

Macaroni and Cheese

This is such a classic, and my version highlights a pure, rich, and comforting cheese flavor since I skip the roux (a mixture of butter and flour cooked with milk or cream) as a base and start by melting grated Gruyère, Parmesan, and sharp cheddar directly into warmed cream instead. I've always felt that a roux dulls the other flavors and almost clashes with the floury nature of the macaroni itself. Dijon and a splash of Tabasco add some heat, while Worcestershire offers salt and the umami quality that keeps you coming back for more. Note: Worcestershire contains anchovies, so if you want this to be vegetarian, substitute soy sauce.

SERVES 8 TO 10

Kosher salt
1 pound elbow macaroni (preferably De Cecco brand)
1 quart (4 cups) heavy cream
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
3 to 3½ cups finely grated Gruyère cheese
Freshly ground black pepper
1 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese (grated on a Microplane)
½ cup finely grated sharp cheddar cheese (grated on a Microplane)
Splash of Worcestershire sauce
Splash of Tabasco
1 large garlic clove, grated on a Microplane
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
1 cup panko bread crumbs, toasted

COOK THE MACARONI: In a large pot, bring 4 quarts of water to a rolling boil over medium heat. Add enough salt to make it taste like seawater (I like to add about 4 tablespoons). Then add the macaroni and use a wooden spoon to stir it, making sure that the macaroni does not stick to the bottom of the pot as it cooks. Cook until the macaroni is still quite firm, generally 6 to 8 minutes (or a few minutes shy of al dente according to the package's instructions). Reserve 1 cup of the pasta water and drain the macaroni in a colander.

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

MAKE THE SAUCE: In the same pot you used to cook the macaroni, bring the cream and the reserved pasta water to a simmer over medium heat. Whisk in the mustard and then stir in 3 cups of the Gruyère. Season with salt and pepper. Simmer gently, stirring constantly, until the cheese is melted and integrated with the cream. Add ½ cup of the Parmesan and the cheddar, and stir until smooth. Add the Worcestershire and Tabasco and the garlic, and stir to blend. Taste for seasoning.

COMBINE: Add the macaroni to the cheese sauce and stir gently to blend. Remove the pot from the heat and set it aside so the macaroni absorbs the flavor of the sauce, 5 to 10 minutes. Taste. If it needs more cheesy flavor, add the remaining ½ cup Gruyère.

FINISH IN THE OVEN: In a medium bowl, mix the butter and the toasted bread crumbs. Season with salt and the remaining ½ cup Parmesan. Transfer the macaroni to a baking dish and top it with an even layer of the bread-crumbs mixture. Bake the macaroni and cheese until it is hot and bubbling, 10 to 15 minutes. Remove from the oven, let rest for a few minutes, and serve.

Garlicky Lamb Steaks

WITH BABY RED POTATOES

Imagine: A slab of seared lamb, touched with garlic and mustard, sitting atop some simply roasted baby red potatoes sprinkled with red wine vinegar. Not only is it tasty, it's so achievable. Start with some center-cut lamb steaks. It sounds good when you say it—"center cut." The center-cut steaks on any whole cut of meat tend to be the best for many reasons: they are easy to cook because they are all generally the same size; they are usually free of the tougher, sinewy ends of any cut of meat; and they are the meatiest! My daughter, Ava, loves lamb far more than I do. She's a real carnivore, so this one's for her.

SERVES 4

4 (¾- to 1-inch-thick) center-cut lamb steaks (2 to 2½ pounds total)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons canola oil
1 cup dry red wine
16 to 18 baby red potatoes, such as Red Bliss, quartered
12 large garlic cloves
2 tablespoons grainy mustard
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Set an oven rack in the upper-middle position.

SEAR THE LAMB: Season the lamb steaks on both sides with salt and pepper. Heat a heavy-bottomed skillet large enough to hold all of the lamb steaks over high heat. Add the oil to the pan and when it begins to smoke, after 2 to 3 minutes, add the lamb steaks in a single layer and cook until browned on the first side, 3 to 5 minutes. Resist the temptation to move them around. Turn them over and brown on the second side for 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer the lamb steaks to a sheet pan, leaving some space between them.

COOK: In the same skillet, simmer the wine for 2 to 3 minutes. This will deglaze the pan and blend all the good browned drippings into the wine. Pour these pan juices over the meat on the sheet pan. Arrange the potatoes and garlic cloves around the meat.

FINISH: Place the pan in the oven on the upper-middle rack and bake the lamb until an instant-read thermometer reads 125°F to 130°F for medium-rare to medium, 15 to 18 minutes. If you like well-done meat, cook the lamb for 5 to 8 minutes longer. Remove the pan from the oven and put it on a burner on top of the stove. In a small bowl, mix the mustard and vinegar together and spoon it over the meat—the liquid will simmer since the pan is so hot. Simmer for 1 minute, tossing to coat the potatoes and meat with the mustard mixture and the cooking juices. To serve, place the pan, with the bubbling-hot juices, in the center of the table or transfer it all to a serving platter.

Chicken Paprikash's Tomatoey Cousin

This is a chicken dish my mother would make from time to time. While not entirely loyal to a classic paprikash, I love that she mixes in some Italian chicken cacciatore vibes with the tomato. I definitely think a good chicken breast, cooked until perfectly juicy, doesn't get enough love. Too often, a boneless, skinless breast cooks up so dry that it resembles shoe leather. Not here. In this dish, the breasts are almost treated like thighs. They are seared skin-down first to get the skin nice and crispy. The cayenne delivers a tingling heat that gets bookended by the sweetness of the paprika and tomatoes on one side and the vinegar on the other. Traditionally, paprikash is served with egg noodles and tossed in a little sour cream, but I love it even more with basmati rice pilaf (see page 213) or a crusty loaf of sourdough bread to soak up all that sauce.

SERVES 4

- 4 (8-ounce) skin-on, bone-in chicken breasts
- Kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 medium yellow onions, halved and thinly sliced
- 4 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1 large red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and thinly sliced
- 3 tablespoons sweet Hungarian paprika
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 medium plum tomatoes, cored and coarsely chopped
- 2 cups chicken stock, store-bought or homemade (page 107)
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Position a rack in the center of the oven.

BROWN THE CHICKEN BREASTS: Season the chicken breasts with salt. Heat the canola oil in an ovenproof medium sauté pan set over medium heat. When the oil begins to smoke lightly, after 2 to 3 minutes, remove the pan from the heat and add the chicken breasts, skin-side down. Return the pan to the heat and cook until the skin is browned, 5 to 8 minutes. Remove the chicken from the pan (you'll use the pan again), transfer it to a plate, cover with foil, and keep warm.

MAKE THE SAUCE: Add the onions, garlic, bell pepper, paprika, and cayenne to the pan you used to brown the chicken. Cook over medium heat until the onions are translucent, 5 to 8 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, chicken stock, and vinegar and cook until the sauce comes together, 12 to 15 minutes. Taste for seasoning.

