice you should first boil it and drain it before frying it in the large pan; if you use plain white rice you do not need to do so. After adding the rice and stir-frying it for one or two minutes, pour a little quantity of vegetable stock or boiling water: if you are using white uncooked rice, the volume of the liquid should be twice the volume of the rice (two cups for one cup rice). Add salt and the cleaned pumpkin flowers, the saffron and the spice and stir well. In a separate small pan slowly fry the almonds. When the rice is done add the almonds, the olives and the chopped parsley and serve.

## **Gazpacho (chilled tomato and cucumber soup)**

This recipe can be served as a very good appetizer, light dinner or even breakfast; it can be prepared in advance and kept in the fridge. It does not require cooking, so it is great when you are in a hurry or in the summer - and you do not wish to remain in a warm kitchen over the stove.

### *You will need:*

500 grams of your favourite bread (a little stale is ok)  
extra virgin olive oil, salt  
500 grams of ripe but firm tomatoes  
one large onion *or* leek  
two green bell peppers  
two pieces of celery,  
two medium sized cucumbers  
a bunch of fresh basil leaves  
two lemons *or* one spoonful vinegar  
2 cups of cold water  
cumin *or* cayenne pepper *or* black pepper

Cut the bread in slices; if you are using stale bread, slightly toast it to improve the taste. Put 300 grams of the bread in a salad bowl and add the chopped onion or leek, salt, oil and water; let it sit for some time. In the meantime cut and clean the vegetables; you can chop them very finely or mix them in a blender for a few seconds with the bread marinade, salt, basil leaves and spices. Pour over the soaked bread and top with the rest of the bread. Another version of the Gazpacho can be made with fresh white grapes instead of tomatoes.



## **Garbanzos a la Sevillana (chickpeas with gravy)**

*You will need:*

300 grams boiled chickpeas  
2 medium sized potatoes, diced very small  
3 bell peppers, cut in stripes  
one carrot, one onion/leek, chopped  
500 grams ripe tomatoes  
a clove of garlic, mashed (optional)  
a bunch of parsley, chopped  
2 tablespoons of flour  
a vegetable stock cube, salt to taste  
4 tablespoons olive oil  
a pinch of cayenne pepper *or* black pepper

Start by stir-frying the onion and garlic in 2 tablespoons of olive oil over a low flame. Then add the flour and stir-fry for a few seconds more. Add the other chopped vegetables, the boiled chickpeas and the vegetable stock, then adjust with water (for extra flavor you could use the cooking water of the chickpeas). Keep the saucepan simmering over a low flame, covered with a lid. When the vegetables are tender add the parsley, the rest of the olive oil and some red chili powder or black pepper. Serve hot with roasted bread.

## **Naranjos rellenos (stuffed oranges)**

*You will need:*

8 large red oranges (about 1.5 kg)  
200 grams fresh cottage cheese *or* cream cheese

1 tablespoon candied orange peels, chopped  
2 tablespoons pistachio nuts, chopped  
100 ml whipped cream  
sugar *or* honey to your taste

This refreshing and nourishing recipe can also be frozen and served as an ice-cream dessert. Wash the oranges carefully but do not peel them. Slice off the tops. If you are artistically oriented, you can cut off two small wedges on each side to obtain a small basket with a handle or cut the orange tops in other ways. You can also re-use the tops to cover the oranges for freezing or serving.

Gently remove the pulp without damaging the peel, then mash the pulp and strain the juice. Add the juice to the cheese, beating well with the candied orange peels, half the pistachio nuts, sugar or honey, and half of the whipped cream. Fill the orange cups with this mixture and keep in fridge or freezer for at least 30 minutes before serving. Just before serving, decorate with the remaining whipped cream and pistachio nuts.

## Greece

### Ingredients and techniques

Ancient Greece is usually considered the cradle of western civilization and the motherland of many great philosophers, scientists and artists of the old classical world. This culture had a deep influence on Mediterranean countries, both by the political and military colonization in southern Italy and

the cultural influence over the rustic Roman conquerors, who absorbed Greek civilization to the point that the Roman aristocrats spoke to each other in Greek language, exactly like the aristocrats of the Russian empire liked to speak French.

Greek cuisine is connected with the traditions of the Balkans and south-eastern Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Romania) and even some regions of the Middle East (like Turkey) which constituted the original area of the Eastern Roman Empire of the early Middle Ages and had strong islamic influences for several centuries. Many ingredients and basic techniques are common all over the region.

Sesame seeds, raisins, almonds, honey, yogurt, fresh cheese, olives and olive oil, coriander seeds, fennel seeds, cumin, fenugreek, grapes, figs, wine and vinegar are traditional Mediterranean ingredients, blended with a touch of oriental taste for scents - as for example in rose or orange flowers. If you do not find the famous Feta cheese, you can use some firm ricotta cheese or cottage cheese. Slice, sprinkle with salt and keep in fridge for a day or two.

A specialty of the Balkans is *kefir*, a product similar to yogurt but obtained with a different microorganism: it is a pleasant fizzy drink, useful for aiding digestion. You can prepare it by adding to a liter of pure water (free from chemicals) a handful of raisins, a lemon cut in wedges and 100 grams of sugar. Put all the ingredients in an airtight glass jar and let it sit in a quiet warm place for about 24 to 48 hours, until the natural carbon dioxide forming by slight

fermentation starts to move the contents of the jar. At this point you can remove the lemon and raisins, pour out the liquid (which is called *kefir* and can be served chilled) and add new lemon, raisins and sugar to the culture. When the microorganism culture has grown (the mixture will ferment in less than 24 hours) you can remove the excess or put it in a separate jar to experiment with different versions, adding fresh fruit juice or juice concentrate or jams, spices or other flavourings to get special drinks. All these drinks will be naturally carbonated, low in calories and very refreshing.

Another specialty is rose petals jam: Bulgaria is famous for its rose cultivations. Get some scented red roses, remove the white base of the petals. Prepare a hot syrup with two cups of sugar and two cups of water, thicken it with apple pectine (available in many shops) and throw in the rose petals, then remove from the fire and let it cool. If you do not find apple pectine on the market, you can make some by using cooking apples: wash them carefully, then boil the peels and cores of apples in a little water and sugar. Squeeze them in the syrup and use the same syrup (adding some more sugar if needed) for preparing your jams.

## **Yogurt**

Probably the most famous specialty is yogurt (milk cultured with *lactobacillus bulgaricus*), a product which was practically unknown in most other countries up to 50 years ago but

has become a very popular food and a valuable ingredient in an enormous range of recipes. Greek yogurt is very thick, so you may want to check the ingredients to ensure there are no additives to mask a lower quality product.

Yogurt is much more easily digestible than milk, but its main value lies in the beneficial action of friendly bacteria called *lactobacillus bulgaricus* on human bowels: it helps the natural balance of the intestine, especially when it has been damaged by antibiotics, infections, viral attacks and so on. For this reason, yogurt should be consumed fresh (without cooking it) and with its micro-organism culture in it (without draining it from the yogurt).

If you wish to make yogurt at home, you need a starter: it is better to use some good yogurt from the market. Also, try to use full fat milk or improve the density of the milk with some skimmed milk powder. Heat the milk (if you use raw milk you should boil it at least once) and let it cool down for about half an hour at room temperature. To test the temperature of the milk the easiest way is to touch it: if you can keep your finger in it for 10 seconds but not more, it is ok. Then add the starter. You will need about 100 grams of starter yogurt for each liter of milk. Stir well, cover the container and let it sit in a quiet and warm place for a few hours.

The place you choose should not be disturbed by any vibrations (top of fridge, etc.) or drafts, and the container must not be made of aluminium or tin or glazed ceramic (containing lead), otherwise the lactic acid will dissolve

some particles of the metal and cause poisoning. Stainless steel, glass or even good plastic containers will be suitable. The best place to keep the container in the winter, to speed up the yogurt production, is the top of a radiator or a shelf above the cooking stove or oven. Do not move or stir the milk until yogurt has formed and the whey starts to separate from the casein; at this point refrigerate and use it within one or two weeks. Drained condensed yogurt is a special treat both as a dessert or as cream cheese. Line a colander with a muslin cloth then pour in sufficient yogurt. Hang the bundle until the content is sufficiently drained, then transfer in a bowl and use either as a whipped cream substitute or dessert (with sugar and other flavourings) or as a spread or ingredient for many sweet or savory recipes instead of cream cheese.

## **Moussaka**

This famous recipe can use vegetarian textured soya protein mince, minced seitan or crumbled vegburgers. Simply season the textured protein or seitan with a little herbs and soya sauce while stir-frying. Although olive oil is the best and most traditional oil, for deep frying it is better to use sunflower oil which is lighter and more digestible.

*You will need:*

3 large eggplants

one onion *or* leek

two spoonfuls of flour

500 grams tomatoes or equivalent amount of tomato puree

200 grams of grated cheese  
200 grams of bread crumbs  
250 grams of soya protein mince *or* seitan etc  
your favourite seasonings: vegetable stock cube, coriander seeds, parsley, etc.  
sunflower oil for frying  
olive oil for stir-frying

Chop the onion or leek and stir fry it on a low flame with a little olive oil, then add the meat substitute and let it brown for a few minutes. Add the tomatoes and your favourite seasonings and simmer for 5 to 10 minutes. In the meantime prepare a batter with 2 spoonfuls of flour, a little salt and water; dip in the eggplant slices and deep fry them in a generous amount of sunflower oil. The more oil you use in the pan, the less oil will be absorbed by the eggplant slices. Drain the eggplant from the oil and arrange in a baking pan in layers with the meat substitute in tomato sauce, sprinkle with bread crumbs and cheese. Top the last layer with bread crumbs and cheese. Cover with aluminium foil and bake for about 20 minutes, then let it cool and serve.

## **Dolmades** **(rice in vine leaves)**

Like almost all traditional recipes, this can be prepared with a choice of different ingredients, because the idea is to utilize small quantities of available foods. If you cannot find vine leaves you may also use other large edible leaves (spinach, cabbage, kale, lettuce), although of course the flavour will not be the same.

In case you find a large quantity of vine leaves and you want to preserve them, you may freeze them after dipping them for a few seconds in boiling water. Be sure to drain them immediately, otherwise they will become too soft. Let them cool at room temperature then wrap in foil or seal in freezer bags and keep them in the freezer until you need them.

*You will need:*

12 vine leaves

300 grams rice

50 grams raisin

100 grams shelled pine nuts

one eggplant with tender skin

about 4 spoonfuls of olive oil

a small bunch of fresh parsley

a small bunch of fresh mint leaves

200 grams tomatoes

200 grams of plain fresh yogurt

First of all cook the rice with the chopped tomatoes, salt and about half a liter of water. Let it cool down. Wash, clean and dice the eggplant in very small cubes. In a separate pan slowly stir-fry the pine nuts in olive oil, drain and set aside. In the same oil stir-fry the diced eggplant, then drain and add to the pine nuts. Add the raisins to the oil and stir-fry until they are soft. Turn off the flame, add the rice, the pine nuts, the eggplant cubes, a little salt, the chopped parsley and mint.

Prepare the vine leaves by spreading them on a clean surface. If they are fresh, it is better to blanch them for a



few seconds in boiling water so they are easier to fold. Fill with the rice mixture and fold nicely, then arrange the stuffed leaves on a baking tray keeping the leaf folds below. Bake for about 20 minutes, until the leaf is crunchy. Serve with fresh yogurt or lemon wedges.

## **Baklava (honey biscuits)**

Filo (phillo) dough is prepared by kneading a firm dough of white flour and then pulling it in a thin sheet, sprinkling with a mixture of flour and oil, folding it and pulling it again several times. If pulling it by hand is too difficult, you can use a rolling pin. The basic technique is similar to puff pastry, but using oil instead of butter or margarine gives more crunch to the final result. Besides Baklava, filo pastry can be used for a variety of sweet and savory preparations, usually baked, just like ordinary puff pastry.

If you prefer to use puff pastry in this recipe (you can purchase it readymade and frozen) remember that thawing and rolling down puff pastry is a very tricky job. It is essential to thaw frozen puff pastry at a low temperature - just move it from the freezer to the fridge and keep it there for several hours until it is possible to roll it. If you try to thaw it quickly the considerable amount of fat contained in it will melt instead of becoming just a little softer, and the pastry will be spoiled. When rolling the dough remember to sprinkle the surface and the rollin pin with flour and work

quickly but gently. Never knead the dough, otherwise it will be spoiled. Simply cut the shapes you need and if you are left with cuttings, just pile them up, sprinkle with flour and roll again gently and quickly. Bake the pastry dough immediately, while it is still cold, by passing it in hot oven (about 200 degrees celsius) for a short time, so that it will puff up easily.

*You will need:*

500 grams Filo dough *or* puff pastry dough

300 grams of condensed sweetened milk

50 grams flour

100 grams powdered milk

30 grams butter or vegetable margarine

a teaspoon grated lemon rind

100 grams blanched almonds, slivered

100 grams dried figs, thinly sliced

100 grams ground sesame seeds

100 grams sugar or honey

To make the cream: in a pan melt the butter with the condensed milk, add flour, powdered milk and grated lemon rind. Stir well. When the cream starts to thicken, remove from the fire. Prepare a mixture with the almonds, figs and sesame seeds. Roll out the Filo dough or the puff pastry dough in thin sheets, arrange them in baking trays in layers with the cooled milk cream and the almond mixture, then set another layer of dough, cooled milk cream and so on. Top with the sugar or honey and bake in hot oven until the pastry becomes puffed and golden. Serve it at room temperature.

## France

### Ingredients and techniques

Like many other countries, France has different regional traditions in culture and gastronomy. Northern France (Bretagne and Normandie) is famous for the production of milk and milk products, especially the butter and the cream cheese called *crème fraîche*. One of the staple foods there is potatoes, like in the other areas of central and northern Europe. Southern France, as we have already mentioned, is a mediterranean area (Provence, Marseille, Nice) and there aromatic herbs are especially popular.

The extreme opulence of pastries, creams and sauces that was characteristic of the old French cookery (concocted by the court cooks) or *haute cuisine* gave way in the second half of the 20th century to the fresher *nouvelle cuisine*, based on lighter foods, served in very small quantities but with a very artistic presentation. Furthermore, the naturist-hygienist movement has been very active in France since the 19th century presenting the many benefits of natural medicine, therapeutic fasting and fresh vegetarian food.

French cuisine, with its illustrious names, has been for a long time the symbol of the most sophisticated cooking, and still today the vast majority of *sauces*, *entrées*, *purées*, *potages* and *desserts* bear French names.

A quick look at a list of sauces will give us an idea of the traditional cookery established by the famous cooks of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries: *Béchamel* (also called white sauce), *Mornay* (white sauce with grated melting cheese), *Soubise* (white sauce with pureed onions), *Mayonnaise* (with egg yolks, oil and lemon juice, although recently eggless vegetarian and vegan versions have been created and marketed with huge success), *Béarnaise* (a mayonnaise made with butter instead of oil, flavoured with tarragon leaves), *Mousseline* (mayonnaise added with whipped milk cream), *Rémoulade* (mayonnaise added with mustard and capers), *Bercy* (made with butter, a special kind of small onions and white wine), *Bourguignonne* (made with red wine), *Périgueux* (made with truffles), *Maître d'hotel* (butter, parsley, lemon juice), *Moutarde* (ground yellow mustard seeds, vinegar and sugar) and so on.

Other famous inventions of the French chefs are the *roux* (flour slightly roasted in butter, used to thicken the gravy in many recipes), the *vole-au-vents* made with puff pastry, the baked dishes topped with bread crumbs mixed with grated cheese called *au gratin*, the cheese *fondue* (different cheeses melted with milk and potato starch, and served with bread bits), the *raclette* (boiled potatoes, baked with grated cheese, milk and parsley), the crunchy *croquemonsieur* (toasted bread filled with melting cheese), *rissoles* (puff pastries stuffed with cheese), *mousses*, *soufflés* and *terrines*, *pâtés* (some versions can be vegetarian or vegan), *consommés* (clear thin soups), the onion soup (*soupe à l'oignon*) and the classical "French fries", called *pommes (de terre) frites*.

A special mention is due to the famous French bread (especially the iconic *baguette*) and to the immense variety of French cheeses - there are about 700 estimated types.

