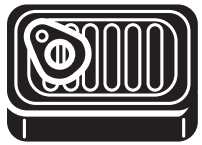


INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO TIN CAN COOK

This is my fourth cookbook, and I've seen inside enough kitchen cupboards by now to be fascinated by our relationship with tinned foods, and what those tins can say about us. Our abilities, our fears, our emergencies, our comfort zones. Tins with ring pulls attached tend to belong to those with slightly more disposable income; look carefully at the Basics and Value ranges next time you're in the supermarket and you'll see that they require a tin opener to get into them. The irony, that those with the least money need an additional piece of kitchen equipment in order to eat the most basic food stuffs.

Food banks – once a quaint Dickensian idea of a 'big society', now sit squarely in every community in the United Kingdom. At the time of writing this, there are around four hundred, providing 1.5 million food parcels a year to people who would be at risk of starving without them, and those parcels are made up primarily of tins. I know, because I was a food bank user for six long months. It was out of those parcels that I started to write my early recipes online, mostly for something to do, and then as my blog grew in popularity, out of a sense of duty and necessity.

I have gone on to write 'cold box recipes', for people who are homeless or have no access to kitchens. 'Kettle recipes' for people who – you guessed it – have only a kettle to heat their food. And recipes from tin cans for charity dinners, for food bank users, for a pop-up restaurant to raise awareness of an 'Eat Or Heat' campaign, and for my books.

The late, former BBC cook Shirley Goode once wrote about my first book, *A Girl Called Jack*, that 'cooking with yoghurt and a jar of fish paste doesn't take any particular skill'. In my *Guardian* recipe column, readers would tut below the lines in the comments section every time I chopped a tin of potatoes into a saag aloo or casserole, so I responded by including an entire chapter of the blessed bleached things in *Cooking On A Bootstrap* by way of retort. I have spent years rinsing the sticky orange sauce from 23p baked beans to reveal the runty little haricots beneath, at a third of the price of the plain ones – a great alternative if you can handle the slightly luminescent tinge that doesn't quite come off.

We have an odd culinary relationship with tinned food. In higher society, rare and supposedly exquisite goods like tinned baby octopus, foie gras and caviar come in beautifully crafted, artistically designed tins. They are collectors' items; one former friend kept a display of every tin of caviar she had ever eaten, an understated trophy cabinet of excess and moral turpitude. The restaurant Tincan, designed by the Tate, popped up briefly in Soho, in London, with hundreds of tins of expensive fish lining the walls to be selected by the customer and served with a chunk of bread, a pinch of salt and an eye-watering bill.

At the other end of the spectrum, I fill my shopping trolley with identical white labelled tins, the contents scrawled on the front as though in a child's hand, with no ring pull on the top, and barely a clue to their contents. At 20p, carrots in a tin are cheaper than fresh. Tinned tomatoes contain more lycopene, a cancer-fighting agent, than their fresh counterparts. Tinned potatoes can be up to a sixth of the price of even the cheapest fresh varieties. Sweetcorn, mushy peas, beans and lentils are all basic staples that can be thrown together into a variety of surprising meals. Tinned sardines contain almost an entire day's recommended intake of vitamins D and B12. The Tin Can Cook is one who can open their cupboard and create a meal from its contents on any given day, whatever they may be.

As I said, it's an odd relationship that we have with tinned goods. But we all have them, lurking in our kitchens, and I'm here to show you how you can create beautiful, delicious and nourishing meals by simply chucking a few of them together.

These recipes are designed for everyone – from those with very little cooking confidence and ability, the smallest of kitchens and the scantest of equipment, all the way up the culinary spectrum to the gourmands, the bon vivants, the entertainers, the practical jokers among us. I once cooked a three-course meal for a group of diners at a five-star hotel entirely from the cheapest tins in the supermarket. They loved the food, but their reactions when we did the 'big reveal' and showed them that it all came from a pile of tin cans, was absolutely priceless. Most laughed, some were embarrassed, one man was memorably apoplectic. Oh, I laughed at his furious notion that somehow tinned potatoes were going to kill him, when moments before he had declared it the best meal he had ever eaten. You can, of course, recreate these recipes with fresh ingredients if you like, but where's the fun in that? Grab your tin opener, and an open mind, and come with me.

SHOPPING NOTES

For the purposes of simplicity, and in order to make this cookbook accessible to people with a range of abilities, I have chosen to use the simpler option, where available, for each ingredient. More experienced cooks may find it slightly frustrating to have to reverse-engineer the recipe lists if choosing to use, say, garlic bulbs in place of garlic paste, but few food writers cater to newcomers, and so I must try. If you are a more confident cook, you'll know how much liquid stock comes from a cube (around 450ml), how many onions 100g of frozen onion represents (a small one) and how to make your own pease pudding (why bother?).

As a novice cook I found myself put off by overtly flouncy language and unfamiliar terminology, and my readers tell me the same. So, I hope you take these recipes in the spirit that they are intended; as a beginner's guide to cooking with tinned and pre-prepared ingredients, rather than anything that will ever compete for Michelin stars or similar.

For the new cook, as your confidence grows in the kitchen, I hope you will stray from these recipes, add your own twists to them, venture into fresh ingredients if you want to, even make your own garlic pastes, pestos and similar. Learning to cook is like most of us learning to walk; the first few attempts will be clumsy, futile, perhaps even a little painful – and frustrating – but if you keep getting up and having a crack at it, one day you'll barely even remember not being able to do it. You just need to take the first step.

CANSPLAINING: CAN TINNED FOOD BE GOOD FOR ME?

I knew as soon as I pitched the idea for this book that I would be deluged by critics keen to share their perceived wisdom about how 'canned food isn't good for you'. I've had this throughout my career as a food writer – from comments on my Guardian recipes, to emails, to a handwritten letter on fancy notepaper instructing me that I was a 'dangerous woman' for using tinned potatoes. Here is my retort to the cansplainers, once and for all; an A to Z of tinned goods, and how good they really are. I've tried not to go too heavy on the science, and I hope it makes for interesting reading.

