

Feed the soul

These nourishing oven bakes have been created by chef and food writer Natasha MacAller, who divides her time between London, Los Angeles and New Zealand

RECIPES

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UNION QUICHE
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DEEP DISH TAMALE PIE

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Union Quiche

pictured page 120

This "quiche" is a savoury bread pudding I created for Union Restaurant in Santa Monica. It can be great for cleaning out the fridge as you can substitute vegetables, cheese and bread to suit, and it's a good make-ahead vegetarian dish.

CUSTARD:

5 large eggs
1½ cups milk
½ cup cream
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
2-3 cloves garlic, crushed
1½ teaspoons smoked paprika, plus extra for sprinkling

FILLING:

300g day-old bread (sourdough or ciabatta are good), cut into cubes
1 medium carrot, grated
1 teaspoon ground cumin
2 colourful capsicums, seeded and sliced into thin strips
1 cup caramelised onions (see the chicken and kumara bake, opposite page, for method)
200g frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
100g feta
1½ cups cooked and diced baby potatoes
Handful mixed fresh soft herbs, eg parsley, basil, dill, thyme, oregano
1 teaspoon dried mixed herbs
250g cottage cheese

Thoroughly line a 23cm round spring-form cake pan with foil and grease the foil. Heat oven to 170°C.

Whisk custard ingredients together in a bowl and season with salt and pepper. Add bread cubes and leave to soak 5-10 minutes. Gently scoop out bread and let drain, reserving the custard.

In a small bowl, toss the grated carrot with the cumin.

Spread a third of the soaked bread in the base of the prepared cake pan.

Sprinkle over half each of the capsicums, onions, carrots, spinach, feta and potatoes. Sprinkle over a third of the fresh and dried herbs and season with salt and pepper.

Layer another third of the bread then the remaining vegetables and another third of the herbs.

Spoon the cottage cheese over and top with remaining bread, feta and herbs.

Pour reserved custard over and tamp down to soak and settle. Sprinkle over a large pinch of paprika.

Place pan on a baking tray and bake quiche for 45-60 minutes or until a skewer inserted in the middle comes out clean. Let stand at least 15-20 minutes before releasing from pan.

Serve warm or at room temperature with tomato chutney and a simple green salad if wished. This dish is best reheated in the oven rather than a microwave.

Serves 6-8

Deep Dish Tamale Pie

pictured page 121

This is a delicious protein-packed meal for the whole family. Accompany it simply with coleslaw or a green salad.

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
800g beef mince
2 large (400g) onions, chopped
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1½ tablespoons plain flour
1½ cups (350ml) beef or vege stock or water
1 tablespoon finely chopped garlic
3 teaspoons ground cumin
2 teaspoons dried oregano
2 tablespoons chopped fresh sage or 1 teaspoon dried sage
1 tablespoon fresh or 1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon chilli flakes
2 tablespoons (6 teaspoons) smoked paprika
½ teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste

3 teaspoons flaky sea salt

1 cup frozen super-sweet corn kernels

400g can kidney, black or mixed beans, rinsed and drained

250-350g jar pitted whole black olives, drained

200g feta or paneer (or queso fresco, if available), diced or crumbled

CORNBREAD TOPPING:

1½ cups cornmeal flour

1 cup plain flour

3 tablespoons instant polenta

¾ teaspoon flaky sea salt

2 tablespoons (6 teaspoons) baking powder

3 tablespoons brown sugar

1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage or ½ teaspoon dried sage

2 large eggs, beaten

1¼ cup milk, warmed, plus extra for brushing

60g butter, melted

1 small jar sliced black olives (about 200g), drained

In a large frypan, heat oil over medium heat. Add mince, onions, tomato paste and flour and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are soft and meat is cooked.

Turn heat to low and add stock or water, garlic, cumin, herbs, chilli flakes, paprika, cayenne and salt, stirring well. Simmer on low for 15 minutes.

Mix in corn, beans and olives then gently stir in cheese. Transfer to a deep casserole or Dutch oven, cover and keep warm. Heat oven to 180°C.

Cornbread topping: Whisk together flours, polenta, salt, baking powder, sugar and sage.

In a separate bowl combine beaten eggs, warmed milk, melted butter and sliced olives.

Gently mix dry ingredients into wet until just combined. Let stand for 5-10 minutes to allow batter to thicken.

Dollop batter over mixture in baking dish and brush with a little milk. Bake 25-35 minutes or until topping is set and lightly golden and the mixture beneath is bubbling. *Serves 6*



Chicken, Kumara, Corn & Cauli Bake

This delicious layered bake is a complete meal in itself. Use a low-sugar barbecue sauce, as it won't overwhelm the other flavours. If you plan on making the Union Quiche (opposite page), fry up a double batch of onions.

4 tablespoons vegetable oil
3 large onions (about 700g), thinly sliced
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup low-sugar barbecue sauce
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
400g chicken mince
250g frozen super-sweet corn kernels
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup whole milk
3 tablespoons peanut butter
1 clove garlic, crushed
4 teaspoons lime juice
400g (about $\frac{1}{2}$ large head) cauliflower
100g cheddar, grated

Handful parsley, finely chopped
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cracked black pepper, or to taste
2 large orange kumara (about 700g)
Extra cheese and a handful of roasted peanuts, chopped, for topping (optional)

In a large frypan, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil over medium-high heat. Add onions and cook until soft and caramelised (this will take about 20 minutes), stirring occasionally and lowering heat to avoid burning.