Among the *desserts*, French artists are credited with the *crème Chantilly* (whipped cream), Eclairs, Profiteroles, Charlottes, cream puffs (called *choux*, literally “cauliflowers”), *crêpes* (especially the version with Grand Marnier, set ablaze at the time of serving), and the famous Saint-Honoré cake, without forgetting the humble but delicious *pain perdu*: slices of leftover bread lightly soaked in milk, shallow fried in butter and coated with sugar and cinnamon.

### **Potage Parmentier (herb flavoured potato soup)**

Antoine Augustin Parmentier (1737-1813) was the botanist who worked hardest to introduce the use of potatoes in Europe, where they could grow easily and quickly, required less work, yielded large harvests and resisted draught and cold much better than wheat. The early importers called them *pommes de terre* (literally “earth apples”) but certainly eating raw potatoes as if they were apples did not make them very popular, so in the beginning potatoes (and maize corn) were just fed to the pigs.

To convince French people to eat potatoes, Parmentier asked the King of France to wear potato flowers as an ornament. Finally people started to try *cooked* potatoes, and in the following decades potatoes saved many thousands of

people from famine all over Europe. Today, few people in the world can imagine a kitchen without potatoes.

*You will need:*

500 grams boiled potatoes or 150 grams of potato flakes  
one medium sized leek  
50 grams butter *or* vegetable margarine  
vegetable stock or broth  
one liter of milk  
two tablespoons of milk cream  
one tablespoon of chopped parsley  
one tablespoon of chopped tarragon *or* other herbs  
one tablespoon of chopped chives  
salt, a pinch of nutmeg  
100 grams of grated cheese  
300 grams of your favourite bread

Mash the boiled and peeled potatoes. Stir-fry the chopped leek in the butter, add the potatoes, the crumbled vegetable stock cube, milk and sufficient water to get a soup of the right consistency. Bring to a boil over a low flame, simmer for about 15 minutes then add the milk cream, nutmeg, herbs and the grated cheese at this point. Remove from the fire, cover the pot and let the soup sit for some time. Prepare the bread cubes by toasting them in a baking pan smeared with butter or oil, then sprinkle with salt. Serve with the soup.

**Quiche aux légumes  
(vegetable filled pastry)**

This pastry filled with vegetables can be prepared in many different ways; like many popular recipes, it represents a

very intelligent and skilled way to utilize a large range of ingredients that were available in small quantities, including leftovers.

You can use puff pastry or a simpler version called *brisée* (also invented by French cooks): cut in small pieces 100 grams of butter or vegetable margarine still quite cold from the fridge, add to 300 grams of flour, together with a teaspoon of salt. Mash the butter pieces in the flour with a fork (do not use your hands as they are warm and will melt the bits) until the flour seems wet. Then pour in slowly a little of ice-cold water, mixing well with the fork, and finally press it into a dough ball by using only your fingertips. Put the dough in the fridge to rest for at least 15 minutes, while you prepare the filling.

*You will need:*

500 grams of *brisée* dough prepared as above, *or* frozen and thawed puff pastry

1 kg. artichokes

two medium sized carrots

one celery stalk, one small onion

two tablespoons of oil or butter

100 grams green peas (fresh or frozen)

100 grams of melting cheese (preferably the hard type, not fermented)

one cup of white sauce (made with 50 grams butter, 50 grams flour, 2 glasses of milk, salt and a pinch nutmeg)

Clean, wash and cut the artichokes. Chop the celery, carrots and onion and stir-fry them in the oil or butter over a low flame. After one or two minutes add the artichoke hearts

and the green peas, then salt and a glass of water, cover the pot with a lid and let cook over a low flame for about 10 minutes.

Prepare the white sauce by melting the butter with the flour over a low flame; roast it carefully, stirring all the time until it gives out a nice smell like cooked biscuits. Then turn off the fire, add the milk always stirring very carefully, and finally add the salt and nutmeg. The white sauce should be rather thick as it needs to keep the vegetables together in the filling. Pour the cooked vegetables in the white sauce, add the grated cheese and mix well.

When the filling has cooled enough, take the dough from the fridge, roll it down on a surface sprinkled with flour. Line a baking pan with a sheet of pastry about 2 mm thick, then spread the filling and fold the edges of the dough over the filling to encase it. You can use some dough to make stripes or small leaves or flowers to decorate the surface of the quiche. Bake in hot oven (about 180 C) for about 30 minutes, let it cool at room temperature and serve.

### **Gateaux Chantilly (whipped cream dessert)**

*You will need  
for the dough:*

400 grams flour  
250 grams butter  
200 grams icing sugar  
one tablespoon baking soda



one tablespoon powdered *or* condensed milk  
a pinch of salt  
juice and grated rind of one lemon  
about one cup of milk

*for the filling:*

400 ml whipping cream, very cold (about 5 C)  
300 grams fresh strawberries *or* raspberries  
100 grams icing sugar  
a pinch of vanilla extract

Prepare the dough: melt the butter in half a cup of warm milk, then add the rest of the milk and the condensed or powdered milk. In a bowl mix the flour with the sugar, the baking soda, the grated lemon rind and a pinch of salt. Keep one or two tablespoons of flour aside for sprinkling the table when rolling the dough. When the butter and milk mixture has cooled, add it to the flour mix and knead the dough into a ball.

Let the dough sit for a few minutes, and in the meantime clean the strawberries or raspberries carefully. Do not soak or wash them in lots of water as they would lose flavour. If you use very large strawberries, you may cut them in half sidewise or in slices. Arrange the berries on a plate and sprinkle with sugar (set aside a tablespoon for the whipped cream) and the lemon juice; allow to sit in the fridge for some time.

Divide the dough into 8 pieces, then roll them on a floured surface to a thickness of about 5 mm. The dough sheets should be square. Keep one square as it is. The remaining 7 squares will be cut in the center to remove a small disk.

Bake all the pieces of the cake, keeping a good distance among the pieces as they will raise a little. Let the pieces cool down well. Prepare the whipped cream by whisking it with a little sugar and a pinch of vanilla extract.

When all the ingredients are cooled well, give the finishing touch to the cake by arranging it on a serving tray. First put the whole square, some berries, then spread some whipped cream and continue with all the 7 hollow squares. Finally fill the hollow with the remaining berries and whipped cream and decorate with the crescent shapes obtained from cutting the centers of the 7 squares. Keep in fridge for about 15 minutes and serve cold.

## **Holland**

### **Ingredients and techniques**

Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg share a very similar tradition and culture in regard to ingredients, eating habits and tastes - similar to those of northern France, Germany and Switzerland, but with some very interesting specialties and famous food products. Holland is one of the major world producers of milk and cheese (the most famous type of cheese is the red Edamer) and inevitably its cuisine is largely based on these products. We should also consider the fact that the saturated fat of milk is better utilized by the human body in colder climates.

In Holland much fertile land has been carved from the sea with a clever system of dams, therefore agriculture is taken very seriously, producing not only the famous flowers and especially tulips (that have become the symbol of Holland) but also plenty of good vegetables such as Brussels sprouts, lettuce, asparagus, onions, green peas, carrots, cauliflowers and cabbages of several varieties.

After the discovery of America, one of the first luxury foods introduced in Europe from the New World was cocoa: it went very well with Dutch milk and cream, so much that Dutch cocoa came to be known as the best product on the market. The same applies to Belgian chocolate, although also Switzerland became very famous.

Potatoes also became a very popular vegetable: while travelling in central and northern Europe, from northern France to Germany, alongside all the important roads you will see signs (often hand-written) inviting passersby to stop and taste the local fried potato sticks.

### **Fried potato sticks**

To make good potato fries you need to know some tricks. First of all you must choose the proper variety (the yellow is more suitable), and then the pieces must be of similar size and thickness; for this purpose it is better to cut large potatoes into sticks. Cut each potato in slices about 1 cm thick, then cut through the stack to obtain pieces with a square section.

Keep the potatoes in a bowl of cold water to keep them from turning black. Heat the frying oil (sunflower is the best) and when you see that the oil starts to move a little (do not wait for smoke) slide in a small piece to test the temperature: if it comes afloat in a few seconds, you can proceed with the others. Do not forget to pat the potato sticks dry before frying them.

Fry small batches of potato sticks. If you fry too many at the time, the oil temperature will drop and the potatoes will absorb too much fat. If the batch is too small, the sticks will become brown on the outside without really cooking through the center. When they are slightly golden, drain and pass on kitchen paper to remove excess fat. When you have finished, let the oil become a little hotter and quickly give a second fry to the sticks in small batches to puff them up a little bit. Serve immediately with salt or mayonnaise.

### **Lettuce, cabbage and pea soup**

In all northern Europe, soup is still the basic and favourite food, often served with bread cubes (toasted or fried). You can try this recipe also with different vegetables, for example by omitting the cabbage or adding asparagus, or by using different types of salad leaves.

*You will need:*

200 grams green peas (fresh *or* frozen)

two lettuce heads

100 grams white cabbage *or* Brussel sprouts

1 red onion *or* a leek  
50 grams butter  
100 grams flour  
half liter of milk  
a pinch of nutmeg  
one tablespoon of chopped parsley  
salt or vegetable stock cube  
100 grams of Edamer cheese *or* other melting cheese  
bread of your choice

Slice the white cabbage or Brussel sprouts very finely, discarding the hard core and the damaged external leaves. Wash, clean and chop the green leaves of lettuce, keeping the hearts aside. Peel and chop the onion or leek.

Melt the butter in a saucepan, add the onion or leek and the cabbage or Brussel sprouts, then the green peas, sprinkle with salt or vegetable stock cube, cover with the lid and let cook for about 10 minutes over a low flame. When these vegetables are cooked, add the green leaves of lettuce and the flour and cook for another 10 minutes, then add the milk and sufficient water and keep simmering, covered, to obtain a good thickness. Season with parsley and nutmeg. In the meantime, prepare the bread cubes by frying or roasting the bread in the oven or in a pan smeared with a little butter or oil.

At the time of serving, sprinkle every serving of soup with grated cheese and bread cubes. If you prefer, you can serve grated cheese and bread cubes separately so that your guests can help themselves as they like.

## **Brussel sprouts au gratin**

*You will need:*

500 grams Brussels sprouts

50 grams butter

300 grams potatoes

100 grams bread crumbs

200 grams grated cheese

a pinch of ground nutmeg

a pinch of ground paprika or red cayenne pepper

a glass (100 ml) of milk cream or milk

a bunch of parsley

Wash and trim the Brussels sprouts. Cut a deep cross in the bottom of each sprout to ensure even cooking inside the core, then blanch them in about one liter of boiling salted water for one minute. If you do not like the smell of boiling Brussels sprouts, add half a lemon to the boiling water (the trick also works with cauliflowers and cabbage).

Drain the sprouts well and shallow fry them in the butter over a very low flame, adding salt. In the meantime peel and dice the potatoes very small, then boil them in the Brussels sprouts water. This water can also be kept aside as a base for future vegetable broth or soups; if you are not planning to use it soon, you need to refrigerate or freeze it.

When the potatoes are done, arrange them in a baking pan, then layer the Brussels sprouts, the grated cheese, nutmeg, paprika, milk cream or milk and top with bread crumbs. Bake in hot oven for about 20 minutes. Wash and chop the parsley and sprinkle on the dish at the time of serving.

## **Gantois (hazelnut and raspberry delight)**

Hazelnuts are a very traditional food resource in northern Europe, as it was once covered with dense forests. These small trees, often found wild, were considered particularly important in the Celtic culture, so much that their roots and branches were deemed to possess magic powers.

*You will need:*

150 grams shelled hazelnuts  
150 grams flour  
300 grams sugar  
100 grams butter at room temperature  
200 ml. fresh whipped milk cream  
500 grams fresh *or* frozen raspberries  
about half a cup of milk

Slightly roast the hazelnuts in the oven, then remove the thin skin by rubbing them gently with a cloth. Grind them roughly, then mix the flour, 5 tablespoons of sugar and the butter; make a dough and divide it into small balls. Roll out the balls on a floured surface and bake them in the oven like large biscuits, then remove from the oven and let them cool well. Clean the fresh raspberries, cover them with sugar and let them sit for some time in the fridge.

Whip the fresh milk cream (it will be easier if it is very cold, about 5 C). Prepare a caramel with the remaining sugar by melting it over a very low flame in a large pan, stirring well until the sugar becomes very slightly golden. Turn off the flame and go on stirring, because it will continue to cook as

sugar reaches very high temperatures. After one or two minutes add a little milk and keep stirring until the caramel becomes a smooth cream. The milk is necessary to keep the caramel from becoming a hard candy. Let the caramel cool down very well.

Prepare the individual servings by arranging layers of hazelnut biscuit with the raspberries and whipped cream, then top with the cold caramel sauce. You can keep this dessert in the fridge for about 15 minutes before serving.

## Germany

### Ingredients and techniques

Everyone knows the story of Hansel and Gretel. The fabled house made of marzipan, candied fruits and other sweets described in this famous tale is certainly one of the most enthralling visions for the fantasy of children and adults alike. These luscious, finger-licking, mouth-watering sweets and the other special *delicatessen* are a true comfort especially during the long and cold winters.

Almost all German specialties were created by a particularly industrious family tradition to cope with the climate restrictions in food production; laborious farmers used to prepare and preserve many ingredients to be utilized all the year round for many recipes. Candied fruits, jams and



preserves made in the right season could last for many months; dried fruits and nuts, butter and apples remain good a long time in cold weather; honey, beer, cheese, *sauerkraut* and other preserves were a real capital investment for people who had to live on them for months.

In the 19th century the supporters of natural medicine and vegetarianism in Germany started to sensitize people about the bad effects of meat preserves and excess consumption of alcohol; we may mention Rudolf Steiner and Doctor Bircher-Benner, the man who popularized *müesli*, a special cereal and fruit mix for breakfast. *Müesli* was developed from the traditional breakfast of farmers and mountain people, to supply sufficient energy to cope with a hard working day out in the cold. Before going to bed in the evening, they put cereal grains (or better, cereal flakes) with some water or milk over the stove where embers kept the house warm during the night. In the morning the porridge was ready: it could be enriched with apple slices, walnuts or hazelnuts, honey and some dried fruits.

The main vegetarian ingredients of German cuisine are potatoes, cabbage, apples, berries, walnuts and hazelnuts, milk cream and butter, bread made not only with wheat flour but also with rye, oats and barley, and flaked cereals.

Among the many luscious desserts we may mention the famous apple *Strudel*, the *Krapfen* (doughnuts filled with jam or cream), the *Zelten* (small buns with candied and dried fruits), the *Basel Mousse* (vanilla ice cream with preserved cherries), the *Sacher Torte* (chocolate cake filled with apricot

jam and frosted with chocolate), and the Black Forest cake (layer cake with whipped cream, preserved cherries and chocolate).

## **Rosti**

### **(pan-fried potato cake)**

*You will need:*

1 kg. potatoes

100 grams butter

2 teaspoons powdered rosemary *and/or* sage *and/or* other dried herbs

salt, black pepper (optional)

Peel and wash the potatoes, grate them, add the salt and leave them in a colander, pressing the mass with a heavy object on a lid (you can use a small pot full of water). The lid will squeeze the excess liquid from the grated potatoes, so they will cook more quickly. After about 30 minutes melt 50 grams butter in a non-stick pan (the double one is perfect because you will not get messed up when it's time to turn the cake over). Press the grated potatoes into it and sprinkle with the powdered herbs.

Cook over a very low flame, with the pan covered. After about 10 minutes add the rest of the butter, turn the cake and cook on the other side as well. When the potatoes are soft, raise the flame a little and roast the surface to make it crunchier. Serve immediately. It can be complemented with a vegetable soup, a salad, or stewed leaf vegetables.

## **Biersuppe (beer soup)**

For this recipe you can use either normal beer or non-alcoholic beer; anyway when cooking most of the alcohol evaporates from moderately alcoholic drinks.

*You will need:*

about half liter beer  
100 grams butter  
100 grams wholemeal flour  
12 pumpkin flowers  
one medium sized leek  
100 grams cheese (melting, hard, non-fermented type)  
500 grams of your favourite bread for bread cubes  
salt and pepper  
a vegetable stock cube  
a pinch of cinnamon  
a teaspoon of sugar

Melt the butter in the pot and add the chopped leek; stir-fry for a few minutes then add the flour, always stirring. When the flour is golden add the pumpkin flowers (without stem and center), salt, pepper, cinnamon, sugar and beer. Add a bit of water and a crumbled vegetable stock cube, and let the soup simmer for about 10 minutes. Serve with grated cheese and bread cubes.