FINISH COOKING THE CHICKEN: Arrange the chicken breasts, skin-side up, in the sauce. Place the pan in the oven on the center rack and bake the chicken until the skin is golden brown and the juices run clear when the thickest part of a breast is pierced with the tip of a knife, 20 to 25 minutes. (Alternatively, an instant-read thermometer should read 165°F when inserted into the thickest part of the breast.) Remove the pan from the oven and let the chicken rest for 10 to 15 minutes in the sauce.

SERVE: Taste the sauce for seasoning. Arrange the chicken breasts on a platter and serve topped with the sauce.

Tomato and Gingery Coconut Milk Chicken

My mother essentially operated her kitchen like a French bistro where the chef had likely worked in a few Michelin-starred joints along the way. With each passing year of my childhood I fell deeper in love with her soufflés, quiches, and mousses. She was, by way of eggs and some advice from the great Julia Child, turning me into a little Francophile. That said, once in a blue moon, she would cook a dish like this one. I was used to richness coming only from buttery, creamy French dishes, so the coconut milk stood out as a real star to me. I remember wondering how a chicken could taste so rich and feel so light and clean at the same time. The answer: Because this is a dish where coconut milk and canned tomatoes live in wedded bliss. The richness of the coconut links up with the acidity and sweetness of the tomatoes. In the middle of it all? The juicy chicken with tasty skin and tender meat. It's not about crispy skin here but rather the true deliciousness of the chicken. I love to spoon this over a bed of rice. It would be equally tasty with some of the potatoes from the Mojo-Marinated Skirt Steak recipe on page 196.

SERVES 6 TO 8

- 6 chicken thighs and 6 drumsticks (3 to 4 pounds total)
- Kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds
- 2 large yellow onions, thinly sliced
- 4 medium garlic cloves, pressed through a garlic press
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
- 2 dried bay leaves
- 1 (15.5-ounce) can unsweetened coconut milk
- 1 (28-ounce) can peeled whole tomatoes
- 1 small knob fresh ginger, peeled and grated

BROWN THE CHICKEN: Arrange the chicken in a single layer on a sheet pan and season with salt. Turn the pieces over and season again. Heat a large skillet over high heat, add the oil, and heat until it begins to lightly smoke, 2 to 3 minutes. Then carefully add enough chicken pieces to fill the skillet without crowding (you will need to cook the chicken in batches). Resist the temptation to move or turn the pieces so they can brown properly on their first side, 5 to 8 minutes. With tongs, turn the chicken pieces over and cook until they are browned on the second side, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer the chicken pieces to a sheet pan and set aside. Repeat with the remaining chicken pieces.

MAKE THE SAUCE: Drain all but about 2 tablespoons of the fat from the skillet. Return the skillet to medium heat and add the cumin seeds, stirring rapidly to give them a quick 10- to 15-second toast. Add the onions and garlic, season with salt, and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until they turn light brown, 5 to 8 minutes. Stir in the cinnamon, red pepper flakes, and bay leaves. Add the coconut milk and the tomatoes, using a wooden spoon to break them up. Cook the sauce until all the flavors come together, 10 to 15 minutes.

FINISH THE CHICKEN: Add ¼ cup of water to the skillet and arrange the chicken pieces, skin-side up, in the sauce. Keeping the heat on medium-low, cook until the pieces are cooked through, 30 to 35 minutes. Stir in the ginger and remove the bay leaves. Taste for seasoning. If the sauce is thin, simmer it for a few more minutes before serving.

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Lentil Soup

Lentils need only a few things to be really happy: black pepper, balsamic vinegar, and brown sugar. In essence, their earthy heart begs for spice, acid, and sweetness as backup dancers. Do not salt the lentils until they are cooked—lentils actually cook more evenly and tenderize better in the absence of salt. The method here is to slow-cook the lentils separately from the vegetables and then add the caramelized vegetables at the end (with the salt). Make this dairy-free by subbing in a flavorful stock—either beef, chicken, or vegetable—for the cream. If it's easier for you, you can precook everything—the lentils and the vegetables—and stir them together just before serving.

SERVES 4 TO 6

- 1 pound dried brown du Puy lentils, rinsed and drained
- 1 dried bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large red onion, halved and finely chopped
- ½ teaspoon cumin seeds
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander
- Kosher salt
- 2 medium carrots, cut into ¼-inch-thick rounds
- 3 celery stalks, peeled and sliced into ½-inch-thick pieces
- 2 teaspoons dark brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 cup heavy cream (or beef, chicken, or vegetable stock)

COOK THE LENTILS: Place the lentils and the bay leaf in a slow cooker and add 6 cups of water. Cover and cook on low for 2 hours. Then raise the setting to high and cook for an additional 4 hours. The goal is to finish with cooked, tender lentils and sufficient flavorful liquid to make the soup.

COOK THE VEGETABLES: Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. When the oil begins to smoke lightly, add the onions, cumin seeds, coriander, and a generous pinch of salt. Stir to blend and cook over medium to high heat, stirring constantly, until the onions begin to brown around the edges, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the carrots, celery, brown sugar, pepper, and another pinch of salt, and cook until the vegetables become completely tender but not mushy, 10 to 12 minutes. Shut off the heat.

FINISH THE SOUP: Check the lentils: they should be tender but not mushy. Remove the bay leaf, season the lentils with a generous pinch of salt, and stir in the cooked vegetables. Remember that the lentils will need a good amount of seasoning because they were cooked without any salt, so the amount of salt you add may surprise you. Stir in the balsamic, mustard, soy sauce, and cream, and let the soup rest for 10 minutes. Taste again for seasoning before serving.

Chickpea and Tomato Chili

This chili honestly snuck up on me. I have to admit that a meaty chili is dynamite, but so are all of the flavors that build in this vegetarian (or vegan, without the sour cream) version. I used to always cook chili on the stove, layering each ingredient in as I was taught in cooking school. The idea that chili can come together so beautifully after a mostly hands-off low, slow cooking time astonished me. I worried the flavors would be dulled and the vegetables uninspired from waiting around too long. I was wrong.

Toasted almonds add great crunch and a toasty flavor, but if you don't want to add them, substitute cooked quinoa or sunflower seeds for a nutty note. If you like your chili less spicy, simply remove the seeds and ribs from the jalapeño before using it. If you don't have time to soak the chickpeas the night before, you can use three (15.5-ounce) cans of low-sodium chickpeas instead, adding them after the tomatoes and spices have cooked. How great is it to have a comforting, healthy meal cooking away all day! All you have to do is come home and dig in.

SERVES 4 TO 6

- 1 (16-ounce) bag dried chickpeas
- 1 (28-ounce) can peeled whole tomatoes, crushed, with their juices
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 2 teaspoons hot paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium red onions, finely chopped
- 1 large red bell pepper, halved, seeded, and sliced into ½-inch-wide strips
- 5 large garlic cloves, grated on a Microplane
- 1 small jalapeño, sliced into thin rounds
- Kosher salt
- 2 cups cooked fresh or thawed if frozen corn kernels
- 6 scallions (green and white parts), thinly sliced
- ¼ cup slivered almonds, toasted
- 1 cup (8 ounces) sour cream (optional)

SOAK THE CHICKPEAS: Place the dried chickpeas in a large bowl and add cold water to cover. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, place it in the refrigerator, and let the chickpeas soak for 8 hours or up to overnight.