A detailed study by the University of California found that: 'freezing and canning processes may preserve nutrient value. The initial thermal treatment of processed products can cause loss of water-soluble and oxygen-labile nutrients such as vitamin C and the B vitamins. However, these nutrients are relatively stable during subsequent canned storage owing to the lack of oxygen. Frozen products lose fewer nutrients initially because of the short heating time in blanching' and that 'exclusive recommendations of fresh produce ignore the nutrient benefits of canned and frozen products.

'Many fresh fruits and vegetables have a shelf life of only days before they are unsafe or undesirable for consumption. Storage and processing technologies have been utilized for centuries to transform these perishable fruits and vegetables into safe, delicious and stable products. Refrigeration slows down the respiration of fruits and vegetables and allows for longer shelf lives. Freezing, canning and drying all serve to transform perishable fruits and vegetables into products that can be consumed year round and transported safely to consumers all over the world, not only those located near the growing region.'[1]

In short, although canning can cause a slight loss of some nutrients, notably vitamin C in some fruits and vegetables when heat-treated, the nutrient value once canned remains stable. And nutrients from canned and frozen fruits and vegetables are arguably more desirable than none at all.

There is some consternation about the potential presence of bisphenol A (BPA) – a plastic coating chemical – used in the lining of some tins. BPA can theoretically interact with oestrogen receptors in the body. The US Food and Drug Administration states that 'normal levels of canned food consumption have no adverse effects on general health', and as of 2016, major manufacturers have pledged to remove the BPA lining from their tins. I mention it merely as a precaution – and because it would be remiss of me to overlook it – but not to cause alarm.

CANSPLAINING AT-A-GLANCE

Anchovies The majority of fats in anchovies are the healthy variety – from omega-3 fatty acids. One serving contains more than 20 per cent of an adult's recommended daily intake of vitamin B3, and they are also a good source of selenium and protein.

Artichokes The artichoke is one of the oldest remedial plants, with records of its use as a medicine dating back to 400 BCE. Ancient Greeks and Romans used the artichoke for digestive problems, and in the 16th century, artichokes were documented as a treatment for liver problems and jaundice. Artichokes are low in saturated fat, and very low in cholesterol. They are also a source of magnesium, dietary fibre, vitamins C, K and vitamin B9.

Asparagus This is a source of vitamins A, C, E, K as well as vitamin B9, iron and fibre.

Baked beans Look out for the low-salt and low-sugar versions of these, although in recent times manufacturers have been far more cautious about making healthy versions of 'fast' foods. Baked beans are a source of magnesium, phosphorous, potassium, zinc and copper. In some of my recipes I rinse off the sticky orange sauce and use them as small white beans, in others I'm happy to just sling the whole lot in, sauce and all.

Beef (stewed steak) Beef is a good source of protein – even beef that comes in a can! You can also grab yourself some vitamin B12, zinc, selenium, iron, vitamin B3 and vitamin B6 here.

Berries In addition to containing antioxidants, many also contain considerable amounts of vitamin C.

Black beans These beans are a staple food in Central and South America. A great source of fibre, protein and vitamin B9, they are also a good source of copper, manganese, vitamin B1, phosphorus, magnesium and iron.

Black-eyed beans These are a source of fibre, potassium, protein and iron.

Borlotti beans These are a source of calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorous, potassium, zinc and copper.

Broad beans Also known as fava beans, broad beans contain no saturated fat or cholesterol, making them a healthy choice. They also contain potassium, copper, selenium, zinc and are a source of magnesium. They are also an inexpensive source of protein.

Butter beans Low in fat and a source of protein, butter beans contain zinc which helps to maintain a healthy immune system.

Cannellini beans A good source of carbohydrates and protein, cannellini beans contain several B vitamins, including B12. They also provide iron, potassium, zinc and other essential minerals.

Carrots Known for being a source of beta-carotene that is converted by the body to vitamin A, carrots are also a good source of vitamin K.

Cherries These are a good source of vitamin C: you can find up to 16 per cent of our suggested daily intake in half a standard tin (150g). Cherries also contain fibre. Half a tin provides a source of potassium – around 350mg – which plays a key role in muscle, heart, kidney and nerve cell functions.

Chickpeas Also known as garbanzo beans, chickpeas are a good source of protein, carbohydrates and fibre. The iron, phosphorous, calcium, magnesium, manganese, zinc and vitamin K in chickpeas all contribute to building and maintaining bone strength.

Chopped pork Although admittedly high in sodium, fat and calories, chopped pork products such as Spam also provide protein and several micronutrients, such as zinc, potassium, iron and copper. Not one for everyday consumption, but there's some goodness in there if you look hard enough.

Clams If you're lucky enough to find these at a low price you can sling them over pasta, or into a soup or chowder. They are a good source of zinc, protein and omega-3 fatty acids, as well as a source of potassium, manganese and phosphorous.

Cockles A seaside favourite, cockles also come in tins and can be found at most supermarkets. They are a good source of vitamin B12, iron, iodine, selenium, omega-3 fatty acids and phosphorous.

Coconut milk Containing a mixture of saturated and non-saturated fats, coconut milk is a good source of potassium. Use it in curries, as a base for soups, or for baking in luxurious breads.

Cod roe Pressed cod roe is a cheap source of protein. It also contains small amounts of phosphorus, selenium, zinc, copper, iron, manganese and potassium.

Corned beef Don't write this one off just yet; corned beef is not as high in calories as you may think (although watch out for the fat content) and it's a good source of protein.

Crab Tinned crab is the most convenient way to eat it; although canning does dull the flavour somewhat, it's nothing that a dash of lemon juice and a shake of salt and pepper can't revive. Canning preserves crab's nutrients, and it is full of protein and omega-3 fatty acids.

Figs Not often found in tins, these are more commonly dried. They are an excellent source of fibre, and a good source of manganese and potassium.

Grapefruit A good source of vitamin C, fibre and potassium. They also contain carbohydrates, and the red and pink varieties contain lycopene (an antioxidant).

Green beans Botanically a member of the legumes family, green beans are a good source of fibre and vitamin B9, and a source of vitamins B2, C and E.