## **Wheat grass juice**

This is one of the best detoxifying treatment you can find; you can make it by yourselves at home, growing the tender sprouts from wheat berries and grinding them in your

kitchen blender. This is especially valuable in winter and in cold climates, when there is some scarcity of fresh fruits and vegetables; you can get organized and rotate the batches so that every day you have ready sprouts, or you can choose to prepare them occasionally as a natural food supplement.

For each batch, wash about 200 grams of wheat berries, discarding the broken or damaged ones as they would rot instead of sprouting. Soak them in clean water for the night but in a cool place so that they will not ferment; in the meantime prepare a flat box (the small fruit and vegetable boxes made of light wood are perfect as they can also be stacked), line it with paper and fill it with good clean soil or sand. Next morning scatter the wheat berries on the soil and keep the box in a warm place in the light. If outside it is not too cold, you can keep it on your balcony or terrace. Water the seeds every day, and after 8 to 15 days your wheat grass will be about 8 centimeters tall. Cut it at the root, wash the grass well and liquidize it with clean water. Filter and drink; the fibers can also be used in soups.

## **Strudel (apple pastry roll)**

Like many popular and famous recipes, Strudel has many versions, so you can adjust the filling to your taste.

*You will need  
for the dough:*

400 grams flour  
100 grams butter  
two teaspoons baking soda  
a pinch vanilla extract  
half a cup of milk cream

*for the filling:*

2 large apples  
2 tablespoons fruit jam (cherries *or* apricot, for example)  
a tablespoon raisins  
a tablespoon candied fruits  
a tablespoon slivered almonds *or* chopped nuts  
a tablespoon flour  
a teaspoon ground cinnamon

First prepare the filling by slicing or dicing the apples, dust them with the flour and the cinnamon, then add the other ingredients. Let the mixture sit for some time to soften, while you prepare the dough.

Prepare the dough by mixing the flour with the baking powder and the vanilla extract, then mix in the butter and finally add the milk cream. Knead quickly and roll down on a floured surface to a thickness of about 0.5 cm. Spread the apple mixture on the dough sheet evenly, leaving a couple of centimeters free on the edge. Roll the dough up and seal the top edge, then lay down the big roll on a baking sheet, leaving the sealed edge on the bottom, so it will not break open while cooking. Before baking, prick the roll with a fork or a skewer so that steam can easily escape.

## **Britain**

### **Ingredients and techniques**

In this book, we considered Britain or Britannia as the whole large area composed by England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, besides the smaller islands.

The original British cookery was based mainly on typical Celtic fare: soups, beer, bread and fruits from the forests that once covered all the islands. These forests were sacred to the original inhabitants of Britain, but gradually were destroyed first by Romans (who wanted to get rid of possible excellent hideouts for rebellious natives) and then by the Christians who wanted to get rid of the old Nature religion. A forest was not only a place of beauty, peace and meditation, but also an important source for construction and firewood material as well as of food: hazelnuts, walnuts, chestnuts, berries of many kinds, mushrooms, herbs and roots were usually harvested from the wild.

Things started to change when Britain became the British Empire and gradually took over north America, India and many other large areas which became colonies and regularly sent their products to Britain. Besides cotton and tobacco, potatoes were a major factor in British (and especially Irish) economy for several centuries, and people developed a taste for mustard, curries and chutneys and exotic foods.

But the most distinctive imported ingredient was certainly tea, discovered by the British traders in China and India, and transformed into a characteristic cultural and social icon with some special additions that were not typical of its oriental origins, such as milk, sugar and a choice of sandwiches and pastries.

The most popular British tradition in good food is still "tea time": it is traditionally observed around 4 or 5 pm every day with a wide variety of snacks, both savory and sweet, and can be had as a peaceful and pleasant break with a full display of tablecloth, napkins and chinaware (High Tea) or in a more informal manner as a light refreshment during some other activity. For example, the famous "sandwich" was named after the Earl of Sandwich, who invented it so that he did not have to quit playing cards when hungry.

Another tradition in British cookery is a wide range of fruit sauces, used both as an accompaniment to main course savory dishes or even as a basis for extravagant soups: apple sauce, plum sauce, lemon custard, sauces made with all the different kinds of berries, and so on. Cumberland sauce, for example, is made with gooseberry jelly, mustard, slivered orange rind and lemon juice - and obviously it can not be used as a dessert.

A British breakfast is the main meal of the day: it normally includes coffee or tea, but also orange juice or grapefruit juice, toasted bread, butter and jam, bread buns of many kinds such as muffins and scones, baked beans, and porridge (rolled oats cooked in milk or water). In recent

years, vegetarian and vegan versions of fried or scrambled eggs with bacon or sausage have also been created.

## **Tea time!**

Let's see how to prepare tea according to the traditional British method, that is usually taken very seriously. To make tea, a real boiler kettle is the best: it whistles loudly announcing that the water is ready for the teapot without letting it evaporate silently while you are doing something else. The teapot is preferably a chinaware (especially if you want to do things *properly*). When water is boiling, pour a little into the teapot to warm it up, then discard it. Hurry up to fill the teapot where the tea leaves are already sitting: a teaspoon for each cup, "plus one for the teapot". If you use tea bags, calculate one for each cup.

Usually brewing takes about 3 minutes. Place the teapot on the serving table together with a small container for milk (at room temperature), a sugar basin and the snacks. Usually tea is not served with lemon, but plain or with milk only, although lemon slices can be arranged.

Recently some people have become concerned about the fact that tea contains tannin and thein (a kind of caffeine), two substances that could be detrimental to health in high quantities, and therefore there has been a growing demand for herbal teas. Now the market offers very good herbal tea mixes as well as single herbs you can brew separately as a tea or mix at your best convenience.



Here are some examples:

- hawthorn leaves and flowers (taste, colour and scent are very similar to regular tea, but it is good for blood pressure)
- apple peels, cinnamon, orange rind
- fennel seeds and lemongrass
- rose hips, hibiscus flowers and a teaspoon of orange juice

## **Sandwiches**

The traditional British sandwich is prepared by cutting two small triangles out of a square bread slice (after removing the crust), lightly spreading them with butter and filling them with a thick slice of cheese and/or some cucumber slices. The edges are carefully trimmed and the whole thing is often kept together with a toothpick. Sandwiches can also contain some pickle or savory preserve, gherkins (small cucumbers in vinegar), watercress leaves, mustard sprouts, etc. The butter used to spread the sandwiches can also be flavoured with different ingredients.

\* *Flavoured butter*: prepare 500 grams of butter at room temperature; it should be soft but not melted. Divide the piece of butter in three small bowls and mash it very well with a fork into a smooth cream. To the contents of each bowl add one of the following mixtures:

- 200 grams shelled and ground walnuts, a little salt
- four tablespoons of orange juice, half teaspoon of yellow mustard powder, salt

- four tablespoons of lemon juice, the grated rind of a lemon, one tablespoon of chopped parsley, salt

You can set the three flavors separately or in layers, in which case it is advisable to pass the container in the freezer for a few minutes before spreading the next layer. The container can be lined with the same paper the butter was wrapped in originally. Keep in fridge to harden again. To make butter curls out of this butter, you need to keep it in the fridge for a longer time compared to plain butter.

## **Muffins**

*You will need:*

500 grams flour

25 grams fresh yeast *or* equivalent powdered yeast

half a liter milk

100 grams butter *or* vegetable margarine

100 grams sugar

different flavourings: a ripe banana, *or* 200 grams ground nuts, *or* 200 grams chocolate bits, *or* 200 grams candied fruits etc.

Prepare a bread dough with all the ingredients listed above, choosing the flavouring you prefer. Form small balls and let them raise either in the buttered tray or in paper cups or on the baking sheet. When they have doubled in volume bake them in oven at about 180 C until they are golden; take them out and glaze the surface by quickly passing a piece of butter on the hot muffins.

When they have cooled, serve them plain, or sprinkled with powdered sugar or with butter and jam (berry jam or bitter orange marmalade are the most traditional options).

## **Scones**

*You will need:*

80 grams butter

350 ml milk

75 grams sugar

600 grams flour

some lemon rind

a tablespoon of baking powder

Sift the baking powder with the flour, add sugar, grated lemon rind and mix well, then add the softened butter and finally the cold milk. Quickly knead into a firm dough, divide into small balls, then roll them out about 1 centimeter thick; arrange these on a baking sheet, cut the surface to allow them to cook evenly also in the middle, then bake in hot oven until they are golden brown.

## **Russia**

### **Ingredients and techniques**

The culture area we are generically calling Russia is actually larger than that particular nation, and refers to the region covering not only Russia proper, but also Lithuania, Estonia,

Lettonia, Belarus, Ucraina and Moldavia, as well as the neighbouring Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Yugoslavia (presently further divided into smaller nations), down to the border of Greece in the south west, and Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland in the north, and Kazakisthan in the east. The common heritage of this north-eastern part of Europe starts with the slavic peoples, then it absorbed the influence of the Orthodox Church, the Czarist empire and the Soviet Union.

The quality of the climate and the agricultural potential, ethnic identity, religious attachments and trade exchanges are essential factors in the development of a food culture. Russian winters are famous for being extremely cold, so in this region culture has developed around this overpowering reality, that is certainly hard enough to shape the character and lifestyle of its people.

It is now known that the foods growing in each specific climate and season are the most suitable to help people endure the conditions of that situation; therefore we should also try to get advantage from this natural quality of foods, and consume mostly seasonal fruits, vegetables and grains, thus availing of fresh and natural foods and at the same time equipping ourselves for the needs of the hour. A wide range of dishes are prepared with the available ingredients, cleverly preserved and presented as appetizers, hearty soups, preserves and pickles. Bread is made with wheat but also with buckwheat, rye and oats, that are suited to colder climates. Milk and milk products are also widely used.

Tea is another popular favourite, simmered and kept hot in the famous Russian teapot called *samovar*. Unfortunately the cold climate encourages the consumption of alcoholic drinks, with heavy consequences on social health.

## **Borscht (beetroot and milk cream soup)**

A cold soup is the last thing we might expect in a cold country, but this recipe is probably the most famous Russian specialty and has several versions.

*You will need:*

4 beetroots (preferably not pre-cooked)  
150 grams beetroot leaves *or* radish *or* turnip leaves  
a small cucumber  
a bunch of chives  
a bunch of mint leaves  
200 ml. milk cream *or* yogurt  
a teaspoon of fennel seeds, slightly roasted and ground  
a tablespoon of chopped tarragon  
wholemeal *or* rye bread

Clean, wash and peel the beetroots, then slice them finely. If you have uncooked beetroots, cook them in salted water for about 30 minutes, then add the cleaned and trimmed leaves and cook for 10 minutes more.

If you have purchased already boiled or baked beetroots (that are deep red in color and give out a thick juice) you should first wilt the radish leaves and then cook the sliced

beetroot for a few minutes more. When the vegetables are cooked, let them cool down, then add the peeled and diced cucumber, the chopped herbs, the fennel seeds, salt and milk cream or yogurt. Allow to sit for at least half an hour before serving. Serve with slightly toasted bread slices.

## **Blinis** **(buckwheat pancakes)**

Buckwheat flour is a very healthy and popular ingredient in colder climates. You can allow the batter to ferment slightly overnight or add a little yeast to speed up the process. For the filling, you can also experiment with various other ingredients, but if you want to keep the “authentic” flavor, choose ingredients that are available in northern countries.

*You will need:*

200 grams buckwheat flour

100 grams wholemeal wheat flour

10 grams fresh yeast

water *or* buttermilk *or* diluted yogurt to make a batter

100 grams fresh butter *or* vegetable margarine

300 grams of potatoes (two or three large potatoes)

300 grams of cabbage (about six or seven large leaves)

one medium-sized carrot

a bunch of parsley

a pinch of nutmeg *or* black pepper

a glass of milk cream

Prepare the batter by beating together the two flours, the liquid you prefer (water, buttermilk or diluted yogurt), salt

and yeast. Allow the batter to sit until doubled in volume, then beat it again. The batter should be rather thin, like yogurt, otherwise it will not spread evenly in the pan and will not cook well.

Prepare the filling by chopping the potatoes, the carrot and the cabbage leaves, then cook them with 30 grams butter, a little salt and a cup of water, over a low flame in a covered pot. Allow to simmer for at least 15 minutes until the vegetables are tender. When the water has dried up, add half a glass of milk cream, nutmeg, half of the chopped parsley and keep heating and stirring for a few seconds more without the lid. Then remove from the fire and let it cool.

Now take a clean non-stick pan (watch out for scratches on the non-stick pans, they make the pan more hazardous to health than plain aluminium pans) and after heating it over a very low flame for a few seconds, melt a small piece of butter. If the temperature is right, the butter bit will run here and there in the pan and sizzle, without smoking. Pour a little batter with the ladle (stir the mixture before taking it out of the container as it tends to separate because heavier parts will sink to the bottom) and spread it on the pan evenly with the bottom of the ladle. Let the batter thicken for a few minutes until the edges of the pancake are crisp, then gently turn the pancake and cook it on the other side as well. Turning the pancakes requires a little skill: if you don't trust your wrist use a lid to facilitate the move. Go on cooking pancakes by using bits of butter; you should get 8

or 9 pancakes from the quantity of batter you prepared, according to the size of your pan. When a pancake is ready, fill it with the vegetables and roll it up, then arrange in a serving plate. After rolling up all the pancakes, garnish with the rest of the cream and parsley and keep warm until serving time.

### **Koulibiac (spinach roll pastry)**

This savory pastry has a very interesting technique for the popular combination of rice, spinach and cheese that we can find in many traditions. Rice has been used in Europe for many centuries although it originated in the East, so it has become a basic ingredient in many recipes; all the other ingredients have existed in the region for thousands of years.

*You will need:*

200 grams white rice

1 kg. fresh spinach *or* 300 grams frozen spinach

50 grams butter

one lemon

one tablespoon of milk cream

200 grams of cheese

500 grams of puff pastry (fresh or frozen) *or* other dough

a pinch nutmeg

a pinch of paprika

Boil the rice in salted water until it is a little mushy, then drain and let it cool. You can use the rice water later as a



tasty and nutritious extra ingredient in some soup or sauce. While the rice cooks, clean, chop and cook the spinach with the butter, the nutmeg and salt. If you use fresh spinach, make sure you really wash them very well by immersing them in a large container. It is best to change their water three times and take them out of the water in a colander. Do not add water for cooking, otherwise the spinach will lose taste and nutrition power; just put them in the pot with a little butter and a little salt, cook over low flame and tightly cover the pot with a lid.

When the spinach are cooked, add the lemon juice (and grated rind, if you like), paprika and milk cream, then stir well, add the grated cheese and stir again. Let it cool well. Roll out the dough into a thin sheet, spread the cooled rice on it, then spread the spinach. Roll it up as for a Strudel, arrange the roll in a baking pan and make small holes with a toothpick to allow the steam to escape during baking. Bake in hot oven at about 180 C until the crust is golden; then take it out of the oven and glaze it by quickly passing a piece of butter over the surface. Serve warm or cold.

### **Easter cake**

For centuries Russia has been under the strong influence of Orthodox Christianity, starting from the days of ancient Eastern Roman Empire, with capital in Byzantium. The Czars made the Orthodox priests a privileged class, and in return the priests supported them in oppressing the general

population, exactly like Catholic bishops and priests did in Europe. The Communist revolution strongly opposed religion, with the result of turning the Russian Orthodox church into an underground movement and strengthening the religious sentiments of the people. When the *perestroika* ended the old regime, thousands of people gathered again in the old churches to celebrate. Easter is probably the most important Christian festivity in Russia, also marking the beginning of the spring season, the birth of the new calves and sheep, and a welcome relief from the rigid Russian winter.

*You will need*

*for the dough:*

300 grams flour

50 grams butter

a pinch of salt

one heaped tablespoon of icing sugar

a teaspoon baking soda *or* baking powder

100 ml condensed milk

grated lemon rind

a pinch of vanilla extract

*for the filling:*

200 grams fresh cottage cheese

50 grams raisin

50 grams almonds

50 grams mixed candied fruits *or* peels

100 grams sugar *or* honey

100 grams butter plus a little more

one tablespoon flour

one teaspoon baking soda

one tablespoon bread crumbs

Mix the flour with the salt, the vanilla extract, the lemon rind and the icing sugar, add the baking soda and mix well. Add the butter, then pour in the condensed milk and knead into a ball. Let the dough sit for a few minutes while you prepare the filling.