START THE CHILI: Drain the chickpeas and place them in a slow cooker. Add the tomatoes, then fill the tomato can with water and add that to the pot. Stir in the chili powder, paprika, and cumin. Cover with the lid, set the slow cooker on low, and cook for 6 hours. After that time, the chickpeas should be completely tender. (If you're using canned chickpeas, add them at this point.)

In a large sauté pan, heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium heat. When the oil begins to smoke, after 2 to 3 minutes, add the onions, bell pepper, garlic, and jalapeño. Season with salt and cook, stirring from time to time, until the onions soften slightly, 3 to 5 minutes.

FINISH THE CHILI: Transfer the sautéed vegetables to the slow cooker and stir gently to combine. Set the slow cooker on high and cook for 30 minutes.

SERVE: Stir the corn and scallions into the chili and taste for seasoning. Ladle the chili into individual bowls and top with the almonds. Serve with sour cream, if desired.

Slow Cooker Brownies

This is an odd place in the book to insert a dessert, but I fell in love with the idea of having a sweet treat like brownies, which are so good eaten warm just as they finish cooking, come out of a slow cooker! This recipe yields a tasty brownie with chewy edges and a very gooey center. Gooier than your classic oven-baked versions. I like to spoon it out and into a bowl, and then drop a scoop of vanilla ice cream right out of the freezer on top. The warm brownies with ice cream melting over them? The best of both worlds. Don't like nuts? Simply omit. It's refreshing not to need your oven to make dessert. This is also a fun dish to have at a dinner party because when your guests look around for dessert, they'll never guess it's waiting in your slow cooker!

MAKES ABOUT 12 BROWNIES

8 tablespoons (1 stick)
unsalted butter, cut
into 8 equal pieces,
plus 1 to 2 tablespoons
at room temperature
for greasing the slow
cooker

1¼ cups all-purpose flour

¼ cup unsweetened
Dutch-process cocoa
powder

¾ teaspoon baking
powder

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1½ cups walnut halves,
coarsely chopped

9 ounces (about 1½ cups)
semisweet chocolate
chips

8 ounces bittersweet
chocolate, chopped
(about 1¼ cups)

1 cup sugar

3 large eggs, lightly beaten

2 teaspoons vanilla
extract

PREPARE THE SLOW COOKER: Grease the bottom and sides of the ceramic insert of a slow cooker with the softened butter, and then line the bottom and sides of the insert with buttered parchment paper. Don't worry if the paper bunches a little when you fit it into the round (or oval) pot. It's unavoidable. What you want is to create a protective layer between the cooker and the batter. (And later, you'll be able to grab the sides of the parchment to lift the whole brownie out once it is cooked.)

MAKE THE BATTER: In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, salt, walnuts, and semisweet chocolate chips. Set aside.

Fill a medium saucepan with about 3 inches of water and bring it to a simmer over medium heat. Put the 8 tablespoons butter and the bittersweet chocolate in a medium heatproof bowl and set it over the simmering water (the bottom of the bowl shouldn't touch the water). Reduce the heat to low. Stir the mixture with a spatula until the chocolate and butter melt together, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove the bowl from the heat and gently whisk in the sugar, eggs, and vanilla. Stir the chocolate mixture into the flour mixture until thoroughly blended. Transfer the batter to the slow cooker, using the spatula to level it.

COOK: Cover the cooker and cook on low for 1½ hours. Then remove the cover and cook for an additional 30 minutes to develop a slight crust on top. (Every slow cooker is different and the timing can vary. If the brownies are still not done at this point, cook until they feel firm around the edges, another 15 to 30 minutes.)

Gently run a rubber spatula around the edges to loosen the brownie from the parchment. For a rustic effect, scoop portions of brownie right out of the slow cooker and serve warm. For classic brownie squares, let the brownie cool in the slow cooker for about 1 hour; then use the parchment paper to lift the brownie out of the cooker and onto a cake plate. Cut it into 12 equal pieces for serving.



RED SAUCE RECIPES

I grew up an Italian American in New York City, so of course my parents and I wandered (and ate our way) through all the Italian neighborhoods, from Little Italy in Lower Manhattan to Arthur Avenue in the Bronx and Hell's Kitchen on Manhattan's West Side. My dad would make these dishes—you know the ones—more than my mom would. He always had a spare can of tomato paste, a can of peeled whole tomatoes, and fresh garlic in the house no matter what. If there were a zombie apocalypse, we would have enough pantry stock on hand to eat these dishes for weeks. The beauty of this kind of highly comforting food is that you can make it in advance and put it in the fridge overnight so it tastes even better when you sit down to eat it the next day.

Ninth Avenue Childhood Baked Ziti

Except for lasagna, my mom didn't make many baked pasta dishes when I was growing up. The first time I ever had—and fell in love with—baked ziti was in a tiny overly air-conditioned restaurant on Ninth Avenue in New York City. It was a true red-sauce joint, and I remember being cold from the air conditioning and very hungry. The dish arrived at my table boiling hot, bubbling volcanically. I was hooked. It was like an instant fireplace and dinner at the same time. The broiled molten cheesy topping, the unabashed use of garlic, the pasta edges that have crunch like they were fried yet somehow are still al dente inside . . . I always like to eat the edges first, don't you?

SERVES 6 TO 8

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium yellow onions, minced
- 10 large garlic cloves, minced
- Kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
- 2 (28-ounce) cans peeled whole tomatoes, with their juices
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 pound ziti pasta
- 1 cup tightly packed fresh basil leaves
- 1 pound mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 2 to 2½ cups finely grated Parmesan cheese (about 8 ounces)

MAKE THE SAUCE: Heat the olive oil in a large skillet set over medium heat. Add the onions and garlic, and season with salt and the red pepper flakes. Cook, stirring from time to time, until the onions become translucent, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes and their juices, the sugar, and the oregano, and stir to blend. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the aroma of the tomatoes deepens and the raw garlic mellows, 18 to 20 minutes. Taste for seasoning. Set aside.

COOK THE PASTA: Fill a large pot with 4 quarts of water and bring it to a rolling boil. Add ¼ cup salt and return the water to a boil. Taste the water. It should be salty like seawater. Add the ziti and stir with a large slotted spoon to ensure that the pasta does not clump or stick to the pot as it cooks. Cook until the ziti is still quite firm, 6 to 8 minutes. Drain.

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Set an oven rack in the upper-middle position.

MIX AND REST: Add the ziti to the sauce and stir gently to combine. Allow the mixture to rest on the stove so the pasta can absorb the flavors from the sauce, 5 to 10 minutes. Then stir in the basil. Taste for seasoning.

BAKE AND SERVE: Fill a 10 by 15-inch baking dish with half of the ziti and sauce, and sprinkle half of the mozzarella and half of the Parmesan over the mixture. Top with all of the remaining pasta and sauce and the remaining cheese. Center the dish on a sheet pan and place it on the upper-middle rack of the oven. Bake until the top browns, 15 to 18 minutes. Switch the oven to broil and broil the ziti until the cheese is golden brown and bubbling, 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

COOK THE PASTA: Fill a large pot with 4 quarts of water and bring the water to a rolling boil over high heat. Add a generous handful of salt. Bring the water back up to a boil. Add the pasta and cook, stirring with a slotted spoon to make sure it does not clump or stick to the bottom, until it's al dente, 8 to 9 minutes. Drain the pasta in a large colander.