Haricot beans Also known as navy beans, haricot beans are an excellent source of dietary fibre and a very good source of both vitamin B9 and manganese. They are also a good source of many minerals including copper, phosphorus, magnesium and iron. In addition, they are a source of protein and vitamin B1.

Kidney beans These slightly ugly dark red-coloured nuggets are versatile powerhouses of goodness. Use them in anything from chillies to bean burgers, burritos to soups for a hefty whack of fibre, iron and the health-boosting vitamin B1. Due to their complex carbohydrate content they provide a slow-release of energy and are a source of protein.

Lemons (preserved) These are high in vitamin C, which isn't adversely affected by the process of preserving them. Unusually for a lemon you can eat the whole thing – skin and all – providing some extra fibre rather than just squeezing out the juice.

Lentils Due to their fibre content, lentils can help to lower cholesterol, which is part of the maintenance of cardiovascular health. The slow release of complex carbohydrates helps to stabilize blood glucose (sugar) levels. They are a good source of fibre, B vitamins including vitamin B9, protein, copper, iron and manganese.

Mackerel This is a good source of protein and omega-3 fatty acids, which play a role in the maintaining healthy hair, skin and nails.

Mandarins These are high in vitamin C, beta-carotene, dietary fibre and are a source of phosphorous.

Mushrooms Rich in B vitamins such as B1, B2, B3, B5 and B9. These help the body to release energy from digested food. They also aid in the formation of red blood cells.

Mussels These are a source of heart-healthy unsaturated fats. According to the author Joanna Blythman, regular consumption of mussels can help improve brain function and reduce inflammatory conditions such as arthritis.[2] Mussels are also a brilliant source of vitamins and packed with important minerals such as zinc, which helps build immunity. Mussels even contain levels of iron and vitamin B9 to rival red meats.

Olives Let me blow your mind: olives are classified (botanically) as a fruit! A tangy, bitter, fatty little fruit. They are also a good source of vitamin E and fibre as well as a source of monounsaturated fatty acids. According to the American Heart Association, 'monounsaturated fats can help reduce bad cholesterol levels in your blood which can lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.'

Peaches A good source of both fibre and vitamin C. A US study states that 'stone fruits such as peaches have been shown to ward off obesity-related diseases such as diabetes, metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease'.[3]

Pears A good source of vitamin C, as well as vitamin K, potassium and very small amounts of calcium, iron, magnesium, riboflavin, vitamin B6 and B9.

Peas Low in total and saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium, peas contain some protein; and vitamin A, C, K several B-vitamins including B2, B3, B6 and B9; magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, copper; and are a good source of dietary fibre.

Pineapple This contains some vitamins B1, B2, B5, B6 and B9, potassium and magnesium. Uniquely for a fruit, pineapple contains high quantities of manganese.

Pinto beans These are a good source of vitamin B1 and manganese; and contain some vitamin B9 and protein.

Potatoes Canned potatoes are a source of vitamins B6, C and fibre. They also contain some copper, potassium, manganese, phosphorous, vitamins B3 and B5.

Prunes These fruits are naturally high in fibre and contain small amounts of potassium in a standard serving of about 3 prunes (30g). Prunes are a good source of vitamin K and also contain some beta-carotene.

Pumpkin An 80g (3 tablespoons) serving of pumpkin provides an adult with a complete daily requirement of vitamin A. Pumpkins also contain some iron, fibre, vitamin C and are a good source of vitamin K.

Rhubarb Containing fibre and vitamin C, rhubarb is also a source of vitamin K and calcium.

Salmon Tinned salmon is high in protein and essential fatty acids, particularly omega-3 fatty acids. It is also a good source of selenium, calcium (if you eat the bones) and vitamins B2, B3, B6 and B12.

Sardines These little fish are a powerhouse of vitamins and nutrients; one small can contains the daily intake of vitamin B12 for an adult. Also rich in vitamins B2, B3 and D, selenium, phosphorous and calcium, omega-3 fatty acids and protein.

Spinach This leafy green vegetable is rich in vitamins B9 and C. Spinach contains vitamins A, B2 and E, protein, fibre, zinc, calcium and iron.

Sweetcorn Tinned sweetcorn contains fibre, vitamins B2, B3, B5 and C; magnesium; phosphorus and folic acid.

Tomatoes Are virtually fat- and cholesterol-free and a source of vitamin C. They also contain the antioxidants beta-carotene and lycopene that become more easily absorbed with cooking.[4]

Tuna An excellent source of selenium; vitamins B3, B12, protein and a source of vitamin B2. tuna also contains the minerals choline and iodine.

Yellow split peas Yellow split peas are a source of molybdenum. They are also a good source of dietary fibre, vitamin B9 and manganese, as well as a source of protein. They also contain smaller amounts of vitamin B5, phosphorus and potassium.

BUT WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?[5]

Beta-carotene This is an antioxidant that is converted to vitamin A (also known as retinol) in the body, Vitamin A in its active form is very important for general overall health but especially healthy skin and mucus membranes, immunity and eye health.It is found in many brightly coloured red, yellow, orange and green fruits and vegetables.

Calcium Vital for the health of your bones and your teeth, calcium also plays a role in muscle function, enzyme reactions, hormone regulation, nerve function and the ability to form blood clots.

Copper We may know copper as a low-value coin, but it is also an essential nutrient for our bodies. (Please don't eat a fistful of pennies, though, as the jury is out on that one.) Working in conjunction with iron, copper enables the formation of red blood cells and helps to maintain healthy bones through enzyme reactions, the formation of new blood vessels, supporting nerve health and overall immunity.

Fibre Dietary fibre is important in maintaining normal digestive health and (sorry to bring it up, but we're all adults here!) regular bowel movements. Fibre helps you to feel fuller for longer, and a good amount of it in your daily diet can improve cholesterol and blood sugar levels and lower the risk of some diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and bowel cancer.[6]

Iodine This is an essential nutrient for growth and development, fertility and metabolism through thyroid function.