Mix the fresh cottage cheese in a bowl with the raisin, the almonds, the sugar or honey, the butter and the flour. Grease a round baking pan with a little butter and sprinkle with bread crumbs; heat the oven while you prepare the cake. Roll the dough on a floured surface to a thickness of about 3 mm, then line a deep baking pan, leaving tall edges to contain the filling. The cuttings can be used to make nice strips over the filled cake before baking it.

When the baking pan is well lined and the dough strips are ready, add the baking soda to the cottage cheese mix (to make it lighter and fluffier) and pour the mix into the baking pan. Decorate with the strips and bake until the crust is slightly golden. Serve cold.

## **United States of America**

What should we say about the USA? Since the beginning of their history they have been called a "melting pot" where all cultures and traditions mixed and boiled in a rather restless way: several waves of English, Irish and Scottish deportees or emigrants, African slaves, fortune-seekers from Italy, Germany, Poland and Holland, Chinese workers, and later on Russians, Indians, south Americans and many others.

The United States have been the "land of opportunities", where all ethnic, religious and social groups could find their own space and fortune, especially after the abolition of slavery following the Civil War. All of them, except those who actually had the most natural rights to the land: the Native Americans, the "red-skinned" tribes who had always lived in its forests, plains, hills and deserts.

Today the Native Americans are trying to win back a social and cultural place for their people, but the most difficult battle they have to fight is within themselves, to recover the faith and appreciation for their own roots and to cultivate them with a deeper understanding. Actually the mission of the United States of America should have been about developing a pacific and constructive way of coexistence and cooperation among many different peoples and cultures without losing all their distinctive flavours, just like a really good soup can blend many ingredients of different nature without obliterating their tastes and textures. The secret here is to respect the values and needs of others - and this must start from understanding and appreciating them.

### **Before the "foreigners" came**

The Native American cookery tradition is not very famous; as due to the nomadic life of most of the northern tribes, people usually had to keep their belongings simple and easily replaceable. They did not use pots, rather they put

hot stones in skin bags filled with water to get it boiling, or they roasted food directly on a flat stone, on fire embers or an open fire. The southern tribes depended more on the cultivation of the land than on hunting, so they developed a number of interesting recipes that were passed on to the settlers and were the origin of the Mexican-style cookery.

Corn bread, corn berry patties, corn cream, pop corns, tomatoes, pumpkin, beans, peppers, pine nuts and pecan nuts, Jerusalem artichokes, sunflower seeds, quinoa, black wild rice and of course potatoes were their staple foods, together with strawberries and other berries, and the sweet sap of maple trees (called maple syrup) which produces instant natural "candies" when poured on the snow.

The famous "Thanksgiving day", still one of the major American holidays, was originally celebrated by the native peoples as the festival for the new harvest, and it became an important celebration for the first settlers as well. Unfortunately the early European immigrants had very little respect for the natural resources of the land and for the native people, whom they considered uncivilized and irreligious. The self-righteous settlers tended to create a violent and exploitative culture, seizing whatever land they wanted, and moving enormous herds of cattle so that the native bisons, a major source of survival for the nomadic tribes, had to be eliminated to give pastures to the cows.

The decimated native tribes were pushed back into reservations, where much of their traditions was lost.

## **Ingredients and techniques of Northern States**

Not surprisingly, the ideal diet of the ruthless cowboys was based on meat, and their favourite drink was distilled whiskey, useful to keep gastric acids strong enough to digest the flesh fibers. Their general idea of vegetables was potato, although small farmers and less wealthy families in the country consumed more beans, maize, wheat, as well as seasonal vegetables and fruits. After a couple of centuries the results of the meat, potato and alcohol diet became so evident that many vegetarian and hygienist activists (often led by religious groups like the Seventh Day Adventists and other protestant sects) could easily demonstrate the validity of vegetarianism for human health; however this concern remained mainly in the intellectual classes and has even been ridiculed by the “tough men of the West”.

With the introduction of industrial and consumeristic values, the modern lifestyle in the northern States became increasingly focused on economical development, business and entertainment, with such a fast pace that rarely people get the time to think about what they are doing, until some major problem comes in their way and they are forced to stop and think. Indeed in the last few decades many north Americans have really started to meditate, and the results can be seen gradually changing the lifestyle and values. After the baby boom generation and the hippy movement, now the New Age movement is blending spiritual values and personal growth with financial needs and the American

dream of good comfortable and stylish life. However, the danger is represented by fad diets and obsession for so-called miracle foods.

Today the American consumers can choose among an incredible variety of products, cookery traditions and techniques, some of them entirely new, like the meat substitutes and other recent inventions (they even make vegetarian sausage, bacon and ham). We cannot say that all of these "substitute" foods are good, but definitely you should try to prepare vegetarian hamburgers.

### **Veg burgers (mixed vegetable and grains patties)**

There are many vegetarian counterparts of the (in)famous meat hamburger; we say infamous because many people today have recognized that it is indeed a junk food - it can be made practically with any kind of meat or leftovers of any type, quality and origin. Of course the vegetarian version is much healthier and cannot be considered junk food, especially when it is made with first class fresh vegetable ingredients.

You can try various combinations and see which is your favourite recipe: rice and other grain cereals, tapioca, cereal flakes, vegetables, beans, potatoes, nuts, cheese of all kinds, textured soya protein, are some of the ingredients you can experiment with. The only important thing that you must remember is to add a small quantity of chickpea flour to

keep the whole thing from falling apart at the time of cooking the burger. For this purpose you can use chickpea flour in various proportions in all the savory dishes that usually require eggs to keep the whole thing together while cooking.

Among the high-protein ingredients that can go into a veg burger, besides the obvious beans and chickpeas, *seitan* is a healthy natural meat substitute consisting of wheat gluten and you can even make it at home with plain wheat flour, *tofu* is a non-dairy fresh cottage cheese made with soya milk, *okara* is the pulp of soya beans obtained after making soya milk, and *tempeh* is a cultured specialty usually made from soya beans and which is especially rich in B vitamins.

When choosing the trimmings for assembling the burger, keep in mind that lettuce and sprouts wilt when in contact with heat, so let the patties cool down and do not toast the inside of the bread bun. You can also experiment by using for example fried or grilled eggplant slices, any grilled vegetable (cauliflower, zucchini etc), ripe avocado slices or mash, roasted bell peppers, slabs of fried or grilled cottage cheese, pesto sauce, tomato sauce, salad dressings or cocktail sauce (eggless mayonnaise mixed with some tomato sauce).

*You will need  
for 8 patties:*

one cup of boiled rice

one cup of boiled millet

two boiled potatoes *or* 200 grams of steamed pumpkin



one cup of red beetroot, boiled *or* baked, grated  
half a cup of cooked beans, mashed  
half a cup of bread crumbs  
four tablespoons sesame seeds, slightly roasted  
half a cup of chickpea flour  
two tablespoons of natural soya sauce  
two tablespoons of chopped parsley  
your favourite spices: nutmeg, chili pepper, etc.  
sunflower oil for deep frying

*for assembling:*

8 bread buns  
8 lettuce leaves (*or* other suitable salad leaves) *or* sprouts  
(green soya beans, watercress, mustard, etc.)  
4 tomato slices  
8 thin slices of melting cheese (optional)  
ketchup, *or* eggless mayonnaise *or* mustard sauce  
one onion, thinly sliced (optional)  
gherkins and pickles (optional)

Mix all the ingredients for the burger patties (except the oil for frying) and add salt to your taste (remember that soya sauce already contains some salt); the mix should be easy to handle and to shape in flat patties. If it is too stiff, add some more potatoes or pumpkin, if it is too soft, add a little more breadcrumbs. Heat the oil in the frying pan and when it starts moving (not smoking) fry a first patty; if it tends to fall apart add a little more chickpea flour (it means some ingredients were too watery). Do not add too much chickpea flour, otherwise your patties will become hard after cooking. Deep fry the patties in small batches for a few minutes until they are golden brown, then drain and arrange them in the buns with the trimmings, making sure the warm patty is not in contact with the lettuce leaves.

Cut the buns, spread sauce on both inner sides, then place the lettuce leaves, the tomato and onion, then the cheese and finally the burger. Serve immediately. If you want to keep the "fast food look" you can also accompany with fried potato sticks.

## **Heroes (stuffed bread loaf)**

This is an interesting fast food item, also allowing plenty of space for various ingredients as per your imagination and taste, so feel free to experiment.

*You will need:*

two bread loaves of about 300 grams each

1 kg. fresh spinach *or* 200 grams frozen spinach

50 grams butter

nutmeg, chili pepper, black pepper *and/or* other spices

two tablespoons of raisins

half a cup of walnuts *or* pine nuts *or* cashew nuts

100 grams of cheese (hard, non-fermenting, melting type)

200 grams of cottage cheese *or* ricotta cheese *or* cream cheese

Cut the top off the bread loaves and remove the central part; you can keep it aside for some other recipe (it is a good ingredient for stuffing baked vegetables). Stir-fry the spinach with the butter, raisins and a little salt; you can add your favourite spices at this time. If you are using fresh spinach, first let them cook down over a low flame in a covered pot, then go on stir-frying them.

When the spinach are rather dry, add the chopped nuts, the cheeses and mix well. Stuff the bread loaves with this mix and press well; put the top back on the loaves and wrap in foil or plastic, then let sit in the fridge for at least two hours. At serving time, unwrap the loaves and slice them.

## Apple pie

Apple pie is so traditional that has become a symbol in itself - as we say "as American as apple pie". And as it usually happens with very popular and successful recipes, there are many versions accommodating different tastes and needs and availability of ingredients.

The same technique can also be used for making pies with other fruits (cherries, berries, pears, apricots, etc) or even vegetables. The ingredients given below are for a 20 centimeters wide pie pan.

*You will need  
for the filling:*

4 or 5 apples

two tablespoons of flour

one tablespoon of raisins

a pinch of ground cinnamon or ginger

about two tablespoons of light brown sugar

*for the dough:*

one cup of plain flour

1/3 cup of butter *or* vegetable margarine

ice-cold water

half teaspoon of salt

Mix the flour with the salt and then add the butter or margarine cut in small pieces, mash with a fork as using your hands will tend to melt the butter. When the butter is completely covered with flour and the flour looks wet, pour in a little ice-cold water and stir, until a rough ball of rather dry dough is formed. Press it quickly into a ball and put it in the fridge for a few minutes. In the meantime wash and trim the apples, slice them finely and mix them with the other ingredients of the filling.

Now divide the dough in two, roll the two halves out and use one sheet to line the pie pan; arrange the filling then cover with the other half of the dough. Seal the edges carefully and make some holes on the top to allow the steam to escape during baking. Bake in hot oven until the surface is golden, then take it out, glaze the surface by quickly rubbing a small piece of butter and let it cool before cutting into slices. You may serve it as it is, or sprinkled with confectioner's sugar, accompanied with ice cream, whipped cream or a berry sauce.

## **Ingredients and techniques of Southern States**

The Southern USA are very attached to tradition, to "old good times", and this feeling naturally applies to kitchens, too, where the angel of the house (or the servant) prepares delicious dishes for the family. Unfortunately we cannot say that this homely tradition is distinctively vegetarian: in spite of plenty of different vegetable ingredients, meals here usually consist of meat, sausage and fried chicken (famous all over America), vegetables are cooked in animal fat and even biscuits are made with bacon fat.

For a vegetarian, and even for those who are just trying to control their cholesterol levels, this cookery style needs to be carefully revised... but have no fear, the vegetarian revolution is marching on in this direction, too: a number of "all-vegetarian supermarkets" have opened in the Deep South, and they started to make good business.

The main vegetarian ingredients used in this cookery style are rice, maize (generally called corn), sweet potatoes (yam), peanuts, tomatoes, mustard and turnip greens, okra and different kinds of beans. The exotic spices and flavourings originally imported by the same ships which transported the slaves from Africa, and the influences of Spanish, French, Portuguese and African cuisines contribute a variety of colours and scents; black pepper is particularly used and appreciated, and garlic and onions are used in very large quantities - this is mainly because these two vegetables partially counteract the effects of non vegetarian foods, as tradition and instinct suggest.

Cajun cuisine is typical of the descendants of the French settlers who established their farms in Louisiana, while Creole cuisine is a mixture of local native traditions and African culture, with some Spanish and French influence: hearty soups, pumpkin and mixed vegetable casseroles, mixed fruit and vegetable salad, rice served with baked beans, rich fruit salads and so on. An important technique is the gravy, developed from the "roux" inherited from French cookery, which is at the basis of many recipes. Heat a little butter or oil in a saucepan, then stir-fry chopped

onion and bell pepper sprinkled with flour. Cook stirring until the flour is golden, then add the liquid and the other ingredients.

## **Fried green tomatoes**

If you want a lighter dish, you may bake them instead of frying. In this case, you can arrange the tomato slices (coated in flour) on a baking sheet with a little oil, and bake them until the flour is golden.

*You will need:*

100 grams finely ground corn flour

100 grams wheat flour

4 large green tomatoes

100 grams butter *or* 4 tablespoons sunflower oil

100 grams grated hard cheese

salt and pepper to taste

Mix the two flours, salt and pepper in a bowl. Slice the tomatoes rather thickly (at least one centimeter thick). Tomatoes do not need to be completely green, but they should be very firm, otherwise they will tend to melt while cooking. Dip the slices in cold water and then in the flour mix, and set aside in a tray to dry.

Heat the butter or oil in a frying pan over medium flame and arrange a few slices; after some minutes (when one side is golden) turn over the tomato slices and cook on the other side as well. Serve with toasted bread.

## **Coleslaw (cabbage salad)**

This very popular salad is served as a side dish and sometimes used as a garnish for burgers and sandwiches. Also, apart from the cabbage and apples, there can be different ingredients according to taste, availability and dietary considerations; for example instead of the yogurt you can use eggless mayonnaise, and instead of peanuts you can use almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds or other seeds.

### *You will need:*

half white cabbage, uncooked  
2 apples of the variety of your choice  
1 medium sized cucumber  
a tablespoon of raisins *or* cranberries  
1 green bell pepper  
2 tablespoons of roasted shelled peanuts  
1 glass plain yogurt  
2 tablespoons oil (optional)  
the juice of two lemons, salt  
a teaspoon mustard sauce (optional)  
one cup of bread cubes, toasted or shallow-fried

Finely shred the cabbage, dice the apples, finely slice the cucumber, soak the raisins in hot water for a few minutes, cut the bell pepper in stripes and mix everything in a salad bowl. Beat the yogurt with the salt, the lemon juice, oil and mustard sauce, then pour on the salad. Serve with toasted or shallow-fried bread cubes. This salad keeps well in the fridge, although it tends to become softer.

## **Gombo (okra casserole)**

The secret to cook okra well is to strictly avoid dampness in the first stage of their preparation, as if they get water at this time, they ooze a kind of slime which is not very appealing. Otherwise, this vegetable is very good and tasty. So you should never wash okra in running water or soak them in water; it is better to wipe them with a damp cloth and let them dry well before cutting. Also slice them with a dry knife and dry hands, and you will have no problems. After thoroughly stir-frying the sliced okra in a little oil, you can add the liquid required by your recipe, because they will be "stabilized" and will cook like any other vegetable.

The non-vegetarian ingredients often used in the traditional version of this recipe can be replaced with tofu and textured soya protein, or cottage cheese and seitan or tempeh.

### *You will need:*

300 grams tofu *or* firm cottage cheese  
300 grams re-hydrated textured soya protein, *or* seitan *or* tempeh  
two tablespoons natural soya sauce  
half teaspoon ground turmeric  
half teaspoon ground coriander seeds  
half teaspoon ground red chili pepper  
one teaspoon each of rosemary, sage, and thyme  
three small bay leaves  
half teaspoon of cayenne pepper  
a pinch of black pepper, ground



half teaspoon of paprika  
about 100 ml sunflower oil  
100 grams wholemeal flour  
two small onions or two small leeks  
one green bell pepper  
one red bell pepper  
500 grams okra  
300 grams radish greens *and/or* spinach  
300 grams rice  
vegetable stock  
4 tablespoons lemon juice  
a large bunch of fresh parsley, chopped

Stir-fry the tofu or cottage cheese in about six tablespoons oil, then drain it and use the same oil to stir-fry the okra. When the okra is slightly golden, drain it and set aside; stir-fry the textured soya protein (or seitan or tempeh), adding also the soya sauce and a first batch of spices: turmeric, coriander, red chili pepper, rosemary, sage, thyme, bay leaf. The order of stir-frying is important because the different ingredients require a progressively smaller amount of oil in order to cook properly.