FINISH THE SAUCE AND MEATBALLS: When you drop the pasta into the water, add the meatballs to the sauce and simmer over very low heat, bubbling slightly, to warm the meatballs through and let them absorb some of the sauce, 3 to 5 minutes. Shut off the heat and allow the sauce and meatballs to rest while your pasta finishes cooking.

SERVE: Transfer the sauce and meatballs to a large bowl and toss in half of the cooked pasta. Add some of the Parmesan cheese. Stir in the remaining pasta. Serve with the remaining cheese in a bowl on the side.

Godfather Spaghetti and Meatballs

SERVES 4 TO 6

GODFATHER SAUCE

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 spicy Italian sausages (about 12 ounces total)
- 5 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- Kosher salt
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 2 medium Roma tomatoes, cored and finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 (28-ounce) can peeled whole tomatoes, with their juices
- 2 to 3 tablespoons red wine
- ½ cup fresh basil leaves

GODFATHER MEATBALLS

- 1 pound ground beef (85% lean)
- ½ cup panko bread crumbs, toasted
- ½ cup finely grated Parmesan cheese, plus extra for serving
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ½ cup chopped fresh curly-leaf parsley
- Kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

TO FINISH

- Kosher salt
- 12 ounces spaghetti
- ½ cup finely grated Parmesan cheese

RED SAUCE RECIPES

MAKE THE SAUCE: In a medium skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the sausages and cook steadily, browning them on all sides, until they are cooked through, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove the sausages (reserve the oil in the skillet) and drain them on a plate lined with paper towels. Add the garlic slices to the skillet and season with salt. Reduce the heat and cook until the garlic browns, about 2 minutes. Then add the tomato paste and sauté it over medium heat, stirring constantly, until it melds with the oil and garlic, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the fresh tomatoes, sugar ("Here's my secret: I add a little bit of sugar"), oregano, and the canned tomatoes and their juices. Cook for a few minutes over high heat, stirring from time to time, until the sauce tastes cooked. Add ½ cup of water and simmer over low heat until the flavors settle and mellow, 5 to 8 minutes. Stir in the wine ("Add a splash of wine") and simmer until the wine blends in with the tomatoes, 3 to 5 minutes. Taste for seasoning. Stir in the basil leaves and sausages.

MAKE THE MEATBALLS: Put the beef in a large bowl and spread it across the bottom of the bowl and up the sides. (This will help to distribute the seasonings evenly throughout the meat.) Add the toasted bread crumbs, Parmesan, egg, chopped parsley, salt to taste, and the red pepper flakes all over the meat and use your hands to mix the ingredients together.

TASTE TEST: Roll 1 small meatball, about 2 inches in diameter. Heat the oil in a small skillet over high heat. When the oil begins to smoke lightly, shut off the heat (to avoid splattering) and add the meatball. Cook until it is browned on all sides and cooked through but still pink in the middle, 2 to 3 minutes. Taste for seasoning and texture. If the meatball is too wet, add some more bread crumbs to the mixture. If it's too dry, add another beaten egg or 2 to 3 tablespoons more of Parmesan. Taste for seasoning. Roll the remaining meat mixture into balls; it should make eighteen to twenty 2-inch meatballs.

COOK THE MEATBALLS: Place the sausages on a flat surface and cut them into 1-inch-thick rounds. Place them, along with the meatballs, in the simmering sauce (you are not going to brown the meatballs, and this is a big difference from how goodfellas cook them). Simmer the sauce over medium to low heat until the meat is cooked through, 10 to 12 minutes. Keep the sauce warm over low heat.

recipe continues

COOK THE PASTA: In a large pot, bring 4 quarts of water to a rolling boil. Add a generous handful of salt. Bring the water back up to a boil. Add the pasta and cook, stirring with a slotted spoon to make sure it does not clump or stick to the bottom, until it is al dente, 8 to 9 minutes. Drain the pasta in a large colander.

SERVE: Shut off the heat and allow the sauce and meat to rest as your pasta finishes cooking. Transfer the sauce, with the meatballs and sausage, to a large bowl and toss with half of the cooked pasta. Add some of the Parmesan cheese. Stir in the remaining pasta. Taste for seasoning. Serve with the remaining cheese in a bowl on the side.



Carrot Salad

WITH MISO DRESSING

Go to the supermarket and head for the refrigerated cases in the produce section. Chances are, nestled in the salad dressings or perhaps near the pickled and fermented jars of kimchi and beets, you'll see a few small plastic tubs of shiro miso, a white (or blond) miso paste that is made from fermented soybeans. Its flavor is both salty and sweet and almost like a salted caramel, and it works magic with savory and sweet flavors. You can use a spoonful of shiro miso in just about any dish where you crave an added layer of richness or a slightly salty note. It even tastes good in a caramel sauce for dessert! I have used brown sugar and salt here to bolster the flavors the miso brings to the table. Sweet carrots and tangy green apple make this salad tasty. I love it whisked into a simple red wine vinegar salad dressing, and it's also delicious mixed with honey and spread on sliced cooked chicken. I add a spoonful whenever I find myself thinking, "I need a dash of I don't know what."

This salad is a case study in one ingredient: carrots. They taste varied and more exciting when they're cut into different shapes and combined with accents like miso, scallion, and green apple.

SERVES 4 TO 6

- 2 tablespoons white miso paste (shiro miso)
- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon dark brown sugar
- 2 medium shallots, minced
- 1½ tablespoons kosher salt, plus extra as needed
- 1½ tablespoons coarsely ground black pepper
- ½ cup canola oil
- 12 medium carrots, peeled
- 2 medium green apples, cored and halved
- 4 scallions (green and white parts), sliced

MAKE THE DRESSING: In a large serving bowl, whisk the miso and vinegar together until smooth. Add the brown sugar and shallots, and allow the mixture to sit for 5 minutes so the shallots can drink in the vinegar. Then whisk in the salt, pepper, and oil. Taste for seasoning.

PREPARE THE CARROTS: Place the carrots on a flat surface. Cut 4 of the carrots into cubes by slicing them in half lengthwise, then slicing each half again lengthwise, and then cutting the quarters crosswise into ½-inch pieces. Cut 4 of the remaining carrots into thin rounds. Grate the remaining 4 carrots on the large holes of a box grater.

FINISH THE SALAD: Cut the apple halves into thin slices. Add the apple slices, carrots, scallions, and a pinch of salt to the dressing and toss everything together. Serve immediately.