Iron Forming part of the haemoglobin molecule in red blood cells that carries oxygen around the body, iron also plays a role in growth, cognitive function, healing of tissues and overall immune function.

Magnesium This supports the release of energy from digested foods, plays a vital role in the electrolyte composition of all body fluids, the production of hormones associated with blood glucose (sugar) regulation and is important in maintaining bone density.

Manganese This mineral helps with the formation of connective tissues, contributes to strong and healthy bones, assists with blood clotting and helps metabolize fat and carbohydrates. It also assists with the absorption of calcium and regulating blood sugar levels. Finally, it is vital for healthy brain and nerve function.

Omega-3 These fatty acids are predominantly found in oily fish, such as salmon, trout, sardines and mackerel. According to the American Heart Association, omega-3 fatty acids may reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.[7]

Phosphorous Critical in maintaining the acid-base balance of your cells, phosphorus also supports the creation of bones and other mineral dense tissues, such as teeth. Phosphorus plays a role in energy storage and transfer.

Potassium This is a major, cell-based mineral (often referred to as an ion) that helps to maintain the correct fluid balance inside cells in conjunction with sodium. Potassium also works with sodium via the kidneys to maintain a healthy and consistent blood pressure. Lastly, it also plays a supporting role in maintaining acid-alkaline balance in the body.

Protein This is an essential macronutrient, just like carbohydrates and fats and vital component of all body tissues. Protein is both a building material that helps to form healthy bones, muscles, skin, connective tissue and other structures such as red blood cells but also forms the basis of other compounds such as enzymes that help to form reactions in our body and signally proteins (such as the blood sugar hormone insulin).

Selenium Regenerates the activity of vitamins C and E, contributes to your antioxidant activity and enhances your immune system. It also helps to prevent damage to your cells and tissues.

Sodium This is needed by the body to help balance fluid levels inside and outside of cells alongside potassium. Sodium also works indirectly to help digestion by supporting the production of enzymes in the pancreas. Table salt is also known as sodium chloride (sodium bound to chloride ions) and this is what is generally found in food (or sprinkled on it). According to the British Heart Foundation (BHF) having too much salt in our diet is linked to high blood pressure.[8] The BHF recommends consuming less than 6g of salt per day, so an easy way to do this is add less salt to your food and choose low-salt options where available.

Vitamin A (retinol) This vitamin is important for vision, the immune system and overall cellular health by protecting DNA, the genetic information in our cells from oxidative damage. Vitamin A also has a supporting role in helping the kidneys, heart and lungs to function properly and contributes to the maintenance of teeth, bones and other soft tissues.

Vitamin B1 (thiamine) Helps to produce energy for all the cells of our body, such as those found in the heart, muscles, brain and nervous system by supporting the body to release energy from our food.

Vitamin B2 (riboflavin) Vitamin B2 helps our bodies to break down and metabolise the energy from food and process certain neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, one of the 'feel good hormones'.

Vitamin B3 (niacin) Vitamin B3 supports over 200 enzyme reactions in the body including those in the release of energy from food. It is also important in the regeneration of the antioxidant glutathione (highly concentrated in the liver and brain) and vitamin C.

Vitamin B5 (pantothenic acid) More commonly called just pantothenic acid these days, vitamin B5 is a vital component part of an everyday diet helping to release energy from the food we eat but particularly fat metabolism.

Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine) Vitamin B6 is vital for brain development by helping to form certain fats called sphingolipids and also in the creation and operation of mitochondria, (the tiny 'cells within cells' that help to create the energy currency of our body, adenosine triphosphate or ATP). Vitamin B6 helps the body to make serotonin as well as other hormones and neurotransmitters involved in stress and mood regulation.

Vitamin B9 (folate) Vital for human growth and development due to its role in rapidly growing tissues. Folate (also known as focic acid) is most commonly known as a supplemental vitamin for pregnant mothers to promote normal foetus growth and it does this by promoting normal nervous system development in the growing baby. Folate also supports the use of proteins and other vitamins (such as B12) for other body processes, such as the creation of red blood cells.

Vitamin B12 (cobalamin) This is needed for the health of all body cells but particularly it plays a crucial role in red blood cell and brain health. Vitamin B12 helps with the health of mitochondria and further improves the energy release from food.

Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) Plays a vital role in the formation of collagen (one of the proteins used in the connective tissue such as those in the skin). Vitamin C is also needed to produce certain hormones such as serotonin. Since vitamin C is an antioxidant, it helps to protect cells from damage, such as those caused by pollution.

Vitamin D (cholecalciferol and ergocalciferol) According to the NHS website, 'vitamin D helps regulate the amount of calcium and phosphate in the body. These nutrients are needed to keep bones, teeth and muscles healthy.'[9] From March through to September, most people can obtain all the Vitamin D they need through natural sunlight, but for the rest of the year we need to help our supply by introducing vitamin D sources, such as oily fish and fortified foods, into our diet.

Vitamin E (tocopherol) Helps to maintain the integrity or strength of cells through it's natural antioxidant ability. In this way vitamin E is crucial in maintaining delicate tissues such as healthy skin, eyes and the sexual organs. As an antioxidant, vitamin E also plays a supporting role in the body's defence system against damaging 'oxidants' such as pollution.

Vitamin K (phylloquinone and menaquinone) Is essential in blood clotting process by working with other 'clotting factors' in the blood stream which helps to stop bleeding and for the wound to heal properly. Vitamin K also plays a role in structural protein formation, so it helps to strengthen bones, cartilage and teeth.

Zinc This is a mineral that has many body processes, such as the production of new cells, repairing tissues, immunity through various mechanisms, supporting normal blood sugar regulation, protein synthesis and very importantly, taste! Zinc helps to manage taste sensitivity and a deficiency can lead to taste disturbances.