Finally add a glass of water and let the protein cook down for a few minutes. In another pan use about 4 tablespoons of oil to stir-fry the chopped onion or leek, then add the bell peppers and the flour, stirring continuously until the vegetables are tender and the flour is golden. Add two cups of water and mix with the okra, the tofu, the textured soya protein, the greens and spinach, the vegetable stock cubes and let cook for about 15 minutes in a covered pot. If you prefer a more liquid soup, add water as needed.

In another pot cook the rice with the remaining oil, salt, paprika and a double volume of water (measured to the rice volume) if the rice is white, or three times as much water if you are using brown rice. When the rice is done, transfer on a serving plate. A few minutes before serving add to the okra casserole the lemon juice, black pepper and chopped parsley.

## **Hopping John (rice with beans)**

This dish is very popular in New Orleans, the city of jazz, and particularly for the New Year's Eve dinner, because tradition says that it will bring good fortune for the whole year. The all-vegetarian version can use textured soya protein, seitan or tempeh, and the good fortune will not be diminished - in fact it will be greater.

### *You will need:*

300 grams long grain rice  
100 grams boiled corn berries  
one red bell pepper  
one celery stalk  
one bunch fresh chopped parsley  
100 grams black-eyed peas  
one onion *or* leek  
one garlic clove (optional)  
200 grams re-hydrated soya protein, *or* seitan *or* tempeh  
four tablespoons sunflower oil  
one tablespoon wholemeal flour  
one tablespoon natural soya sauce

one large bay leaf  
a pinch of black pepper  
a pinch of red cayenne pepper  
grated lemon rind

First of all prepare the black-eyed peas by soaking them overnight (otherwise boil them for 2 minutes and let them sit in the covered pot for one hour). Cook the beans in the pressure cooker with about 1 liter water, the chopped onion or leek, the celery stalk, crushed garlic, spices and lemon rind. When the beans are soft, remove from the fire.

Cut the bell pepper into stripes, stir-fry it in oil for 3 minutes, then drain and set aside. In the same oil stir-fry the textured soya protein (or seitan or tempeh), then add the soya sauce, sprinkle with flour and stir-fry for 2 more minutes. Add a little of the cooking liquid of the beans and let the gravy thicken, then pour the protein into the beans casserole and simmer everything until the beans start to mash. Add salt to your taste.

In a separate pot cook the rice with a double amount of water (if white, or three times if brown), adding the boiled corn berries at the end. Arrange the cooked rice on serving plates, pour on the bean sauce and decorate with the bell pepper stripes and chopped parsley. You can serve with stewed leafy greens and corn bread.

## Mexico and Latin America

### Ingredients and techniques

The culture and cuisine of Latin America developed from the encounter between ingredients and techniques of native peoples (usually called *indios*) and the Spanish tradition of the *conquistadores*. For practical purposes, because we do not have sufficient space to deal separately with specific areas, we have included all the central and southern American region, from Mexico to Argentina.

Even more than potatoes, corn (maize) has always been largely used in different varieties and recipes starting from the famous *tortillas*, a flat corn bread very similar to Indian *chapatis* or Italian *piadinas*. These are served in an enormous range of dishes, and basically are the staple food, at least accompanied by a fiery spicy hot *salsa* of tomatoes and bell peppers. Chillies are very typical of the tradition, too.

Beans are used in almost all recipes, even as a dessert: cook the beans until they are tender, then stir-fry them in a non-stick pan with sugar, a little butter, a pinch of cloves and aniseed. When they are dry allow the cream to cool before serving. Rice is served generally with beans or in soup.

Other typical ingredients of Latin American cuisine are *cilantro* (coriander leaves), potatoes, yams (sweet potatoes), pumpkin, avocados, tomatoes, corn cobs, quinoa (a cereal grain growing on a tree) and other local vegetables.

## **Tortillas (flat corn bread)**

The dough is traditionally prepared by soaking the dry corn berries in lime water to make them more easily digestible. Lime stone solutions are also used in Italy to soften unripe green olives so that they can be preserved in brine and used like the ripe black ones. After a few hours, the softened corn berries are rubbed with cloth to remove the bran loosened by the lime water, then after at least half an hour they are ground with a little water and salt into a smooth dough (called *masa*). Another 30 minutes are required to allow the dough to soften further (covered by a cloth), then the dough balls are flattened and cooked on a hot stone or iron plate. If you want to speed up the process, you may use finely ground corn flour (called *masa harina*), kneading it into a dough with a little water and salt. Allow the dough to sit for about 30 minutes before rolling it out and cooking the flat breads. You can add a teaspoon of butter or sesame oil. A different kind of *tortillas* can also be prepared with wheat flour and a little butter.

Some famous recipes with *tortillas*:

\* *Burritos*: stuff the *tortillas* (usually with rice and beans), roll them up and serve with any sauce (preferably tomato).

\* *Fajitas*: mix oil, lemon juice and spices (you can add a little soya sauce for extra flavor) and use it to marinate tomatoes, bell peppers, pumpkin, eggplants or other vegetables, then grill the vegetables, fill the *tortillas* and serve with sauce.

\* *Enchiladas*: spread a sauce on each *tortilla*, fill them with some stuffing, roll them up and bake for a few minutes.

\* *Quesadillas*: grate some hard cheese (the Monterey cheese is the original one), fill the *tortillas*, fold them in half and grill them or roast them on a hot plate; they are good with a fresh *salsa* (usually chopped raw tomatoes) or grilled and peeled ed bell peppers.

\* *Tostadas*: prepare the *tortillas*, roast them in the oven until they are crispy, then pile them up in layers with fillings or trimmings.

\* *Tacos*: rub some butter or oil on the *tortillas*, hang them on a mould so they will make a sort of pouch to contain the filling, and roast them in the oven.

\* *Nachos*: cut the *tortillas* in smaller pieces (usually triangles) and deep fry them or roast them in the oven after rubbing them with oil.

Here are some ideas about fillings:

\* *Guacamole*: a cream of ripe avocado mashed with lemon juice, chopped onions or leeks and salt. It is often served with plain Tortillas, Enchiladas or Tacos. Make sure that the avocado is ripe and soft but not rotten (the pulp should be green and not brownish or grey), as often the avocados sold on the market are quite hard but they quickly pass the ripeness point.

\* *Chili con carne*: it can be prepared with textured soya protein or seitan instead of meat. Stir-fry the vegetarian

protein with a little oil, bell peppers, hot chili pepper, paprika, onion or leeks, a few herbs (sage, rosemary, thyme, bay leaf) and a tablespoon of flour. When the flour foams, add one tablespoon natural soya sauce (not typical of the region, but useful for the meaty flavor), a cup of tomato puree, water or vegetable stock to the desired density and let it simmer for at least 15 minutes. If you want a thicker gravy, you may add a cup of cooked beans with the liquids and cook until they are mashed.

\* *Chili con queso*: follow the above recipe but substitute the vegetal protein with cubes of fresh cheese (*queso fresco*).

\* *Frijoles refritos*: boil the beans with your favourite spices and herbs, then stir-fry them in oil or butter, and add salt.

\* *Fresh salad*: made with lettuce leaves, bean sprouts, chopped onion or leek, bell peppers, avocado bits, tomato slices, and small cubes of fresh cottage cheese.

### **Chili con frijoles colados (baked beans in hot chili pepper sauce)**

In America the word “*chili*” or “*chile*” refers to a savory stew usually spiced with “*chili peppers*”, and gave the name to the large nation of Chile. Another traditional ingredient of the recipe are beans, a very important source of protein that goes very well with maize, not only in the kitchen but in the agricultural fields as well. The native peoples used to plant the maize first, then 5 beans around each plant, and then scatter some pumpkin seeds in between the maize. In

this way the beans plants climbed on the maize for support, releasing nitrogen into the soil in return, while the pumpkin covered the ground with leaves, preventing the propagation of weeds and retaining valuable moisture inside the soil.

*You will need:*

200 grams black beans  
one onion or leek, some garlic (optional)  
1 kg. bell peppers (of different colours)  
300 grams ripe tomatoes  
four tablespoons sunflower oil  
one tablespoon butter  
hot chilli peppers as per your taste  
half teaspoon of turmeric  
salt and pepper

Boil the beans in the pressure cooker until they are tender. In the meantime wash and trim the bell peppers and onion (or leek) and stir-fry them over a low flame with oil, garlic and turmeric, in a non-stick pan. After a few minutes add the diced tomatoes and the hot chilli peppers. When the beans are done, pour them in the bell peppers pan and go on cooking for another 10 minutes, stirring well with a wooden spoon. Serve with Tortillas or toasted bread.

## **Llapingachos (potato patties)**

*You will need,  
for the patties:*

1 kg. potatoes  
one onion *or* leek  
a garlic clove (optional)



a bunch of fresh cilantro (coriander leaves)  
half teaspoon chilli pepper or paprika, salt  
400 grams fresh cottage cheese *or* tofu  
100 grams tapioca pearls  
2 tablespoons sunflower oil  
sunflower oil for deep frying

*for the sauce:*

200 grams shelled and roasted peanuts  
2 tablespoons sunflower oil  
one onion (or leek)  
some garlic (optional)  
400 grams ripe tomatoes  
a pinch of chilli pepper, salt

Start by boiling the potatoes, drain and cut them in half to let them cool more quickly, then peel and mash. While the potatoes are cooking, soak the tapioca with a little warm water (sufficient to cover them). Chop the onion (or leek) and stir-fry it in oil with the garlic (you can remove it after frying). Clean and chop the coriander leaves. When the potatoes are cooked and mashed, add the stir-fried onion, the fresh cheese, drained tapioca pearls, coriander leaves, chilli powder and salt. Mix well and let it cool a little; this is the mixture for the patties. Prepare the sauce by stir-frying the other onion and garlic, then add the chopped tomatoes, chilli pepper, salt, and simmer over a low flame. In the meantime coarsely grind the roasted peanuts and then add them to the sauce. Simmer for a few minutes more, stirring well to avoid sticking on the bottom of the pan, then remove from fire. Heat the deep-frying oil, fry the patties, drain them and serve immediately with the hot sauce.

## **Humitas (corn cob surprise)**

If you find corn cobs with their leaves, you can prepare this authentic Peruvian specialty. The corn berries should be tender and the leaves still green and soft; as this happens only for a short time after the harvest you may consider purchasing a good quantity and freezing them.

### *You will need:*

8 fresh tender corn cobs with leaves

100 grams boiled corn berries (besides the cobs)

50 grams fresh cottage cheese

50 grams hard cheese (Monterey type or other hard, non fermented, melting type)

one onion (or leek)

hot chilli pepper (optional)

2 large tomatoes

100 grams butter

a glass of milk

Remove the outer leaves of the corn cobs, set them aside. Grate the tender berries off the cobs and keep them in a bowl. Stir-fry the onion or leek in the butter, then add the hot chilli pepper, the grated corn berries, the boiled corn, the two diced tomatoes, and simmer for a few minutes. Let it cool. Grate the cheese and add it to the other ingredients, mix well, then divide into 8 parts and wrap the stuffing in the cob leaves. Tie the bundles with white cotton thread and bake them in oven for about 20 minutes. Serve warm.

# India

## Ingredients and techniques

Indian cuisine is extremely rich and interesting, thanks to the great variety of natural vegetarian ingredients and to the fact that most Indian people (especially Hindus and Sikhs) consider food as a very important religious symbol - as offering to God, help for meditation and token of blessing and opulence. During the colorful Indian religious festivals food has a role which is more important than in any other celebration in the world.

Indians usually take three meals a day, but all the day long (and most of the night) you can see a number of people drinking the all-pervasive *chai* (tea boiled with water and milk), nibbling on street foods and “tiffins” such as sweets (an amazing variety), all sorts of biscuits, fresh fruits and cucumbers sprinkled with salt and spices, snacks made with fried chickpea batter mixed with peanuts and spices, sprout salads, filled pastries, vegetable fritters, tiny puffed bread with sauces, salty doughnuts with yogurt sauce, pancakes. Sometimes instead of tea they have cold drinks, sugarcane juice, coconut water, fruit juices, yogurt drinks and more.

Everything can be found in tiny shops or stalls often less than two square meters large, where they cook, serve the food and wash the plates in a bucket under the table. If you are travelling in India and wish to taste some of these street

foods, we suggest that you choose a shop with a regular running water supply, and a service using disposable earthen food containers or leaf plates.

The same snacks are also prepared in traditional families, usually by the wife or mother, and while visiting people's homes, offices or shops you may be offered some drink or food, as it is customary to treat guests and even customers. This does not mean that you are forced to accept the drinks and foods, although you should try to be sensitive and not to offend your hosts. *Chai* will be the basic item, but you may also get *nimbu pani* (lemonade, often salted instead of sweet), *lassi* (yogurt drink), or *sharbat* (juice or syrup drink), and some fruits and sweets like *halava* (a buttered semolina pudding) or *laddu* (small fried droplets of chickpea flour stuck together with sugar syrup and sometimes raisins and nuts). In Bengal you could be offered some Bengali milk sweets and *puri* (puffed bread), or *chanachur* (a dry spicy snack of fried chickpea flour batter, green peas, peanuts etc).

Breakfast is generally a small meal: in the South you will probably have *idlis* with coconut sauce, while in the North you may get *chapatis* with chickpeas in gravy. Lunch is generally served on the *thali*, a sort of eating tray with a mound of white plain rice and/or some wholemeal flat bread (*chapati*), accompanied by a number of small bowls (*katoris*) containing the curried vegetables, sauces, soups and plain yogurt. At the end of the meal you may expect some crispy fried wafers (*papads*) made with bean flour.

Usually sweets are offered as a snack between meals; this is actually very good for digestion, because sweets eaten at the end of a large meal tend to ferment and cause digestive problems. For the same reason, fruits are also considered a snack in themselves more than a dessert at the end of a meal. Supper is generally lighter and similar to breakfast, although many people take some fried snacks or breads in the evening.

We divided the sub-continent into northern and southern India, but actually several regions and States deserve a separated description. Unfortunately the space in this book is not sufficient, so we will just mention a few items, like the most basic and famous Bengali sweets:

- \* *rasagulla*, small spongy balls made with fresh cottage cheese boiled in rose water syrup
- \* *gulabjamun*, larger spongy balls made with solidified milk boiled in rose water syrup
- \* *sandesh*, a fresh cheese fudge often flavoured with saffron
- \* *badam burfi*, a milk and almond fudge sometimes covered by silver foil (avoid the foil, it is generally non-vegetarian)
- \* *misti dahi*, sweetened condensed milk made into yogurt

When talking of Indian cuisine, the first name that comes into mind is curry. Not many people know that "*curry*", an English rendering of the Hindi *khari*, is not a spice mixture but a dish cooked with a spicy gravy.

In India a "curry powder" is called *masala*, and is generally prepared fresh for each and every dish, by roasting and grinding a different blend of spices every time. The combinations are almost unlimited, but the basic spices are turmeric, fresh or dried chili peppers, fresh ginger, garlic and onions.

Some people avoid garlic and onion as these tend to bog down the consciousness to the lower material levels and therefore are to be avoided by yoga practitioners of all schools.

Other popular spices are cumin seeds, fenugreek, *urad dal*, assafetida (*hing*), black mustard seeds (*rai*), aniseeds, black salt (*kala namak*), tamarind and cardamom, but the variety of spices you can find in an Indian grocery is impressive and includes ready-made mixes as for example *Garam masala* (literally "hot spices", with black pepper, cumin, cloves, cinnamon and cardamom). *Khari* leaves and *tej* are also used, usually stir-fried before cooking the stews, while coriander leaves (*dhania*) are added fresh.

*Chatni* (anglicized in "chutney") is another spicy recipe, served with snacks as well as with rich meals. Among the most famous *chatni* recipes some are made with tomatoes or mint, or apple, or pineapple, or mango, and so on. Various types of *achar* (pickles) are also very popular; these are generally fiery relishes made with vegetables or unripe fruits pickled in salt, spices and mustard oil. They keep very well for years without any artificial preservative and are served in small quantities with meals.