Juicy Chilled Cucumber, Olive, and Feta Salad

There are so many types of feta cheese at the supermarket that it can be confusing: Greek, Danish, French, in brine, not in brine, cow's milk, sheep's milk. Greek feta is the one you know from the classic diner-style Greek salad that feels like three meals in one and takes 45 minutes of chewing to get through. The feta is firm, cubes nicely, and has a pleasantly salty, creamy note with a chalky, chewy undertone. I love it. But when I make a cucumber and tomato salad at home, I like French sheep's-milk feta. It's creamier and softer than Greek feta, and, honestly, I just like the flavor more. I also use large, meaty green olives instead of the classic Kalamatas, because I love their texture and mellower flavor. I choose English cucumbers here because I can skip the seeding and they have a great sweet taste. If you have access to farm-stand cucumbers like Kirbys or "burpless," use those!

SERVES 4 TO 6

- ½ small red onion, sliced into very thin rounds on a mandoline
- 2 English cucumbers, peeled and halved lengthwise
- Kosher salt
- 4 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 small inner yellow celery stalks with their leaves, cut crosswise into ¼-inch pieces
- 1 cup green olives (my favorite are Cerignola), pitted and halved
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 6 ounces feta cheese (preferably French sheep's-milk feta)
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano

SOAK THE ONIONS: Fill a small bowl three-fourths full with cold water and add a few ice cubes. Place the onion rounds in the water and refrigerate for 15 to 20 minutes. This will mellow their raw onion flavor.

DICE THE CUCUMBERS: Place the cucumbers, cut-side down, on a flat surface. Cut each half lengthwise into 3 even slices. Turn the slices on their sides and cut them again into 3 even slices. Now cut the strips into ½-inch cubes. Spoon them into a large serving bowl and toss with a pinch of salt. Refrigerate.

MAKE THE DRESSING: In a medium bowl, whisk 3 tablespoons of the vinegar with the Dijon mustard and olive oil. Taste for seasoning. Stir in the celery (including the leaves) and olives. Remove the onions from the ice water and pat them dry with a kitchen towel. Season the onions with the sugar and add them to the dressing.

ASSEMBLE AND SERVE: Break up the cheese with your fingers and sprinkle it with the cumin, oregano, and the remaining 1 tablespoon vinegar. Remove the bowl of cucumbers from the fridge and pour off and discard any liquid they have released. Add the cheese and all of the dressing to the cucumbers. Toss, taste for seasoning, and serve.

Roasted Sweet Potato Salad

WITH HONEY AND TOASTED PUMPKIN SEEDS

This sweet potato salad can serve many purposes. Sometimes I eat this dish as an afternoon meal to take a break from meat—but not flavor! It is also a wonderful companion to bacon and eggs in the morning, and it works beautifully next to dishes like my Mojo-Marinated Skirt Steak on page 196. What makes this salad really stand out is the miso, honey, and lime juice dressing—it adds umami and a fresh note and just ties into the sweetness of the potato in a great way. Endive is crisp, sturdy, and bitter, which is lovely against the creaminess of the potatoes and the salty, almost butterscotch taste of the miso. This salad is great when the potatoes are warm but is equally delicious when they are cool or even chilled.

SERVES 4 TO 6

- 4 large sweet potatoes
- 2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons white miso paste (shiro miso)
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- Juice of 1 lime
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon Asian sesame oil
- Maldon salt
- 1 head yellow or red Belgian endive, separated into individual leaves
- ¼ cup pepitas (hulled pumpkin seeds), toasted

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Position a rack in the center of the oven.

COOK THE POTATOES: Arrange the potatoes in a single layer on a sheet pan. Place the pan in the oven on the center rack and bake, undisturbed, until a paring knife slips easily into the center of the largest potato, 1 to 1½ hours. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool.

MAKE THE DRESSING: In a medium bowl, whisk together the soy sauce, miso, honey, rice vinegar, and lime juice. Slowly whisk in the olive oil and sesame oil along with 1 to 2 tablespoons of cool water. Taste for seasoning.

CUT THE POTATOES: Place the potatoes on a flat surface, and with a serrated knife, carefully quarter them lengthwise. Arrange the pieces in a single layer on a serving platter.

ASSEMBLE AND SERVE THE SALAD: Season the potatoes with the Maldon salt. Drizzle some of the dressing liberally over the potatoes. In a medium bowl, toss the endive with some of the remaining dressing. Intersperse the endive leaves between the potatoes and top with the pepitas.

Grilled Brown Sugar Corn Salad

WITH SCALLIONS

This salad is a summertime greatest hit. There is no way everyone won't devour it! I love it most of all with grilled corn, but roasted corn (or even leftover cooked corn) can be great with these ingredients. I like to serve it and eat it freshly assembled and still warm, but, that said, this salad is also great when it's put together ahead of time and the flavors get a chance to meld together. Serve it warm or chilled, preferably on the patio.

SERVES 3 OR 4

- 6 large ears fresh corn, shucked
- 5 scallions
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt
- 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- Juice of 1 large lime
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons dark brown sugar
- ½ cup fresh basil leaves

Preheat a grill to high.

GRILL THE CORN AND SCALLIONS: Rub the ears of corn and the scallions with about 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Place the corn and scallions on the hottest part of the grill and cook until they are charred on all sides; the scallions will take 3 to 4 minutes and the corn 8 to 10 minutes. Remove them from the grill and let them cool slightly. Cut the kernels off the ears of corn and slice the scallions (green and white parts) into ½-inch lengths.

MAKE THE SALAD: In a large serving bowl, whisk the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil with the cider vinegar, mustard, lime juice, and pepper. Taste for seasoning. Add the corn and scallions to the bowl, along with the brown sugar and basil, and toss to finish.



Spinach Salad

WITH SOY-GINGER DRESSING

This is a salad that can go two ways. It can be a great zingy companion to any main course, or it can be served topped with roasted chicken (see page 76) or grilled steak for a salad main. I read that we benefit more from spinach when we eat it partially cooked; I also think it tastes best when eaten this way, which is why I wilt most of the spinach for the salad, adding in a bit of raw spinach before serving. You can use larger, leafier spinach here; just tear it into smaller pieces and cook it a few seconds longer. I like to make the dressing in advance and find it is most flavorful when it has a chance to cool to room temperature.

SERVES 2 OR 3

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ½ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
- Kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon smooth peanut butter
- 3 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- Juice of 1 large lime
- 1¼ pounds baby spinach leaves

SAUTÉ THE GARLIC: Heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil in a small skillet set over medium heat. Add the garlic, red pepper flakes, and a pinch of salt, and cook, stirring constantly, until the garlic softens, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the peanut butter; then transfer the mixture to a medium bowl.

MAKE THE DRESSING: Whisk the soy sauce, honey, ginger, lime juice, and 2 tablespoons of water into the peanut butter–garlic mixture. Taste for seasoning, and if the dressing seems thick, add 1 more tablespoon of water and taste again.

MAKE THE SALAD: Place a large skillet over low heat and add the remaining tablespoon olive oil. Warm it slightly (about 30 seconds) and then remove the pan from the heat and add about three-fourths of the spinach. Season it lightly with salt and toss with a spoon so the spinach gets coated with the oil and wilts slightly, about 1 minute. The spinach should be only partially wilted and still appear somewhat raw. Pour off any water that might have accumulated in the bottom of the skillet and add the softened spinach and remaining raw spinach to the dressing. Toss to combine and serve in individual bowls.