BEANS

SWEET–SOUR CANNELLINIS
VE

MAKES 1 JAR

1 x 400g tin of cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

½ small onion, finely sliced – fresh is best here but 50g frozen sliced onion will suffice

100g frozen peppers or 1 small pepper of any colour, finely chopped

80ml vinegar – red, white or cider

1 tbsp white sugar

100ml oil – olive is admittedly best but vegetable or sunflower will suffice

I first came across the idea of sweet-sour pickled beans in Sarah Raven's *Garden Cookbook*, a treasure trove of favourite recipes organised by the seasons and by individual ingredient type. A veritable encyclopedia of inspiration and information, I often casually flick through to find new ways of using familiar products, and this recipe was one of them. Friends rave about these beans; they request them, they gratefully receive jars of them as gifts. The recipe may seem simple but the end result is nothing short of spectacular. And the recipe is so adaptable, I have made these with many different beans; Sarah prefers borlotti, while I opt for cannellini, for their creamy richness and satisfying heft. I'm yet to brave the butter bean, however.

Pop the beans into a pan of cold water. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer. Simmer for 15 minutes to really soften the beans, then drain them thoroughly and set aside.

Meanwhile, thoroughly clean and sterilize a large jar (at least 800ml in size) and its lid. You can sterilize with Milton fluid, used for cleaning baby bottles and useful to keep in the kitchen, or by washing with hot soapy water and baking in the oven for 10 minutes at 120°C (fan 100°C/250°F/gas ½), jar and lid together.

Place the beans in the sterilized jar.

Add the chopped onion and pepper to the pan, along with the vinegar, sugar and oil. Bring the pan to the boil very, very carefully, do not take your eyes off it for a moment as you are dealing with hot oil and it poses a fire risk if unattended.

As soon as bubbles start to form, remove the pan from the heat immediately.

Allow the mixture to cool for a minute, stirring well, then pour into the sterilized jar over the beans, as full as you can get it. Pop the lid on and turn the jar upside down to cool (Sarah suggests this), then allow to cool completely before placing in the fridge.

Try to resist sampling them for at least 7 days, as the flavour will develop in this time. If the jar is clean and sterile, these can keep for a few months unopened. Once opened, use within a week.

TIP

Eat them warm on toast, on a salad, as a side dish, chilled and straight from the fridge, as a midnight snack, tapas – there is no occasion on which these will not beautifully, deliciously suit.

BOSTON-STYLE BEANS

SERVES 2

1 x 400g tin of baked beans

1 tbsp garlic paste or 2 fat cloves of garlic, crushed

100g frozen sliced onion or 1 small onion, finely sliced

1 x 400g tin of chopped tomatoes

½ tsp paprika

1 tsp vinegar, plus a splash to serve

170g (approx) tinned pork or ham

These aren't exactly authentic Boston beans, but they are porky and smoky, so I've taken the liberty of giving them this title. When I started writing this book, we were on the cusp of a looming food crisis, where senior politicians predicted food shortages as Britain was due to leave the European Union, and I started to reimagine my favourite classic recipes as though I only had a pantry of tinned food at my disposal. This was one of them. (There is a nine-month discrepancy between writing a cookbook and it being published, so lord knows what will have happened by the time you come to read this, but here's a recipe for emergency beans regardless of the current political landscape!)

I don't bother rinsing the sauce from the baked beans for this recipe; the saccharine-sweet base note is part of its appeal. So, tip the beans and sauce straight into a saucepan, and bring to a medium heat. Add the garlic, onion, tomatoes, paprika and vinegar and stir well.

Separately, grate the ham or pork on the 'large hole' side of a box grater. Pop it into the pan with the beans and stir it in. Cook for a further 10 minutes; the ham will start to dissolve slightly, which is fine. Add a splash of water if required to stop the sauce drying out too much. Cook for a further 10 minutes, then serve, with a splash of vinegar to finish.

These beans can be cooled and frozen in a freezerproof container for up to 6 months, or kept in the fridge, covered, for up to 3 days.

CHICKPEAS WITH BREAD & SPINACH
VE

SERVES 2

1 x 400g tin of chickpeas, drained and rinsed

4 tbsp oil or 60g butter

2 tbsp garlic paste, or 4 fat cloves of garlic, crushed

1 tbsp paprika

1 tbsp ground cumin or garam masala

100g bread, torn or chopped into 2.5cm chunks

1 x 400g tin of spinach

400ml vegetable stock

salt and pepper

This is my favourite recipe for using up old greens and bread. Any bean will do; I've used chickpeas here but kidney beans make for an earthy, serious bite, and cannellinis lend a creamy luxury as they start to fall apart in the pan. Tinned spinach looks utterly petrifying when you first peel back the lid, but it's perfect for this. If the idea really rankles, use 400g frozen or a few handfuls of fresh, but you get more for your money with a tin.

Toss the chickpeas into a large pan. Add the oil or butter, garlic and spices, and cook for 3–4 minutes on a medium heat, stirring to incorporate the spices.

Toss the bread pieces into the pan. Drain the spinach if required (I have found that most tinned spinach is very tightly packed and needs no draining, but I haven't tested every single brand!) and add that too. Pour over the stock and season generously with salt and pepper.

Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer. Cook for 20–30 minutes until the bread is swollen and the liquid has been absorbed. Enjoy warm or chilled – it makes a fantastic filling for wraps or pitta breads, a decent lunch or a side dish for curries, and any leftovers can be blitzed into a hearty, homely soup.

BREAD, BEAN & HERB STEW
VE

SERVES 2–4

1 x 400g tin of white beans, drained and rinsed

300g drained and rinsed tinned carrots

1 x 400g tin of chopped tomatoes

1 tbsp garlic paste or 2 cloves of garlic, crushed

300ml vegetable stock

½ tsp mixed dried herbs

2 slices of bread, torn or cut into small chunks

salt and pepper

1 tsp lemon juice

The idea of putting bread in stew is one that dates back hundreds of years, to a medieval broth drink known as 'caudle'. It is both a use-up for stale bread, or crusts cut off for fussy children, and adds texture and thickness to a liquid broth. This soup is hearty, wholesome and delicious – made in a grey January fog for a group of hungry friends and devoured with gusto.