## Northern India

The basic staple food for north Indian people is generally *chapati* (also called *roti*), a flat wholemeal wheat bread cooked on an iron griddle. Milk, yogurt and cottage cheese (*panir*) are very appreciated and potatoes are also a great favourite in many dishes. Rice is quite rarely served and in small quantities as *pulao*, enriched with several ingredients such as vegetables, nuts and *panir* (fresh cottage cheese). The Himalayan region (Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh) is famous for its long-grain Basmati rice, grown in hilly areas. Basmati rice has a very distinctive flavour and scent, and its grains swell almost three times during cooking.

*Samosas* and *kachoris* are rich dough pastries stuffed with a savory or sweet filling and deep-fried. *Pakoros* are chickpea flour batter fritters (usually made with vegetables, but also with cheese or bread bits) served with hot sauce. *Puris* or *luchis* are deep-fried puffed bread discs or various size.

*Khari* (often spelled as the anglicized word "curry") is a preparation of stewed vegetables in gravy with a spice mix, oil or ghi, onion and garlic. Spices are an important part of Indian cooking, and a good cook has to learn how to use each and every spice. Mustard seeds must be fried before using, until they crackle; ginger, garlic and fresh chili peppers are usually ground into a paste or finely chopped. Turmeric and ground coriander seeds are not supposed to be fried, fenugreek is bitter and must not be used in large quantities. A resin called *hing* or asafetida is also used in very small quantities (generally in place of garlic and onion).

After stir-frying the spices with a little oil or *ghi* (clarified butter) the vegetables are added, then they are sprinkled with plain flour or chickpea flour to make a gravy, then liquids are added together with other spices. *Khari* is usually served with steamed rice or some bread such as *chapati* or *puri*. Some classical combinations are: cauliflower and potatoes (*alu gobhi*), green peas and potatoes (*alu matar*), okra, potatoes and tomatoes (*bhindi khari*), green peas and cottage cheese cubes in tomato sauce (*matar panir*).

### **Chhole bhature** **(puffed bread with chickpeas in gravy)**

*Bhatura* are made with slightly fermented wholemeal dough, while *puri* are made with plain white flour dough, but the technique for frying them is exactly the same, so you can choose the variety you prefer.

*You will need*  
*for the bread:*

200 grams wholemeal wheat flour (*atta*)  
10 grams yeast  
a pinch of salt  
sunflower oil *or* clarified butter for deep-frying

*for the gravy:*

100 grams dry chickpeas (*kabuli chana*)  
four medium size tomatoes  
one onion *or* leek, *or* a pinch of *hing* powder  
two tablespoons sunflower oil  
one tablespoon wholemeal flour  
one tablespoon of *masala* (mixture of spices)



one teaspoon red chili powder  
half a glass of plain yogurt  
one tablespoon chopped fresh coriander leaves

Start by making the bread dough: mix the flour and a little salt with yeast and add half a glass of warm water, then knead vigorously for 2 or 3 minutes. The amount of water should be sufficient to make a soft dough which will not stick to your hands. While the dough sits, prepare the chickpeas.

If you have boiled chickpeas this dish will require a few minutes only; if you have dry chickpeas you must soak them overnight and cook them in the pressure cooker for a sufficient time. Baking soda will help speeding up the process, but do not add too much to the cooking liquid otherwise it may foam and clog the pressure cooker valve (it is very dangerous). Stir-fry the onion or leek or *hing* in a pan with the oil, then add the flour and stir-fry for a few seconds more, until the flour foams, then add the chopped tomatoes, the *masala* spices and salt, and finally the boiled and drained chickpeas. A good mixture of spices here is coriander seeds, turmeric, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, and black pepper. Let the chickpeas warm up for about five minutes, then add some water (possibly the cooking water of the chickpeas) and simmer until a thick gravy is formed. Finally add the yogurt and chopped coriander leaves.

Now make the *bhatura*: while you heat the oil in the deep-frying pan, divide the dough into 8 small balls, then flatten them into discs of 2 mm thickness. When the oil starts to

move (but does not smoke) slide the *bhatura* into it and quickly turn them when they are golden on one side. Drain them carefully and serve hot with chickpea gravy.

## **Palak panir (spinach and fresh cheese)**

In the original recipe the spinach are mashed or blended into a thick puree, but if you prefer you can just chop them. Instead of fresh cheese cubes you can also use boiled or deep-fried potato cubes (then the recipe will be called *alu palak*) or fried eggplant cubes or even tomato wedges. The spinach gravy can be enriched with a tablespoon of milk cream or tomato puree. The possible variations on this recipe are innumerable; try a few and pick your favourite.

*You will need  
for the panir:*

2 liters full fat milk

the juice of two/three lemons *or* a pinch of citric acid

sunflower oil *or ghi* (clarified butter) for deep-frying, if you want fried cheese cubes

*for the spinach gravy:*

1 kg. fresh spinach (or 300 grams frozen spinach)

two tablespoons sunflower oil *or* one tablespoon of *ghi*

one teaspoon black mustard seeds (optional)

one teaspoon *urad dal* (also called black gram)

a pinch of *hing* powder

one or more fresh green chili peppers

one teaspoon of ground coriander seeds

one tablespoon of milk cream

Start by preparing the *panir*: bring the milk to a boil in a pot over a medium flame to avoid scorching it. Remove from the fire and gradually add the lemon juice or citric acid, and stir gently to curdle the milk. As soon as the milk curdles, stop adding the curdling agent, otherwise the cheese will become too dry and will not stick together. You may wait for a few seconds after adding the first dose of curdling agent, to allow the gentle formation of curds. The fact is that not all lemons have the same quantity of juice and same acidity, so it is impossible to know exactly how many lemons you will actually need. In case you get dry curds that dissolve in the whey, strain them with a muslin cloth and use for some other recipe (they are especially good for fillings and dips mixes). Drain the cottage cheese and preserve the whey; you can use it fresh to add it to the spinach gravy or make nice beverages with more lemon juice or other ingredients, or let it become sour for a few days at room temperature and use it for curdling other milk in future. While the cottage cheese drains, prepare the spinach.

If you have fresh spinach, you need to wash them very carefully by soaking them in three separate and subsequent batches of clean water; washing them under running water is usually not sufficient. Then drain them and cook without adding more water, in a covered pot over a low flame. Heat the tablespoon of oil (or *ghi*) in a saucepan, add the spices starting with the mustad seeds and proceeding in the order given in the list. You can also try different experiments with other spices.

When the spices are golden add the cooked spinach, salt and a cup of the curds whey (if you want to follow the original recipe, you should first blend the spinach with the cup of whey and then add it to the spices). Cover with a lid and simmer for a few minutes. Add the fresh cottage cheese cubes (you can either deep-fry them or toss them in the spinach as they are), simmer for a few minutes more, then add the cream. Serve with *chapati* or rice.

### **Matar Pulao** **(rice with almonds and green peas)**

This fancy rice is also called *Pushpanna* (“flower rice”) and is considered a festival dish. It is usually served as a side dish, accompanied by yogurt, at least two or three vegetable preparations (*sabji*), *chatni* and savouries.

*You will need:*

300 grams long grain rice

100 grams green peas (fresh or frozen)

200 grams *panir* (fresh cottage cheese, see previous recipe)

50 grams almonds *or* cashew nuts

50 grams raisins

a pinch of saffron *or* turmeric powder

a tablespoon clarified butter (*ghi*)

sunflower oil for deep frying

a pinch each of cinnamon, cardamom, nutmeg, red chili

a teaspoon of grated ginger root

the juice of one lemon or two limes

a few tomato wedges and cucumber slices for garnishing

Prepare the cottage cheese and drain it well. You may use the whey to soak the cheese cubes for a few minutes after deep frying them, so they will be softer. Shallow-fry the green peas with the ginger root in the clarified butter, then add the washed and drained rice, salt, saffron and the other spices and an amount of water twice the volume of the rice. Continue cooking of a medium flame until the rice is done. A few minutes before serving, add the raisins, the deep fried cheese cubes, the fried nuts and mix well. Sprinkle with lemon juice and serve immediately.

### **Gobhi matar Samosa (stuffed crust pastry)**

In Bengal *samosas* are called *sringar*, but the idea is the same. *Samosas* will be served everywhere at street stalls, on trains and in stations by vendors and are a favourite Indian snack. Generally the filling is made with potatoes and spices, sometimes with other vegetables. One can also make sweet *samosas* with a filling of cooked apples, mashed bananas, cooked down milk, or mixed nuts and dried fruit bits. Usually sweet *samosas* are sprinkled with icing sugar or coated with silver foil. The following recipe has a tasty savory filling.

*You will need  
for the dough:*

200 grams white flour

50 grams clarified butter *or* 80 grams butter *or* margarine

a pinch of salt

cold water

sunflower oil for deep frying

*for the filling:*

2 medium sized potatoes

200 grams cauliflower flowerettes

100 grams green peas, fresh *or* frozen

one tablespoon clarified butter

a little salt

a pinch each of black cumin, *hing* powder, red chili powder, nutmeg

a teaspoon each of grated ginger root, turmeric, *urad dal*

First prepare the filling, so that it will have the time to cool down. Slowly heat the clarified butter with the ginger root and the *urad dal* for a few seconds, then add the green peas, salt and the other spices and stir-fry for a few minutes, then add a cup of water. Wash and peel the potatoes and dice them very small, then add them to the peas and continue cooking for a few minutes; it is better to keep the saucepan covered with a lid to speed up the process and avoid excessive evaporation. Wash and cut the cauliflower in small pieces, then add to the other vegetables and complete cooking. When the vegetables are tender, remove from fire and let cool down.

Prepare the dough by mixing the flour with a pinch of salt and clarified butter or plain butter, then add the water and knead into a ball. When the filling is cool, divide the dough into 8 balls, then roll them in discs about 2 mm thick. Fill with a tablespoon of the cooked vegetable mixture and fold the dough over it, seal the edges very well and fold them

back in a decorative manner. Do not keep the edges too thick. Deep fry the *samosas* in hot sunflower oil, drain and serve immediately, with a tomato ketchup sauce or some *chatni*.

## **Besan Laddu** **(chickpea flour fudge)**

The word *laddu* simply means “ball” and can be applied to a variety of sweets provided they have the same shape. The most characteristic version is prepared in Maharashtra with small deep-fried droplets of chickpea flour batter, stuck together with a thick sugar syrup and generally containing raisins, mixed nuts, cardamom, saffron and other spices. These sweets are offered to the Deities in the temple and are considered a great favourite of Ganesh and Krishna.

We give you an easier version that could be described as an Indian version of toffee - a firm fudge with a nutty flavour which will be soft when hot but harder when cooled; it stays fresh for a very long time and is an ideal sweet to keep handy in a jar for guests and children.

*You will need:*

200 grams chickpea flour

200 grams butter *or* margarine

150 grams icing sugar (*not* granulated sugar!)

50 grams dessiccated shredded coconut

50 grams almonds *or* cashews, shelled and chopped

a pinch of cinnamon

Melt the butter or margarine in a flat pan with a thick bottom, add the chickpea flour and keep stirring over a medium flame for about 15 minutes, until the cream becomes golden brown and gives out a nutty smell. Be careful not to scorch the mixture or let even a drop of water or steam into the pan. The wooden spoon and your hands must be dry; do not work near a pot of boiling water or any other source of dampness. If you allow even a very small quantity of water in the mixture, it will turn mushy.

When the cream is golden brown add the chopped nuts, the shredded coconut and the cinnamon. Turn off the heat and add the icing sugar, stirring very well to avoid the formation of sweet lumps. You cannot use regular sugar because it will not melt properly and the end result will be sandy.

If you do not want to make balls, line a baking sheet or a serving plate with aluminium foil, then pour in the hot fudge and shake gently to let it settle and get an even surface. Allow the fudge to cool completely, then remove the aluminium foil (the fudge will come off like a slab) and cut the sweet in small squares or diamonds. Serve cool.

## **Southern India**

The great hero of south Indian cookery is rice. Big heaps of plain unsalted steamed rice are served in all restaurants, while other dishes are served by the spoonful: spicy bean soups (*dal* or *sambar*), spiced vegetables (*sabjis* or *kharis*),



yogurt, and oftentimes coconut *chatni* or *dal chatni*. Plain yogurt (*sada dahi*) is served as accompaniment and is very useful to quench the fire of hot spices.

*Dosas* are the most typical dish in south India, served as snack or breakfast: to make them you must soak separately rice and *urad dal* (a small black bean that is very rich in proteins), then grind them and let them ferment for a few hours, then the batter is cooked on a griddle like pancakes. Usually *dosas* are served plain (*sada dosa*) or stuffed with a spicy potato filling (*masala dosa*), always with a little coconut *chatni* and *sambar*. The same accompaniment goes with *idli*, a kind of steamed rice and bean bread made with the same batter. Thicker *dosas* are called *uthapam*; the batter can be also mixed with bits of tomatoes and other vegetables.

### **Dahi bhat (yogurt rice)**

This is a very refreshing dish, suitable particularly in summer and for those who have some digestive problems (in this case it is better to omit the black mustard seeds). You can serve it with deep-fried eggplant slices and a bowl of string beans stewed with shredded coconut.

Yogurt is very useful for quenching any burning sensation in the body, both internal and external, for burns of all kinds and for the effect of hot spices. If you happen to bite unexpectedly into a chili pepper hiding in a vegetable relish, keep a spoonful of plain yogurt in your mouth for a few seconds.

*You will need:*

500 grams rice (two cups)

four cups water

two teaspoons of butter *or* clarified butter

one teaspoon of sunflower oil

half liter of plain fresh yogurt

one teaspoon of grated fresh ginger root

one teaspoon of black mustard seeds (optional)

one small fresh green chili pepper

a small bunch of fresh coriander leaves (or parsley)

one lemon or two limes (limes are small and very aromatic tropical lemons)

Wash and drain the rice well. Heat the mustard seeds in the oil until they crackle, add the ginger and chili pepper, then the rice. Add the water and salt, then cover with lid and let simmer until the rice is done. The cooking time depends on the kind of rice: some take as little as 6 minutes, others take up to 18 minutes, so test a grain by pressing it. When the rice is done, add the butter, lemon juice and the yogurt, mix well and allow to sit for 5 minutes. In the meantime chop the coriander leaves or parsley. Arrange the rice in individual plates or bowls and garnish with chopped leaves. You can serve warm or cold.

### **Nariyal chatni (coconut relish)**

There are many versions of this relish, as every single cook in India likes to develop a personal recipe and hand it down to family members and friends.

*You will need:*

200 grams dessiccated shredded coconut *or* 400 grams fresh coconut (about one whole coconut)

one cup plain yogurt

one tablespoon of *ghi* *or* coconut oil *or* sunflower oil

one teaspoon of *urad dal*

one teaspoon of black mustard seeds

one teaspoon of fresh ginger root, grated

one teaspoon of fresh green chili pepper

one pinch of *hing* powder

salt

Slowly heat the *ghi* (clarified butter) or oil in a pan, add the *urad dal* and the mustard seeds; when they start to crackle add the ginger root, the chili pepper and the *hing* powder and remove from the fire. Put the coconut in a blender, add salt, yogurt and mix well. At the end add the fried spices and mix again for a few seconds. Serve with snacks.

## **Sambar (tamarind soup)**

This soup is usually served as an accompaniment to rice or fried snacks, but it is good even by itself. The vegetables listed below will give a rich soup, but often Sambar is thinner and contains less vegetables; as always, the choice is yours.

*You will need:*

50 grams green soya beans (*mung dal*)

50 grams split peas (*matar dal*)

50 grams red lentils (*toor dal*)  
3 liters water  
one small green bell pepper  
200 grams squash *or* pumpkin of any type  
one carrot, one potato, half eggplant  
100 grams of string beans *or* okra  
one onion (optional)  
one tablespoon of tamarind extract  
one tablespoon of dessiccated coconut  
two teaspoons of *ghi* (clarified butter) *or* sunflower oil  
one teaspoon of fresh grated ginger root  
one teaspoon of black cumin seeds (optional)  
two teaspoons of ground coriander seeds  
one teaspoon of black mustard seeds (optional)  
one small green chili pepper, a teaspoon turmeric  
a tablespoon fresh coriander leaves, chopped

In India you will easily find split and hulled beans, which cook very quickly, otherwise you will need to soak them carefully overnight. Boil the three types of legumes in a pressure cooker with the diced vegetables, tamarind, coconut, salt, turmeric and coriander seeds.