Pk Sanieski

Juicy Carrot Soup

Here raw ingredients are combined to create a tasty “clean” soup for warm weather. I like orange carrots best for this because they always taste the sweetest and offer the best texture. (Sometimes the fancy heirloom stuff is not the best ingredient to use.) Ginger juice tastes better (and is less work) when you leave the skin on; simply rinse off any dirt before juicing. Note: You can most easily make this soup by purchasing the carrot and ginger juices ready-made. When I have some friends over, I love a first course that’s sitting on ice (quite literally) and is ready to go. It takes the pressure off cooking!

SERVES 6

- 1½ quarts (6 cups) fresh carrot juice
- ¼ cup fresh ginger juice (store-bought or from 8 to 10 ounces fresh ginger; see Note)
- Juice of 2 large oranges (about ½ cup)
- Juice of 1 large lemon (about ¼ cup)
- 2 tablespoons honey
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small jicama, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ small jalapeño, cut into thin rounds (see Note)

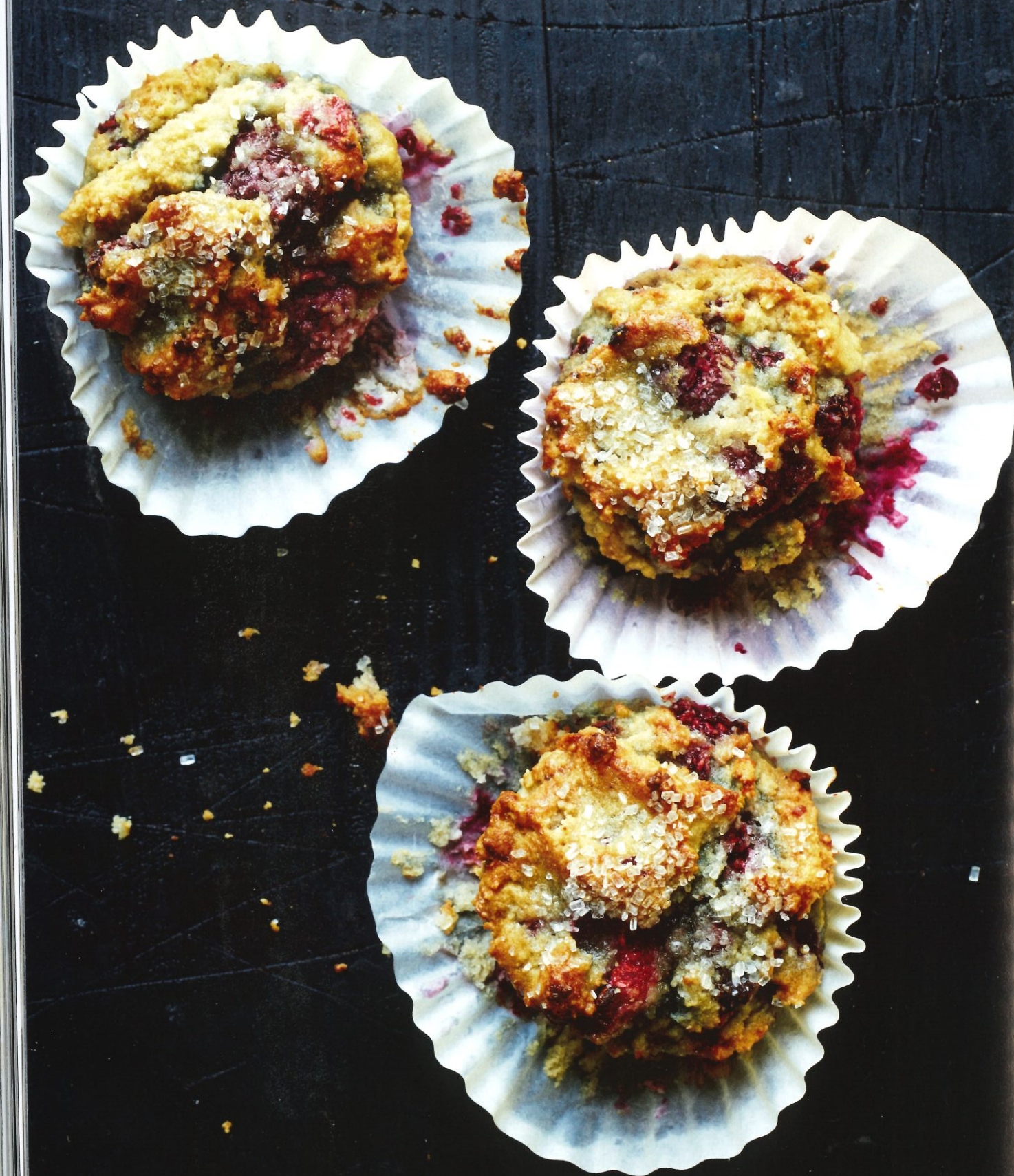
MAKE THE SOUP: In a blender, combine the carrot juice, ginger juice, orange juice, lemon juice, honey, and salt and pepper to taste, and blend on medium-low speed until smooth. With the blender running on medium speed, slowly pour in the olive oil. Taste for seasoning and then refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 8 hours. Chill six soup bowls in the refrigerator, too.

GARNISH AND SERVE THE SOUP: Toss the jicama, ground ginger, and jalapeño together in a medium bowl and season with salt. Divide the jicama mixture among the chilled soup bowls. Pour the soup over the jicama (it becomes a hidden crunchy, spicy treat) and serve.

Ginger Juice: On a flat surface and using a large chef’s knife, cut the ginger into ½-inch slices and run them through a juicer according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

Note: For less heat, simply remove the seeds and ribs from the jalapeño.





Gluten-Free Vanilla-Raspberry Muffins

Thanks to almond flour, these gluten-free muffins have a wonderful flavor, with the brightness from the raspberries providing a great counter to the richness from the nut flour. I sprinkle sugar and lemon zest over the muffins right when they come out of the oven. The sugar immediately adheres and semi-melts, offering sweetness and great texture as well. Other muffins that include lemon in the batter—but not grated on top—can't match the brightness of grating the zest right over the top.

MAKES 12 MUFFINS

Nonstick cooking spray
1¾ cups almond flour
1 cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup (2 sticks) plus
2 tablespoons unsalted
butter, cut into small
cubes, at room
temperature
2 large eggs
3 large egg yolks
3 tablespoons buttermilk
1 tablespoon vanilla
extract
1½ cups fresh raspberries
¼ cup coarse sugar
Grated zest of 1 large
lemon

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Position a rack in the center of the oven. Spray a 12-cup muffin tin with cooking spray and then add a muffin liner to each cup. Coat the liners with cooking spray as well.

MAKE THE BATTER: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment (or using a handheld mixer), mix the almond flour, granulated sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and butter on low speed until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs, 3 to 5 minutes. With the mixer on low speed, slowly add the whole eggs, egg yolks, buttermilk, and vanilla.