The ingredients are all fairly interchangeable; the beans can be any kind you fancy, even plain old baked beans will do. I make mine with kidney beans sometimes, but baked beans are my favourite smutty staple in soups and stews. You can extend this with some diced chopped veg, or sweeten and substantiate the base with chopped onion and garlic, but I like it just as it is, simple and huggy. To make this gluten free, simply replace the bread with gluten-free slices of your choice.

Pop the beans and carrots into a pan that will hold double their volume.

Pour over the tomatoes, add the garlic and the vegetable stock and sprinkle in the herbs. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook for 20 minutes until the beans start to soften.

Stir the bread pieces through the stew, then cook for a few minutes. Season with a little salt and pepper and add the lemon juice to taste. Serve hot.

This stew will keep in the fridge for 2 days, but it will thicken slightly, so add a splash more water if you are heating it from cold.

BUTTER BEAN & CIDER CASSOULET
VE

SERVES 4–6

3 tbsp garlic paste, or 1 whole head of garlic, finely chopped

200g frozen sliced onion, or 2 large onions, sliced

1 tbsp oil

2 x 200g tins of carrots, drained

a generous pinch of dried herbs

1 x 400g tin of cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

1 x 400g tin of butter beans, drained and rinsed

200ml cider

black pepper

½ tsp paprika

1.2 litres vegetable stock

1 tsp English mustard

1 tbsp vinegar or lemon juice

bread and greens, to serve

This soft, creamy cassoulet is a couple of tins of beans at their finest; simmered until gently collapsing, bolstered by a rich, slow-cooked flavour. In a nod to the traditional French version, I have added a smattering of paprika instead of the usual bacon pieces for a similar smoky flavour. I like to use cannellini beans with the butter beans but haricot, borlotti or baked beans (with the sauce rinsed off) work just as well. Leftovers can be frozen – it also makes a tremendous pie filling.

First locate a large, wide pan – usually known as a sauté pan, but any pan will do. Toss the garlic and onions into the pan, add the oil and cook over a low heat, just to knock the raw, acerbic edge off your alliums. Cook for a couple of minutes until softened but not yet browning, then add the carrots too, along with the herbs. Give it all a stir and leave it on the heat.

Tip both lots of beans into the pan, followed shortly by the cider, a few pinches of pepper and the paprika. Bring the heat up to medium-high, and add a third of the stock. Allow the liquid to come to the boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer. Cook for 40 minutes, adding more stock as necessary to prevent it drying out, as the beans will thicken the sauce.

After 40 minutes, add the mustard and vinegar or lemon juice. Cook on a simmer for another 40 minutes, adding stock as required to prevent it drying out. Aware that this is a budget cooking book, I am at pains to point out that cooking on the hob is generally the least expensive way to cook (apart from a slow cooker, in which this recipe would work just fine with half the amount of stock) – so you can take more liberties with long cooking times on the hob than you could in the oven.

Remove from the heat completely, cover with a lid, foil or a large plate and let it sit for 40 minutes. It will continue to gently cook in its own retained heat and save you some money on your energy bills in the process.

Just before serving, heat through and stir well so it is evenly hot through, then serve – preferably with some bread and a pile of greens.

TIP

You can replace the cider with an equal volume of white wine if you have it knocking about.

BLACK BEAN DAAL

SERVES 6–8 GENEROUSLY

100g frozen sliced onion, or 1 small onion, diced

4 tbsp garlic paste, or 1 whole head of garlic, chopped

1 tbsp oil

1 tbsp garam masala

1 tbsp curry powder

¼ tsp ground cinnamon (optional)

½ tsp fennel seeds (optional)

1 x 400g tin of black beans, drained and rinsed

1 x 400g tin of green lentils, drained and rinsed

1 x 400g tin of chopped tomatoes

800ml chicken or vegetable stock, or water

100ml coconut milk

salt and black pepper

This daal is based on one of my favourite recipes, from an Indian street food-inspired restaurant in London's Kings Cross, called Dishoom. They use black lentils and a 24-hour cooking time, as well as a splash of cream, to achieve their famously rich, creamy and decadent daal. This is a poor imitation of the original, which I have probably got all wrong, but it is still extremely good, and as a bonus it freezes really well, too. It's so easy to make this vegan if you swap chicken for vegetable stock.

Toss the onion into the largest saucepan you can find. This recipe makes a fairly generous amount of food, so you'll want a big vessel to cook it in! Then add the garlic to the pot. If using fresh garlic, the size doesn't matter so much here, as it has a long, slow cook to soften it; I like to leave mine fairly chunky, to find later on as sweet, hedonistic surprises.

Add the oil, garam masala, curry powder, cinnamon and fennel, if using, and set over a gentle heat. Cook together for around 5 minutes, stirring to coat the alliums in the spices.

Tip the black beans and green lentils into the pot. Add the tomatoes, and stir everything together. Cook for a further 5 minutes.

Add half the stock or water, and bring to the boil by turning up the heat. Reduce to a simmer as soon as it comes to the boil, stir well, and cook for 45 minutes, adding a little more stock or water occasionally if it thickens and looks like it is starting to dry out. Stir occasionally to stop the beans sticking and burning.

When the daal has been cooking for 45 minutes, stir through the coconut milk, and season with a few generous pinches of salt and pepper. It is ready to eat now, but if you can spare the time and the fuel, cooking it for a further half an hour really develops the flavours and takes this dish to a whole new level. If that sounds like a hassle, you can leave it to cool completely – it will continue to cook – for half an hour, then just blast it with a little more heat just before serving.

GOULASH
VE

SERVES 4

1 x 400g tin of kidney beans

1 x 400g tin of baked beans

100g frozen sliced onion or 1 small onion, finely sliced

1 fat clove of garlic, finely sliced, ½ tbsp garlic paste, or a generous shake of the dried stuff

4 tbsp oil

3 tsp paprika

1 x 400g tin of chopped tomatoes

1 vegetable stock cube

1 tsp sugar

black pepper

To make this into a beef goulash, simply add a tin of corned beef at the same time as the kidney beans, and break it up with a wooden spoon. For a luxury version, rinse a tin of stewed steak and use that instead. No, I haven't lost my mind; it's a really neat trick for quickly adding some tender beef without having to cook it for hours on end. The bean version is, however, quite sufficient, and is my personal favourite.