If you are going to use okra instead of string beans, carefully keep them away from water: wipe them with a damp cloth and stir-fry (*chaunce*) them in the spices and oil a few minutes before adding to the soup. Prepare a *chaunce* by stir-frying over a low flame the black mustard seeds in oil or *ghi*, then add the remaining spices and fry for a few seconds more; then remove from the fire.

When the beans are dissolved in the cooking liquid, pour in the hot chaunce (watch out for the sizzling effect) and let simmer for a few minutes more. Finally add the chopped coriander leaves and serve. In case the soup has become too thick, add some boiling water.

## **Buttermilk**

Originally butter was churned starting from yogurt and not from milk cream, as in hot climate milk cream is spoiled much more easily and quickly than yogurt; this system is mentioned in the ancient scriptures and depicted in ancient art, therefore we can say that yogurt has been used in India for several thousands of years. In fact, there is reason to believe that the popular Bulgarian tradition may have originally picked up the technique from India, just like the “Arab numbers” were introduced in Europe by Arabs but learned originally from India.

After churning the butter, the remaining whey is used as a very healthy drink, seasoned with a little salt and spices, such as black cumin, khari leaves, black pepper, fresh grated ginger, chopped green chilli peppers, and a pinch of *hing* (*ferula assafetida*).

If you want to prepare this drink from plain yogurt, you need to add equal amounts of cold water and season with salt and spices as described above. Blend well in a liquidizer for a few seconds, and serve chilled.

## Indo-China

### Ingredients and techniques

Originally this vast region between India proper and China was for several centuries under the cultural and commercial influence of India (and absorbed some of the Hindu and Buddhist flavor) and subsequently to Muslim invasions and dominations; more recently it fell under the colonial rule of European countries and was finally exposed to the Chinese communist ideology.

Today the region comprises a considerable number of nations with different political situations and tendencies: Vietnam, Indonesia (including many islands, like Java and Bali), Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Kamboja, Laos, north and south Korea and Myanmar (former Burma). Being also near to New Guinea, Oceania and Australia, its popular culture and cookery were also influenced by the native oceanic peoples.

The agricultural produce and food habits of the region are based on bananas, coconut, calcium-rich citrus fruits and many exotic fruits, rice, soya (especially yellow soya beans, very popular in China and Japan and basic ingredient of many recipes), yams or sweet potatoes, spices and cane sugar. With these ingredients an expert local cook can prepare an incredible variety of salty and sweet dishes.

Of course fish, pork and chicken meat are also used like in China, although the strictly vegetarian Buddhist monks labored to invent many new foods that could perfectly substitute meat and fish in all the most popular recipes: not only the soya sauce (*shoyu* and *tamari*) and *tofu* that have become so famous in many other countries, but also more complicated specialties such as *seitan*, *tempeh*, *kori-tofu* (a type of snow-frozen *tofu* similar to textured soya protein), *yuba* and more. Particularly *tempeh* and *tofu* have become staple foods; it seems that *tempeh* was first invented in this area and later introduced in Japan.

We need to remember that the Indonesian variety of soya sauce is definitely different from the Japanese recipe as it also contains sugar, vinegar, hot chili pepper and other spices.

### **Nasi wuduk (rice with coconut and vegetables)**

This rice is generally served with sweet-and-sour vegetables and *tempeh* or *tofu* cubes.

*You will need:*

200 grams dessicated coconut, *or* one small coconut

400 grams long-grained rice

300 grams green (*mung*) soya bean sprouts

one leek (including the green leaves)

two carrots

three large cabbage leaves *or* 200 grams cauliflower

100 grams fresh or frozen green peas  
100 grams bamboo shoots (optional)  
one bell pepper  
one tablespoon fresh grated ginger root  
two tablespoons of soya sauce  
three tablespoons of sunflower oil  
one tablespoon of sesame oil

Start by preparing the coconut milk: if you have fresh coconut pulp, simply liquidize it in the blender with sufficient water, or if you have dessicated coconut you will need to rehydrate it with a little warm water for at least half an hour before liquidizing it. You can use the coconut milk as it is or filter it and use only the liquid and preserve the pulp for some other recipe (it is good for fillings and added to patty mixtures).

Wash and drain the rice and cook it in the coconut milk with a teaspoon of salt. The liquid needs to be twice the volume of rice, so that it can be absorbed correctly. While the rice cooks, wash and trim the vegetables, cut them in small pieces, then add them to the oil in this order: grated ginger, carrots, green peas, leek, bamboo shoots, cabbage or cauliflower, bell pepper, and finally soya bean sprouts and the *tofu* cubes, when the other ingredients are tender. After adding each vegetable replace the lid on the pan.

This system of gradually adding ingredients will allow you to save a lot of time in the process of trimming, cutting and cooking, as the first vegetables take longer to cook while you will have time to add the others gradually. Together



with the soya bean sprouts add the soya sauce, turn off the heat and let sit for a few minutes, then serve with the coconut rice.

### **Satay with hot sauce**

You can prepare a fully vegetarian version of this famous Malaysian dish with textured soya protein chunks, *tempeh*, *tofu* or *seitan*.

*You will need*

*for the skewers:*

1 kg. vegetable protein of your choice

*for the marinade:*

two onions *or* five leeks

two garlic cloves (optional)

a small hot green chili pepper

50 grams brown sugar *or* molasses

two tablespoons of apple vinegar

two tablespoons of soya sauce

one tablespoon of sesame oil

two tablespoons of your favourite spice mix

a pinch of ground black cumin

a pinch of ground cloves or allspice

100 grams shelled and roasted peanuts

*for the sauce:*

100 grams shelled and roasted peanuts

two tablespoons of sunflower oil

one teaspoon of brown sugar

one tablespoon of lemon juice or apple vinegar

a pinch of chilli powder

salt

Prepare the marinade by grinding the roasted peanuts with all the other ingredients. Soak the vegetarian protein in the marinade and let it sit at least overnight, in an airtight container, in the fridge.

Make the sauce by blending together the sauce ingredients. Stick the vegetarian protein on bamboo or steel skewers and broil them on the barbecue or oven, or roast them in a non-stick pan, gradually adding all the marinade. Serve hot with the sauce and steamed rice.

Instead of using vegetarian protein, you can also try to prepare this recipe by skewering large cubes of your favorite vegetables.

### **Pisang goreng (banana fritters)**

*You will need:*

four large ripe bananas  
200 grams flour  
100 grams sugar  
a pinch of salt  
a teaspoon of cinnamon  
sunflower oil for deep-frying

Mash the peeled bananas, then mix them with flour, salt and most of the sugar (keep one tablespoon aside for garnishing). Allow the mix to sit for about 30 minutes, then deep fry in hot oil. Drain and sprinkle with the remaining sugar and ground cinnamon. Serve immediately.

## China

### **Ingredients and techniques**

There are not many Chinese vegetarians, as the Buddhist monks, the traditional oriental apostles of vegetarianism as an aspect of spiritual life, have been practically wiped out not only in China but also in most of the regions that have come under the influence of the Chinese government.

Chinese culture has been for thousands of years a symbol of refined living, wisdom, prosperity and stability, but the ancient traditions have been almost totally destroyed by the communist "cultural revolution" that ruthlessly, violently and systematically replaced them with the maoist ideology. Besides, the open distrust and hatred for "foreigners" and "dangerous western influence" closed the borders tightly against tourism and cultural exchanges with the rest of the world. Thus in general it has been easier to learn about the roots of Chinese culture from the folklore and festivals that have survived in expatriate communities scattered all over the world, starting from Hong Kong and Singapore.

The most basic foundation of this culture has been expressed through popular cuisine, as Chinese restaurants are probably the most famous and all-pervasive food shops we can find everywhere at global level. Although rice and soya beans have been the staple foods of Chinese people

for thousands of years, the Chinese are known for their wide views regarding the edibility of many things. In other words, just like ancient Romans, Chinese people seem capable of cooking and eating almost anything.

The traditional ingredients grown by farmers in China are rice, soya beans of several varieties, sesame and ginger, but also maize, peanuts, sorghum, millet, barley, yams and so on. Among vegetables we should mention the bamboo shoots (the new stalks that bamboo groves produce directly from the roots), leeks, onions, soya bean sprouts, green peas, carrots, daikon (a kind of large and long white radish), Chinese cabbage (which is also very good in salads), and others that are generally found only in local markets.

Rice is generally steamed until very soft, so that it will be easier to eat with sticks. It seems that the Chinese invented the noodles, probably in the same period when Italians invented spaghetti. It is not uncommon to find similar food preparations in very distant areas and cultures, because human beings have generally the same needs, intelligence and resources because of their common nature. The main difference is that Chinese people preferred fresh noodles and vermicelli made of different flours and textures (white flour with milk, soya bean flour, rice flour, buckwheat flour etc), while Italians preferred to use the characteristic durum wheat pasta that was carefully dried and could keep for very long time, and shaped them in many different ways.

*Tofu* is another major ingredient of Chinese cookery, also used in all the Far East countries. It is prepared in several

varieties for different purposes, but is always very valuable for health and nutrition as it helps in lowering cholesterol levels. Pressed tofu can be diced or sliced and fried, or added fresh to stews and casseroles; blended with other ingredients, it makes very good dips or desserts.

A word of caution about one of the most common ingredients in Chinese cooking: *ajinomoto*, or “Chinese salt”, is actually monosodium glutamate, a flavor intensifier that, although vegetarian in nature, should be avoided because it is toxic even in moderate doses and can cause acute food poisoning: symptoms are headache, vomiting, diarrhea, burning sensations, feeling of pressure in the chest and general discomfort.

## **Peanut soup**

*You will need:*

300 grams shelled peanuts

one turnip, one leek

one teaspoon of fresh ginger root, grated

one tablespoon of soya sauce

one teaspoon of mixed spices

Soak the peanuts overnight, then put them in a pressure cooker with the sliced vegetables and the ginger root. Cook until very tender, then allow the pressure to go down, add the spices and the soya sauce and let it sit, covered, for a few minutes before serving. You can also add a few fried *tofu* cubes at the time of serving.

## **Chow Mein (fried noodles with vegetables)**

*You will need:*

400 grams Chinese white noodles (made with milk)  
one tablespoon of fresh ginger  
one leek  
one bell pepper  
100 grams green peas  
two medium sized carrots  
100 grams cauliflower flowerettes  
200 grams green soya bean sprouts  
two tablespoons of sesame oil  
two tablespoons of soya sauce

If you do not find the Chinese white noodles you can prepare them yourselves at home with 300 grams finely ground semolina, a pinch of salt and a cup of milk. Knead well into a stiff dough and process like normal noodles, rolling out a sheet of dough 2 mm thick, then sprinkle with flour, roll up the sheet and cut in thin stripes; let the noodles dry on a wire before cooking them.

Wash, trim and cut the vegetables. Heat the oil in a pan, add the ginger, the green peas, then the other vegetables; keep the soya bean sprouts last as they cook very quickly. When the vegetables are tender, turn off the heat and separately boil the noodles. When the noodles are done, drain them well then toss them into the pan and stir-fry the whole thing for a few minutes more. At the end add the soya sauce and serve hot. You can also add about 100 grams of deep-fried tofu cubes to this dish.

## Tofu fry

*Tofu* is generally sold in many shops, but if you cannot find it you can prepare the fresh *tofu* yourselves.

*You will need:*

500 grams yellow soya beans

5-6 tablespoons curdling solution

salt

Wash the soya beans carefully and soak them for about 5-6 hours depending on the room temperature. The timing and temperature are important because all beans and seeds, if left soaking too long in a warm place, start to ferment (you may notice very small bubbles of carbon dioxide); this is not bad when you want to boil beans and seeds because actually a slight fermentation helps cooking and digesting the seeds, but if you want to make milk out of seeds, fermentation will cause the proteins to separate before you can strain out the liquid from the pulp, and this puts *tofu* out of question.

Fermentation occurs when the seeds have become tender enough and the environment temperature is warm enough to start the fermentation process, so you can also soak the beans in the fridge and save yourselves extra worries: in this way you can leave the beans soaking overnight without any danger of fermentation.

When the beans are ready, drain, rinse and grind them very finely with a little fresh water. The beans must become a very smooth cream; the smoother the cream, the larger quantity of *tofu* you will get compared to the bran (*okara*) that will be left in the end. If you like, you can remove the husks of the beans before grinding them; the *okara* will be

less and the quality of the *tofu* will be better. While you grind the yellow soya beans in the blender, prepare a large pot with about two liters of water and bring it to a boil; pour the liquidized soya cream into the boiling water and stir well; cook for about 2 minutes (or 5 minutes if you want to consume the milk directly instead of making *tofu*), always stirring, then let it cool down, covering the pot. It is better to pour the bean cream into boiling water than diluting it before and then heating, because creamed seeds tend to stick to the bottom of the pot. Boiling water prevents this and at the same time the cooking starts earlier and you will not need to heating the soya cream for a long time.

Prepare a muslin cloth and line a colander over a large pot. Pour the cooked cream into it, pressing and squeezing as much as you can: the strained liquid is soya milk, while the dry pulp remaining in the cloth is called *okara* and can be used for stuffings and other recipes. For example, try the *okara* vegetable patties: mix cooled *okara*, steamed rice, a little chickpea flour and chopped parsley, then deep fry in soya oil.

We need to spend some more words about the curdling agent to transform the soya milk into curds. Traditionally, *tofu* makers use *lushui* (called *nigari* in Japan), a rather bitter but healthy white substance (powder or flakes), which is mostly magnesium chloride with some magnesium sulphate and other trace elements, obtained from sea salt after the sodium chloride has been removed. If you cannot find *nigari*, you can use Epsom salts, or just vinegar or lemon juice, or citric acid.



To curdle: heat the soya milk again until it starts to boil, then turn the flame off and add salt and lemon juice, little by little, stirring very gently, until you see that the milk starts to curdle, forming "clouds" in the "clear sky" of whey. Then cover the pot and allow the pot to cool down for about 10 minutes. Rinse the muslin cloth you used for straining the milk and use it for straining the *tofu* by ladling the curdles very gently into the colander. When only whey is left in the pot, strain it separately and add to the curds whatever solids were left. Tie the cloth in a bundle and hang it over the sink or press it under a weight. The whey can be used to wash pots and dishes, as it contains some substances which remove grease (some lecithin and saponin). After a few hours the *tofu* will be firm enough to be diced or sliced. Fry it in sunflower or soya bean oil and serve hot with a little soya sauce, rice and stewed vegetables.

### **Flower fritters**

There are many flowers that are edible and can be cooked in various ways: chrysanthemum flowers should not be too difficult to obtain. You can also use acacia flowers, roses, primroses, elderberry flowers or hibiscus flowers: they are all good and edible.

*You will need:*

8 chrysanthemum flowers, rather large

200 grams plain flour

50 grams granulated sugar

100 grams liquid honey (acacia is the best)  
some mixed ground spices, such as cinnamon, nutmeg,  
black pepper, cardamom seeds  
one tablespoon of rose water *or* other flower water  
sunflower oil for deep frying

Wash the flowers and let them dry without damaging them. Prepare the batter by mixing the flour with the sugar, the spices and the rose water, adding a little more plain water, until the batter becomes thin like honey. Whisk the batter well and let sit for a few minutes. Dip the flowers in the batter and fry them quickly in hot oil. Drain well and pour a little honey on the hot fritters. Serve immediately.

## Japan

### **Ingredients and techniques**

The Japanese empire developed its culture mostly during the Middle Ages and was able to preserve tradition much more than China in the last century. After the second world war, Japan channeled its energies, values and determination into economic development and soon became one of the major financial powers in the world, and inevitably there was a steep deterioration of public health due to general pollution and increase in the consumption of industrial foods.

In the 1960s researcher George Oshawa demonstrated how natural foods could counteract many pollution problems (including atomic radiations) and in the following decade the macrobiotic revolution spread to the United States and to the rest of the world, introducing many traditional Japanese foods in the food habits of millions of people. The macrobiotic diet (*macro* means "greater" and *bios* means "life") is based on Japanese Taoist philosophy and advocates the use of whole grain cereals, soya products, seaweeds and simple cooking techniques to counteract the bad effects of excessive consumption of white rice, meat and fish. This original blend of Taoist philosophy and scientific research also deeply influenced other research fields, like physics, medicine and psychology.