FINISH AND BAKE: Remove the bowl from the mixer and use a rubber spatula to gently fold in the berries. Divide the batter among the prepared muffin cups, filling them to the top. Place the muffin tin in the oven on the center rack and bake until the muffins are golden brown on top and a knife inserted into the center of one emerges clean (aside from perhaps a streak of raspberry), 18 to 20 minutes. Remove the tin from the oven and immediately sprinkle the coarse sugar and lemon zest over the muffins. Let the muffins cool in the tin for 15 to 20 minutes, then carefully remove them from the tin and arrange on a serving platter. Store the muffins covered loosely in plastic. If storing overnight, refrigerate.

Molasses Cookies

Molasses cookies and warm spice cookies are two favorites of mine. I use blackstrap molasses for these, which is the darkest and least sweet kind of molasses because it is made from the third round of boiling concentrated sugarcane juice. It doesn't have any heavy sulfur notes and it tastes almost like lightly burned sugar. I also use shortening to give the cookie a distinctive crunchy texture. Like when you eat a crispy piece of bacon. The absence of butter flavor here leaves more room for the spices, molasses, and vanilla to take center stage. I eat these cookies warm and sprinkled with sugar right after baking. I sometimes stick two together with some caramel sauce in between or sandwich them around bold-flavored ice creams like rum raisin, cinnamon, or butter pecan.

MAKES 24 TO 30 COOKIES

½ cup packed dark brown sugar
½ cup blackstrap molasses
¼ cup solid vegetable shortening
1 large egg yolk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1½ teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon ground cloves
1 cup all-purpose flour, plus extra for rolling

MAKE THE DOUGH: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat together the brown sugar, molasses, shortening, egg yolk, vanilla, cinnamon, ginger, baking soda, salt, and cloves. Remove the bowl from the mixer. Sift the flour over the batter and gently stir it in—just until mixed. Gather the dough into a ball and place it on a piece of plastic wrap, flattening it into a thick 6-inch round. Enclose the dough in the plastic wrap and refrigerate it for at least 1 hour and up to 12 hours.

GET READY: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Place oven racks in the upper-middle and lower-middle positions. Line two sheet pans with parchment paper.

CUT OUT THE COOKIES: Divide the dough in half and place one piece on a lightly floured surface. Use a rolling pin to roll the dough into a sheet about ½ inch thick, adding more flour on top or under the dough if needed to prevent sticking. Use a 2-inch round cookie cutter (or a decorative one) to stamp out cookies as close together as possible. Place the cookies on one of the prepared sheet pans, leaving at least 1 inch of space between them. Repeat with the remaining dough.

BAKE: Bake the cookies until they are golden brown, 6 to 8 minutes. Remove the pans from the oven and let the cookies cool on the pans for 2 to 3 minutes. Then use a metal spatula to transfer them to a wire rack. These cookies taste best when freshly baked, but can be stored in a plastic container with a fitted lid at room temperature for up to 3 days. If you won't be able to eat or serve them all within 3 days, it's better to bake half the dough and refrigerate (or freeze) the rest to bake later. If you freeze the dough, simply leave it in the fridge overnight to thaw before rolling, cutting, and baking.

Brown Butter–Chocolate Chunk Cookies

This is all about that first bite: the butter gets browned, so it offers a nutty caramel taste, and then there's also the brown sugar note and the chunks of chocolate. When these are hot from the oven, they literally melt in your mouth. I like the heft of chocolate chunks, but you can easily sub in the same amount of chips here. I love to fold in untoasted walnut pieces for added texture and a nutty taste. Walnuts are also generally the cheapest nut at the grocery store. Store them, and all your nuts, in the freezer for a longer shelf life. Nuts get rancid quickly, especially if they are sitting in your cupboard at room temperature.

MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN COOKIES

¾ cup (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup packed dark brown sugar
1 large egg
1½ teaspoons kosher salt
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
1 (11.5-ounce) bag semi-sweet chocolate chunks
1 cup chopped walnuts (optional)

BROWN THE BUTTER: In a small sauté pan set over medium heat, melt 4 tablespoons (½ stick) of the butter, swirling the pan often, until the white bits in the bottom of the pan turn light brown and the butter smells nutty, 2 to 3 minutes. Immediately pour the brown butter into a small bowl and let it cool for at least 10 minutes or up to 30 minutes.

MAKE THE DOUGH: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the remaining 8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter with the granulated and brown sugars on medium-high speed until smooth, light, and fluffy, 8 to 10 minutes. Add the egg, salt, and vanilla and beat on medium speed until blended. Remove the bowl from the mixer. Sift the flour and baking soda into the bowl, and then stir in the cooled brown butter, stirring only until the mixture is combined and no pockets of unmixed flour remain. Stir in the chocolate chunks and walnuts (if using).

GET READY: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Set oven racks in the upper-middle and lower-middle positions. Line two sheet pans with parchment paper.

BAKE THE COOKIES: Using your hands, roll generous tablespoons of the dough into balls and arrange them on the lined sheet pans, leaving at least 1 inch of space between them (they will spread as they cook). Place the pans in the oven, one on each rack. Bake until the cookies are light brown on the top and edges, 8 to 10 minutes (they'll look a little underdone). Remove the pans from the oven and allow the cookies to cool on the pans for 5 minutes. Then use a metal spatula to transfer them to a wire rack. Let them cool for another 5 to 10 minutes before serving. Store the cookies in a plastic container with a fitted lid at room temperature for up to 2 days.

Cherry Almond Cookies

Cherry and almond is one of my favorite combinations. The aroma of almond extract also creates that certain Italian-bakery effect. In fact, whenever I'm baking and I pull a bottle of the extract out of the cabinet, one whiff takes me straight back to childhood. Almond extract in a bakery is like that first sniff of perfume in a department store that sets the tone and makes you want to start shopping. In this case, the extract makes you want to start baking. These cookies are flourless, so the batter can be a bit loose. The taste of them, once they are baked, is worth it.

MAKES ABOUT 20 COOKIES

1⅓ cups almond flour
½ cup plus
1½ tablespoons
granulated sugar
Grated zest of 1 large
lemon
1 teaspoon ground ginger
¼ teaspoon almond
extract
1 teaspoon kosher salt
Scant ½ cup dried
cherries, coarsely
chopped
2 large egg whites
1 tablespoon honey
½ cup confectioners'
sugar

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Set oven racks in the upper-middle and lower-middle positions. Line two sheet pans with parchment paper.

START THE BATTER: Put the almond flour, granulated sugar, lemon zest, ginger, almond extract, salt, and dried cherries in a large bowl and stir to combine.

ADD THE MERINGUE: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat the egg whites and honey on medium-high speed until they reach fairly stiff peaks, 5 to 8 minutes. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold the meringue into the almond flour mixture.

FORM THE COOKIES: Place the confectioners' sugar in a medium bowl. Wet your hands to keep the batter from sticking (and this batter is sticky!), then use your hands to form the batter into 1-tablespoon balls. Flatten the balls slightly into thick coins, roll them generously in the confectioners' sugar, and set them on the prepared sheet pans, leaving 1 inch of space between each cookie and wetting your hands as needed. You should end up with about 20 cookies.

BAKE THE COOKIES: Bake until the cookies are light brown on the top and edges, 10 to 12 minutes. Remove the pans from the oven and allow the cookies to cool on the pans for 2 to 3 minutes. Then use a metal spatula to transfer them to a wire rack. Let the cookies cool for another 5 to 10 minutes before serving. Store the cookies in a plastic container with a fitted lid at room temperature for up to 2 days.