Empty the kidney beans and the baked beans into a colander, and blast under cold running water to get rid of the tinned taste and the sauce from the baked beans. When well rinsed, set to one side.

Place the onion and garlic in a sauté or large non-stick frying pan with the oil and paprika and fry on a low heat until the onion is softened.

Add the chopped tomatoes, crumbled stock cube, sugar and half a tin (200ml) of water, and stir well. Simmer gently for 15 minutes until thickened and glossy. Tip in the colander of rinsed beans, stir to mix well and heat through for 10 minutes. Serve, devour, have seconds and enjoy!

CHILLI ROASTED CHICKPEAS
VE

SERVES 4 AS SNACKS

1 x 400g tin of chickpeas, drained

2 tbsp oil

a few pinches of salt

¼ tsp chilli, powder or dried chilli flakes

These chickpeas make for a tasty little snack, and once you have the hang of them, you can vary the flavours to use whatever you have to hand. A splash of lemon juice to taste works well, ¼ teaspoon ground cumin is nice, and a generous seasoning of salt and pepper is good, too. For a more substantial meal, use them to top a warm winter salad, or toss with scraps of meat and a loose tomato sauce for a quick dinner.

Preheat the oven to 180˚C (fan 160˚C/350˚F/gas 4).

Give the chickpeas a good thorough rinse under the cold tap to get rid of the 'tinny' taste. (You can retain the liquor from the tin, see Tip on page 49.)

Tip the chickpeas into a mixing bowl and add the oil. Sprinkle over the salt and chilli and jostle the bowl gently to cover them all in oil and flavour. Tip them onto a baking tray or roasting tin – one with a lip around the edge, not a flat baking sheet, else they'll just roll off again!

Pop the tray into the oven for 30 minutes, removing it halfway through and shaking it gently to stop the chickpeas sticking and burning. Best served immediately.

BLACK BEAN & PEANUT STEW
VE

SERVES 2–4

100g frozen sliced onion, or 1 small onion, finely sliced

1 x 400g tin of black beans, drained and rinsed

1 tbsp oil

1 tsp paprika

1 tsp mixed dried herbs (optional)

1 x 400g tin of coconut milk

2 tbsp peanut butter, smooth or crunchy

2 tbsp tomato purée or ketchup

salt and pepper

100g green beans or tinned peas

50g tinned or fresh spinach (optional), plus extra to serve

a dash of lemon juice, fresh or bottled

plain white fluffy rice, to serve

My original version of this dish contained chicken, but I have substituted it with black beans here. It makes for a more filling meal, and a cheaper one, too, as beans and pulses are generally far less expensive than meat and poultry. Dried beans work out even cheaper, but they require a degree of organisation to remember to soak them the evening before, or even to know what you will be eating in advance. I have never managed to be quite so organised, so it would be disingenuous of me to urge you all to do so, but if you are a meal-planning person, bear in mind that dried pulses may be less convenient than popping open a tin of pre-cooked ones, but they will save you money.

If you find black beans difficult to get hold of or they are not to your taste, you can use kidney beans, green lentils, or really, any bean will do. The cooking time given here is a minimum, not an absolute; as with any pulse-based stew, it will simply improve the longer it is cooked for. This recipe is also ideal for a slow cooker, if you have one. You can use tinned, fresh or frozen green beans or peas for this recipe.

Toss the onion into a large saucepan or shallow frying pan, then add the beans. Pour in the oil, and cook on a medium heat for a few minutes to take the raw edge off the onions, then add the paprika and mixed herbs (if using) and give it all a good stir.

Pour in 125ml water and coconut milk, followed by the peanut butter and tomato purée or ketchup. Mix everything up and crank up the heat to full to bring it briefly to the boil – then reduce to a medium simmer again. Cook, stirring intermittently, for around 20 minutes, until the sauce has thickened and is a glossy reddish-brown colour.

Add the green beans or peas and spinach, if using, and cook for a further 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt, pepper and a dash of lemon, and serve. I serve mine with a pile of plain white fluffy rice and some extra greens, for good measure.

TIP

I like to throw a few dried chilli flakes all over mine at the end, but they certainly aren't compulsory, especially if feeding little mouths.

RED LENTIL & MANDARIN CURRY
VE

SERVES 4

150g dried red lentils

1 tbsp ginger–garlic paste

1 tsp ground turmeric

1 tsp ground cumin

a pinch or two of dried chilli flakes, plus extra to serve (optional)

salt and pepper

1 x 300g tin of mandarins

1 x 400g tin of chopped tomatoes

The first time I stayed at a girlfriend's house, all she had in the cupboard was Diet Coke, tinned mandarins and a sticky patch of something ominous that was possibly once soy sauce. Her hob hadn't worked in over two years, and she stubbornly warned me not to try to change her.

Undeterred, over the course of our relationship I subtly snuck in the odd ingredient I could use to make microwaveable meals, a couple of spices to pep up salad dressings and a jar of ginger-garlic paste – 'just in case'. Turmeric and black pepper made it over the threshold as a cold remedy, and a tin of tomatoes for an emergency gazpacho that never materialised. I frequently joke with her that she keeps me grounded and keeps my recipes where they are meant to be – conjured up from dust and thin air and a couple of tins of nothing.

One week, left alone while she was out on a jolly, and armed with a YouTube video, a dogbone wrench, a Phillips screwdriver and a mission, I fixed the damn hob. And one cold winter night, faced with just a literal handful of stashed ingredients and disbelieving cries of 'what on earth could you make with what's in MY cupboard?', I threw this together.

Pop the lentils into a saucepan that will easily hold double their volume, and cover with water. Do not salt the water as the lentils will seize and harden. Bring to the boil and reduce to a vigorous simmer for around 10 minutes, then drain and thoroughly rinse to get rid of the greyish scum that will have risen to the surface. Tip them back into the pan and return it to the heat.