Although Japanese cuisine is in many ways similar to the Chinese, especially regarding the most important staples (rice and soya beans), we have chosen to present it separately because of the important influence of the macrobiotic movement on the global New Age culture and on the development of global vegetarianism from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Rice, white or brown, is still the basic food of all Japanese people. Usually the far-eastern type of rice dishes may appear rather overcooked to us, but this is good when you have to eat it with sticks or roll it in wrappers (as in *sushi*). A particular variety of glutinous rice is also very popular. Rice flour is used to make thin noodles, wafer dough to be stuffed and steamed, creams and puddings.

Furthermore, rice is used to make *saké* (fermented rice wine) and *amasaké* (a lightly fermented drink which is often a basic ingredient for desserts) and even sugar (malt), although sweets became more popular only in relatively recent times.

Soya beans are the other pillar of Japanese cuisine. There are three main varieties of soya beans: the most famous is the yellow, but there are also the green (*mung*) and the red (*adsuki*). *Adsuki* beans are richer in sugar and starch and make great desserts, creams and soups. *Mung* beans are richer in proteins but very easy to digest; they are mainly used in soups and to make bean sprouts.

Yellow soya beans are very rich in oil, lecithin and proteins. They are mostly utilized to make the famous and excellent Japanese soya sauce (the best for adding “meat” flavor in recipes of any tradition) both light *shoyu* (in which a certain amount of wheat berries is used) and strong and thick *tamari* (plain soya bean sauce), a few kinds of *miso* (vegetable stock concentrate used for excellent soups), *tofu* of many varieties (soft, hard, fresh, preserved, fermented, snow-frozen), *tempeh* (a mild flavoured and crunchy cultured soya bean cake), *natto* (a different kind of cultured soya bean cake, with stronger taste and stranger texture), *yuba* (dried soya milk sheets which resemble ham in texture), soya oil, soya flour, soya noodles, soya butter (made from soya flour), soya bean grits (used like peanut grits) and other ingredients which are not yet known on the world market.

Seaweeds are very popular in this island country; the most used and known types are *wakame*, *hijiki*, *kombu*, *kanten* and *nori*. *Wakame* are usually crumbled in soups, stews and casseroles, *kombu* are used especially with boiled beans, *kanten* (also known as *agar agar* on western markets) make a neutral jelly with no smell or flavour, and *nori* have a strong fish smell and are often used to make rice stuffed rolls.

Other traditional ingredients of Japanese cookery are: *seitan* (wheat gluten cooked in a way similar to meat), *umeboshi* (plums preserved in brine), sesame seeds, *kudzu* (arrot root starch), *daikon* (a large white radish), leeks, turnips, bamboo shoots, many kinds of mushrooms, glutinous yam, lotus and water lily roots, chrysanthemum flowers and leaves, local spinach, sweet potatoes, taro, ferns, chives, cabbages, *kabocha* pumpkin, eggplants, ginger root, and a number of other vegetables which are practically unknown outside Japan: *shiso*, *akamé*, *gobo*, *fuki*, *gingko nuts*, *junsai*, *kinomé*, *myoga*, *mitsuba*, *udo*, *shirouri*, *wasabi* and *yuzu*. The seven spice powder (dried chilies, sesame, *sansho* pepper, green *nori* flakes, white pepper and dried orange peel) is the counterpart of the five spice powder of Chinese cookery.

Tea deserves a special mention, as the tea ceremony is a very deeply cherished tradition: a moment of elegance, beauty and meditation. Also, tea is often taken at the end of a meal. However, tea is always served plain, without sugar or milk or lemon juice, and is never used to make cold drinks or fruit-infused drinks. There are many varieties of tea used in Japan, of which green tea is probably the most

popular; besides the regular tea leaves that are not fermented like the black variety, there is a bright green variety called *matcha*. The *bancha* or *hojicha* tea is made with tea twigs which have been on the plant for about three years and therefore contain practically no theine and very little tannin (the fresher parts of the tea plant usually contain a greater quantity of these substances) and has become quite popular with those who follow the macrobiotic school. This tea requires a little extra attention for brewing: first the dry crushed tea twigs should be slightly roasted, until a thin white vapour comes off (this also eliminates residual theine), then boiling water should be poured on them. The kettle should be kept boiling for about 3 minutes, then allowed to brew for another 5 minutes.

### **Nabemono (winter soup)**

*Nabe* means "one pot cookery" and is the exact equivalent of the old traditional European soups, but while in Europe the fireplace was usually on one side of the room and the cooking was made by one specific person or even in a separate room altogether, in Japan the soup is cooked on a covered coal brazier in the middle of the area where the family eats. Each person reaches out freely to take the food from the pot, and the dining area is warmed up more effectively while the family is having the meal.

The main pot on the brazier contains the broth; several other ingredients are arranged on the table and are cooked for a few minutes in the soup, then each person picks out the cooked bits from the pot, and a new batch is added.

*You will need:*

2 leeks

2 chinese cabbages

100 grams *daikon* or white radish

a cup of mixed vegetables (as per your taste)

a small piece of *kombu* seaweed

a sheet of *nori* seaweed

two tablespoons *miso* paste or four tablespoons soya sauce

300 grams buckwheat noodles

500 grams *tofu*

Set the brazier (or electric skillet or tabletop burner) on the serving table. Roast the *nori* on the open flame for a few seconds, then crumble it in a small bowl. Place the piece of *kombu* at the bottom of the pot, add the *nori*, the vegetables (chopped very finely), water, the *miso* and let boil, covered, for about 15 minutes or less according to your taste. The Japanese taste does not like overcooked foods.

When the vegetables are tender add the buckwheat noodles to the soup and let cook for a few minutes until tender. Drain out the noodles with a few vegetables dividing them into the individual bowls, then put the *tofu* cubes in the soup, allowing them to simmer only a few minutes. Do not overcook *tofu* as it tends to become spongy. Drain the *tofu*, too, and distribute into the eating plates. At the end distribute the remaining soup.

## **Seitan with Teriyaki sauce (wheat gluten scallops in sweet-hot sauce)**

This recipe needs to be planned and organized in advance to become more time-effective, especially if you want to make it from scratch.

*Seitan* is a meat-like food made with wheat gluten, and can be prepared in different ways; if you make it at home it is better to use ready-made gluten flour and add a small percentage of regular flour to obtain the texture you want. With a lower percentage of gluten, you will get a softer and spongier product. You can also experiment by adding other ingredients to the *seitan* dough, especially various flours, and get considerably different textures and flavors.

Normally wheat contains about 30% gluten (protein) and 70% starch (carbohydrate), so when you make *seitan* from wheat flour, a large part of your flour will be washed away as starch is soluble in water and if you are not able to recover it by sedimentation, it will be wasted. Gluten flour or gluten powder, however, is an industrial by-product of wheat starch manufacturing, and there is practically no waste involved.

Only a very small percentage of people suffer from gluten intolerance, so in general you do not need to worry about your health in consuming *seitan*, especially if your normal diet does not contain an excess of gluten-rich products, such as wheat derivatives (bread, pasta, etc) or “protein enriched” supplements or foods.



The following recipe shows you how to make seitan from plain flour, but if you find wheat gluten powder everything will be so much easier: just mix the gluten with 1/10 plain flour and a teaspoon of salt and knead it with a little water. No need for washing, just boil the mass and you will have the seitan ready for the further preparation.

*You will need*

*for the seitan dough:*

3 kg plain *or* wholemeal flour

two teaspoons of salt

*for Teriyaki sauce and further cooking:*

three tablespoons of *miso*

three tablespoons of soya sauce

two tablespoons of sesame oil

one leek

one teaspoon of fresh grated ginger root

one garlic clove, crushed (optional)

a pinch of yellow mustard powder

two tablespoons of molasses or brown sugar

First of all prepare the *seitan* dough. Mix the flour and salt and add the water slowly, knead very well into a firm dough and let it sit for at least 30 minutes. Knead it again for 5 minutes, then put it in a bowl and cover with cold water. Let it sit for another 30 minutes, then *wash* the dough in the water as you would wash a cloth, kneading the dough firmly but softly. When the water becomes white with starch, discard it (or pour it in a very large pot or bucket to recover by sedimentation) and add clear water to the seitan mass. Continue to knead until the water remains almost clear; it will take about 30 minutes.

At first it will seem that all the dough will dissolve in the water, but after some time you will notice some fibers do not dissolve and gradually stick together more distinctly: that is gluten. The starch can be recovered from the water by letting it set at the bottom of the pot or bucket, then removing the surface water very gently without disturbing the starch on the bottom, until you get at the starch. Then you can transfer the starchy cream onto a cooking pot and use it for a sauce, soup, or creamy dessert. If you live in the country and have some cows, you will find they love this starchy water. In old times, uncooked starch water was also used for bathing especially small children as it soothes irritation of the skin, or to stiffen clothes and especially shirts and collars.

When your gluten is sufficiently separated from the starch, put it in a boiling pot of water or broth and cook it until it doubles in size. The dough can be shaped as you like and after boiling it will look like a big chunk of boiled meat. When done, remove the *seitan* from the water and let it cool, then slice it into scallops.

Prepare a marinade with the ingredients for the Teriyaki sauce and soak the *seitan* scallops in the marinade for several hours or overnight, preferably in the fridge. When ready to serve, place the scallops in a non-stick pan and pour the marinade over them, broil them for a few minutes on each side and serve immediately.

## **Tempura (vegetable fritters)**

*You will need:*

200 grams white wheat flour

a little salt

very cold water

1 kg. mixed vegetables of your choice (carrots, cauliflowers, daikon, turnips, eggplants, etc.)

sunflower oil for deep frying

Wash and trim the vegetables, cut them in sticks, then dry them well. Besides the regular vegetables you can also use spinach leaves or flowers, or special “foreign” vegetables such as zucchini, pumpkin, asparagus, long beans, avocado, tiny tomatoes, and so on: they will be less traditionally Japanese, but enjoyable all the same.

Prepare a thick batter with flour, salt and water: the density is good when it coats the bit of vegetable but you can still clearly see the shape under it. Heat the oil until it starts to move (not smoke): a drop of batter should immediately float up and “dance” around pushed by little bubbles. At this point slide the vegetable bits coated with batter and cook them until they are golden. Drain the fritters on paper and serve hot with soya sauce or a tofu dip.

Do not cook too many or too little at the same time, otherwise they will absorb too much oil or they will not cook properly inside. Never leave boiling oil empty, otherwise the temperature will raise too much and it will burn, becoming acid, thick and very bad for health.

## Middle East

### Ingredients and techniques

The region commonly known as Middle East comprises a number of nations and cultures that we could technically describe as “semitic”. There is a lot of confusion about this definition because most people tend to mistake the racial/ ethnic identity with the religious/ ideological identification, therefore we see that criticism of the Jewish religion is called “anti-semitism”, even though about 98% of all Jews in Israel and all over the world are of caucasian race and not of semitic race. The same consideration applies to the “Arab race” of the original inhabitants indigenous of the Arabian peninsula who were the first to convert to Islam, while Muslim peoples of different or mixed genetic heritage (mostly blacks or asians) were converted later.

The perspective of cuisine, especially in a small publication such as this, cannot elaborate enough to make distinctions between the different religious and cultural groups of the region, although certainly these are important factors in defining food habits. Besides, we cannot examine the many differences with the rest of the huge continent to which the Middle East is culturally attached - Africa. We hope in a future publication we will be able to elaborate better.

Generally all semitic ethnic groups are very traditionalist and tend to reject other influences from different cultures, religions or cuisines. Their tradition is not conducive to vegetarianism, but still we will be able to prepare many of the most typical dishes by using the basic and popular vegetarian ingredients that grow in the entire region.

Wheat is used to make bread, pastries and especially the very famous *cuscus*, a sort of "wheat pearls" made with semolina rubbed together into very small bits, which are then dried and steamed at the time of meals. *Cuscus* is a staple of north-African cookery and can be served in hundreds of different dishes, both savory and sweet. A similar but more natural preparation is *bulghur*, that is produced by parboiling wheat berries, drying and cracking them into grits; *bulghur* can be used in most recipes that call for *cuscus*.

Chickpeas, lentils and broad beans are traditionally cooked in soups, stews and patties, often seasoned with large amounts of garlic and onions and local herbs, like the *molokheya*, a kind of wild leafy green with a strong taste. Dates are very popular - fresh, dried and candied; a paste made with ripe dates is used like honey. Also raisins and figs are very popular and used in sweets. Honey is still very widely used, and so are distilled flower waters.

Olive oil is more widely used than butter and gives a distinct flavour to foods. Clarified butter is also used. Another popular ingredient is sesame seeds. Spices are widely used, especially cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, black

pepper, coriander, mint, parsley, aniseed, cumin. *Harissa* is a fiery hot chili paste, considered a valuable ingredient in many dishes.

The most popular drinks are mint tea, karkadé tea (made with dried red hibiscus flowers) and coffee. Alcohol is prohibited by Islam.

## **Cuscus (steamed wheat pearls)**

It is relatively easy to find pre-cooked *cuscus*, that is very easy and quick to prepare. Just boil some water (three times the volume of the dry *cuscus*) with a little salt and a tablespoon of oil or butter. When the water is boiling, pour the *cuscus*, stir, cover the pot with a lid and turn the fire off. Allow the cuscus to sit for about 5 minutes and serve.

Here are some ideas on how to serve it:

### *\* Cuscus salad (taboulé)*

Steam about 300 grams of *cuscus* as described above, then arrange it on a serving tray and let it cool down. In the meantime wash, trim and cut the salad vegetables (a couple of tomatoes, one green bell pepper, one cucumber, some leek or onion), add some pitted black olives. You can also add a small bunch of parsley or basil or a few mint leaves, as per your taste. Season with salt, black pepper, olive oil and lemon juice, and serve with the cooled *cuscus*, preferably with a decoration of lettuce leaves.

\* *Cuscus with chickpea and vegetable stew*

Prepare the stew first: wash, trim and cut one onion or leek and two bell peppers, dice two potatoes very small and stir-fry them with a little oil; after 5 minutes add 200 grams boiled chickpeas, stir-fry for a few minutes more then add about 500 grams diced tomatoes, salt, cayenne pepper and a bunch of dried herbs of your choice (rosemary, oregano, marjoram, bay leaf, basil, parsley). Simmer, covered with a lid. When the vegetables are well cooked, prepare about 300 grams *cuscus* as per basic recipe; arrange it on a serving tray and pour the cooked vegetables and chickpea sauce on top. Serve hot. Another variety of stew can be made with red lentils instead of chickpeas.

You can also prepare a stew with one of the classic types of vegetarian protein, together with the legumes or to replace them, as per your taste. Just remember that soya sauce (*shoyu* or *tamari*), although originally developed in China and Japan, can greatly improve any vegetarian dish.

\* *Cuscus dessert*

Chop 200 grams seeded dates, 100 grams raisins and 100 grams each of pistachio nuts and almonds, put them in a saucepan with 100 grams butter, a teaspoon of grated orange rind, a pinch cinnamon or cardamom powder, and about 100 grams sugar. Add half a liter of water and bring to a boil. Pour in 300 grams of *cuscus* and stir well, then turn off the heat and cover the pot. Let it sit for about 10 minutes and serve hot. You can also accompany this dessert with milk cream or condensed milk.

## **Taamia (chickpea patties)**

*You will need:*

200 grams chickpeas  
one large boiled potato  
two tablespoons chickpea flour  
100 grams fresh cottage cheese  
one or two hot chili peppers (optional)  
a small bunch of parsley, chopped  
a tablespoon lemon juice  
sunflower oil for deep-frying

If you prefer boiling the chickpeas yourselves instead of using canned ones, soak them overnight and boil them in the pressure cooker. When the chickpeas are soft, drain them, mash them in a bowl with the potato, the chickpea flour, a pinch of salt, hot chili pepper and parsley. Make small round patties and deep-fry them in hot oil. Serve sprinkled with lemon juice.

## **Baba ghanoush (eggplant spread)**

*You will need:*

two large eggplants  
200 grams sesame seeds or peanuts  
two tablespoons of lemon juice



one garlic clove (optional)  
two tablespoons of olive oil

Cut the eggplants in half lengthwise, smear with oil and bake them in the oven until they are tender. In the meantime slightly roast the sesame seeds or peanuts and let them cool. When the eggplants are done and cooled, puree them in the blender with the sesame (or peanuts), garlic, lemon juice and a little salt. Serve on toasted bread.

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