Blondies

I think blondies are more layered, textured, and tasty than their far more famous cousin, brownies. With a blondie, there is room for flavor beyond the taste of chocolate—there is an exciting contrast between the toasted nuts, the salt, and the occasional chocolate chips. For extra-deep flavor, I brown the butter before adding it to the batter. You don't need to get out any fancy equipment to make these. You don't even need a stand mixer. All you need is a bowl, a saucepan, and a spoon.

MAKES 16 TO 24 SQUARES

8 tablespoons (1 stick)
unsalted butter,
plus extra at room
temperature for
greasing the pan
1 cup pecans
1 cup all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon baking
powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon kosher salt
⅔ cup packed dark brown
sugar
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 large egg yolk
1 tablespoon light corn
syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup semisweet
chocolate chips

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Position a rack in the center of the oven. Line the bottom of an 8-inch square baking dish with two long sheets of foil, allowing an inch or two of excess foil to hang over each edge. Grease the foil with butter.

TOAST THE PECANS: Place the pecans on a rimmed sheet pan and bake until they become toasty and golden brown, 5 to 8 minutes. Transfer the nuts to a plate to cool, then finely chop them.

BROWN THE BUTTER: In a large saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat, then cook, swirling the pan often, until the white bits at the bottom of the pan turn light brown and the butter smells nutty, 2 to 3 minutes. Immediately pour the brown butter into a medium bowl and let it cool for at least 10 minutes.

FINISH THE BATTER: In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. To the bowl with the brown butter, add both sugars, egg, egg yolk, corn syrup, and vanilla, and stir to combine. Pour the wet ingredients over the dry ingredients, add the chopped pecans and the chocolate chips, and stir only enough to combine. (The less the batter is mixed, the tenderer the blondie will be.)

BAKE: Pour the batter into the prepared baking dish, spreading it out evenly into the corners, and place the dish in the oven on the center rack. Bake until a small knife inserted into the center of the blondie emerges clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Remove the baking dish from the oven and set it aside to cool for at least 10 to 15 minutes.

SERVE: Grip the overhanging foil and use it to lift the entire blondie square out of the pan. Transfer the blondie to a cutting board and cut it into small squares. Then use a metal spatula to transfer the squares to a wire rack. Let the blondies cool for another 10 to 15 minutes before serving. Store the blondies in a plastic container with a fitted lid at room temperature for up to 2 days.

Coconut-Ginger Tuiles

What I love about thin, wafer-like tuiles is that they stay pliable while they are warm and can be molded into lots of shapes that end up being an edible component of a dessert. *Tuile* means “tile” in French, and this cookie sort of looks like a traditional clay roof tile. You can insert the just-baked tuiles into the cups of a muffin tin to shape them into casual (i.e., not perfect) tart shells that can be filled with pastry cream and fresh strawberries or with chocolate mousse. Or you can turn a tuile into a homemade ice cream cone by wrapping it, hot from the oven and while it is still pliable, around a conical mold or even a small glass. Coconut milk and butter create a rich but light batter, while ground ginger gives the cookie a slight tingle on the palate, one you can't quite place—and that keeps you coming back for more.

MAKES ABOUT 18 TUILES

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup packed dark brown sugar
1 teaspoon ground ginger
4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter, melted
¾ cup unsweetened coconut milk
Nonstick cooking spray

MAKE THE BATTER: In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, brown sugar, and ginger. Stir in the melted butter and the coconut milk. Whisk the batter until it is smooth, and then set it aside to rest for 10 to 15 minutes.

GET READY: Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line two sheet pans with parchment paper and lightly spray each one with cooking spray.

BAKE: Place a tablespoon of the batter directly on one of the lined sheet pans, and use the back of a spoon to spread it out into an oval about 2 inches wide and 2 to 3 inches long. Spread a few more on the pan, leaving at least 1 inch of space between them. Repeat with the second sheet pan. Place the first pan in the oven and bake until the tuiles are golden brown, 5 to 7 minutes.

SERVE: Act quickly! Using a metal spatula, peel the tuiles off one by one and leave them flat or gently curl them into any shape. If the tuiles harden before you have a chance to shape them, return the sheet pan to the oven for a minute, until they soften again, then continue shaping. Cool the tuiles for a few minutes before serving. Repeat the process with the second pan. You can make the batter in advance and store it in the fridge for up to 2 days. It's best to bake the tuiles only as you need them. The tuiles can be stored in a sealed plastic container at room temperature overnight—that's all.

Raspberry Walnut Rugelach

Rugelach originated in Poland, and the word means “little twists” in Yiddish—I used to enjoy them at friends' houses over the holidays, and now I make them for Ava because they're just so good. The little flaky “twists” are filled with chewy raisins and crunchy walnuts, while the cinnamon-laced raspberry jam offers tang and makes the cookies addictive. You can bake all of the cookies at once, or freeze some of the dough and bake them as needed. I keep the dough in the refrigerator and work with just one portion at a time because when it gets warm, the dough can be difficult to handle. If this happens, rather than struggle, just pop it back in the fridge for a few minutes.

MAKES 2 DOZEN COOKIES

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature
6 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
2¼ cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for shaping
⅓ cup sugar
1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
¾ cup seedless raspberry jam
¾ cup golden raisins, coarsely chopped
¾ cup walnuts, coarsely chopped

MAKE THE DOUGH: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the butter and cream cheese on high speed until mixed and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Reduce the speed to medium and slowly add the flour, mixing just until it is incorporated. Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and divide it into thirds. Place each third on a piece of plastic wrap and press it to form a round. Enclose each round in the plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

MAKE THE CINNAMON SUGAR: In a small bowl, combine the sugar and cinnamon. Set aside.

ROLL THE DOUGH: Line three sheet pans with parchment paper. Lightly flour a rolling pin, the work surface, and the dough itself. Roll one portion of the dough into a 6-inch round that's about ½ inch thick. Use a brush to remove any extra flour from the surface of the dough.

ASSEMBLE: Spread ¼ cup of the jam over the dough, leaving a ½-inch border around the edge. Sprinkle one-third of the cinnamon sugar over the jam. Top it with about one-third of the raisins and one-third of the walnuts. Cut the round into 8 even triangles (like 8 slices of pizza), and roll each triangle from the wide end inward. Place the rugelach on one of the lined sheet pans, leaving 1 inch of space between them and making sure the tips of the triangles are on the bottom. Refrigerate the first pan and repeat with the remaining 2 dough rounds. Refrigerate the rugelach for at least 1 hour or up to 12 hours before baking (or freeze for up to 2 months).

GET READY: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Position a rack in the center of the oven.

BAKE THE COOKIES: Bake one pan of rugelach at a time. Place the pan in the oven on the center rack and bake until light brown, about 10 minutes. Rotate the pan and bake until the bottoms are golden brown, another 10 to 12 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven, set aside to cool slightly, and add another pan to the oven. Transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool completely. The cookies can be stored in a sealed plastic container at room temperature for up to 3 days.