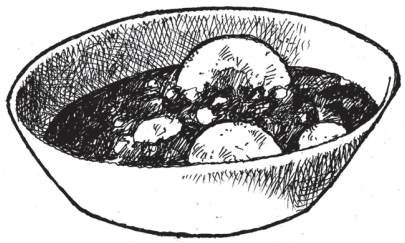
Add the ginger-garlic paste (or finely chopped fresh ginger and garlic if you don't have any, but I swear by this as a quick cheap fix – you can find jars of it in the World Foods aisle in the supermarket). Add the spices – turmeric, cumin and chilli – and a pinch of salt and a few pinches of pepper, and give it all a good stir. Crank the heat back up high.

Drain the mandarins, reserving the juice (see Tip). Tip the mandarins into the pan, and add the tomatoes. Cook the lot for a further 20 minutes or longer – using lentils makes this more like a daal, and the longer cook lends itself to softer, swollen lentils with a comforting, creamy texture.

Serve hot with extra chilli to taste – in my small household we all have a wildly varying tolerance to heat, so I put a smattering in the curry and leave a small dish of chilli flakes in residence on the table for the bolder members to use with abandon.

TIP

Some brands of tinned mandarins come in orange juice, which I neck greedily, and some come in a sticky-sweet syrup, which I put in a jar in the fridge to use in a salad dressing or cake.



MUSHROOM, LENTIL & BEER PIE
VE

SERVES 6

FOR THE FILLING

1 x 390g tin of green or brown lentils

100g frozen sliced onion or 1 small onion, finely sliced

2 tbsp garlic paste or 6 fat cloves of garlic, chopped

2 tbsp flour, plus extra for dusting

2 tbsp oil

250ml vegan beer

1 veg stock cube

2 tbsp tomato ketchup or purée

200g tinned carrots, diced or sliced

400g mushrooms, diced or sliced

1 tbsp meat-style gravy granules

1 tsp lemon juice

FOR THE PASTRY

300g ready-made shortcrust pastry

1 tbsp oil, to glaze

This pie came about because, firstly, I adore pie. It was my pregnancy craving, some years ago now; steak pie followed by cherry or apple pie. I would buy packets of Mr Kipling and polish them off by the half dozen. Something about the crumbling, yielding collapse of the pastry, the hot-or-cold, sweet-or-savoury, the lingering lubrication, satiation, of a layer of fat and gravy disappearing down my greedy gullet. I make a pie most weeks, more so since cooking vegan food than ever before. This particular pie came from a longing for something 'meaty', but not meat, of course. A hearty, wholesome, dark and brooding pie with base and top that would fool even the hardiest of carnivores. Fortunately most ready-made pastry is vegan, as are a very well-known brand of gravy granules.

First pop the lentils into a saucepan that will easily hold three times their volume. Cover with cold water, but do not salt them or they will seize and harden. Bring to the boil at the back of the stove, where they can be forgotten for a while. Reduce to a simmer and roundly ignore them for around half an hour, only interfering should they start to dry out a little, then just add a splash of water.

In a separate pan over a low heat, add the onion and garlic. Stir in the flour and oil – it will look dreadful, but give it a chance – and cook, mixing well to a rough, chunky paste. Add a splash of the beer, which will fizz pleasantly, and mix to loosen it. Add a splash more, mix, splash, mix, until half of the beer is combined. Set the other half to one side. Crumble in the stock cube, then squeeze in the ketchup, and mix well. Add the carrots and mushrooms to the pot. Bring everything to the boil, then reduce to a simmer, until the lentils behind them on the stove have softened.

When the lentils have cooked and the pie filling is glossy and unctuous and reduced in volume, it is time to combine the two. Drain the lentils and rinse thoroughly to get rid of any residual white scum, then tip them into the pan with the mushrooms and beer. Mix them together well – you may find you need to add a little more beer to the mixture, so do. Add the gravy granules and mix well, bearing in mind that they will thicken the liquid when cooked, so it can afford to be a little runny at this stage. Finish with a dash of lemon to brighten it, as the beer can be quite a heavy, mouth-filling flavour.

At this point, if you are cooking the pie now, turn your oven on to 180˚C (fan 160˚C/350˚F/gas 4) and make sure that there is a shelf in the middle of it for best results.

➜

Roll out your pastry on a lightly floured surface. Lightly grease a pie tin or similar receptacle – I find a 900g loaf tin makes a very pleasing pie in an emergency, and a Victoria sponge tin creates a thinner one with a good pastry-to-filling ratio. Any leftover filling can always be frozen to make future pies, or eaten as a casserole, so the size of your tin is not prescriptive. Lay the pastry carefully in the tin, pressing it gently into the corners. The weight of the filling will do the rest for you.

Spoon in the filling, working your way from the outside to the middle, and gradually so as not to overbear and thus tear your precious pastry. Fill it to the top – don't be shy – underfilled pies have their own circle in Hell in my books.

Now make the top. I am naturally incompetent at delicate tasks, my rough-hewn hands more suited to heaving large objects around, fiddling in u-bends and smashing together flatpack furniture than delicately fiddling with pastry, and so, as with many things, I have found a method that is both simple and idiot-proof, and looks astounding. I make my pie crusts with tessellated or overlaying cookie-cutter shapes, the effect of which is beautiful and elicits squeals of delight from guests of all ages. I highly recommend it – and if the pieces overlap, there is more pastry per mouthful, which can only be a glorious thing. Roll out your excess pastry to around 4mm thick. Take a cookie cutter of your choice, or if you live in a household without small children, you can use a small glass for the same effect. Cut circles of pastry and carefully lay them on top of the pie – it doesn't matter if there are gaps, in fact, they rather pleasingly get sticky with caramelised gravy, so embrace them. Start from the outside and work your way in, until the pie is covered or all the pastry is used up.

Glaze with a little oil. Place it in the oven and bake for 40 minutes, or until the pastry is golden. You may wish to re-glaze halfway through, for extra sheen. I did, but then this is my living, and I need to tempt you here any way I can.

And serve. I find this quite sufficient on its own, my excuse for no sides being that it contains a hefty dose of our 5-a-day (onion, mushroom, tomato, carrot, lentils) and because in our household, we like pie.