Transfer onions to a bowl, stir in barbecue sauce and mustard and set aside to cool.

In the same pan, heat remaining oil and cook chicken mince, chopping with a spatula to crumble meat. When fully cooked, mix into the onions.

Place corn, milk, peanut butter and garlic in a small pot and bring to a low simmer. Transfer mixture to a blender

and whizz to a purée. Add lime juice and season with salt and pepper.

Cook cauliflower in boiling salted water until fork tender. Drain and lightly mash. Mix in cheese, parsley and pepper.

Peel and very thinly slice kumara with a sharp knife or mandolin. Season lightly with salt and pepper.

Heat oven to 170°C. Lightly oil a deep baking dish at least 23cm square. Arrange a double layer of kumara slices in the base. Layer with half the corn sauce followed by half the mince mixture. Add a single layer of kumara, all the cauliflower and another single layer of kumara. Top with remaining mince mixture, corn sauce and kumara.

Press layers down with your palms and grind over some pepper. Bake 1 hour then sprinkle with extra cheese and peanuts if desired. Bake 15 minutes more or until golden and kumara is tender. *Serves 6 >*



TAHINI SWIRL BROWNIES

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ORANGE POLENTA,
BLACKCURRANT & MINT
MERINGUE SLICE
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Tahini Swirl Brownies

pictured page 124

This brownie is dark and fudgy but not too sweet, with toasty, nutty tahini swirled through it. It is great for dessert or as an afternoon tea treat.

425g dark chocolate (eg Whittakers 50% cocoa), chopped

225g butter

1 tablespoon cocoa powder (for coating the baking tray)

4 large eggs

225g sugar

3 teaspoons vanilla extract

2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil

100g plain or gluten-free flour

25g cocoa powder

1½ teaspoons baking powder

¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon salt

4 tablespoons (60g) tahini, well stirred

Melt chocolate and butter together in a double boiler, a bowl set over a pot of simmering water, or in a microwave, stirring occasionally until shiny and combined. Set aside to cool to lukewarm.

Heat oven to 160°C. Grease a 23 x 32cm baking tray and line with baking paper then flip the paper over and press it back into the pan so both sides are greased. Sift 1 tablespoon cocoa powder evenly over the paper base and sides. Discard any excess.

Beat eggs, sugar, vanilla and sesame oil together in a large bowl until thickened. Sift dry ingredients together.

Add melted chocolate mixture to egg mixture and combine well then add dry ingredients and mix well.

Pour batter into prepared pan. Drizzle tahini over and swirl into lines using a fork or toothpick.

Bake 15 minutes then remove tray from oven and drop it about 5 times on the bench or floor to remove any air bubbles.

Return brownie to oven for another 5-10 minutes. To test if brownie is cooked, insert a skewer; some crumbs should still stick to it. Avoid overcooking or the brownie will be dry rather than fudgy. Cool before cutting into squares. *Makes about 24 pieces*

3-4 drops peppermint essence
Mint leaves for garnish (optional)

Blackcurrant filling: Mash berries in a saucepan with sugar and salt until juices appear.

In a small bowl, mix orange juice with cornflour. Add to berries along with allspice and bring to the boil. Cook, stirring often, for 10-15 minutes until mixture is thickened.

Take off heat and stir in lemon juice. Allow to cool before using. Filling will keep in the fridge for up to a month.

Polenta crust: Grease a 12 x 32cm baking tray or similar. Cream butter and sugar then beat in yolk, milk and vanilla.

In a separate bowl, whisk dry ingredients with orange zest then stir into butter mixture to make a soft dough.

Roll out dough between 2 sheets of baking paper. Peel off 1 sheet of paper and press dough evenly into tray so the remaining sheet of paper is on top. Patch any gaps to make a neat crust. Freeze until firm.

Heat oven to 160°C. Peel top paper off and prick crust all over with a fork. Place paper back over crust, fill with rice or pie weights then bake blind for 20 minutes or until crust is dry and light golden brown. Cool at least 15 minutes before filling.

Mint meringue: Heat oven to 180°C. Beat egg whites until foamy. Add mint extract then gradually beat in sugar until shiny, stiff peaks form.

Spread filling in pastry case (do not overfill) and cover with meringue to the edges of the crust. If you have a crème brûlée torch, wave the flame over the meringue to brown the edges before baking.

Bake 15-20 minutes until meringue is golden and set. Allow slice to cool before cutting into squares or fingers. Garnish with fresh mint leaves. *Makes 8 slices*

Nut, Nib, Seed & Fruit Bars

A simple treat free from refined sugar, dairy and gluten, that can be mixed up with whatever nuts, seeds and dried fruits are in your pantry. The salty soy adds a punch of moreish deliciousness. These bars keep well in the freezer.

1 cup rolled oats
 ¾ cup natural almonds
 ½ cup walnut pieces
 1½ tablespoons tamari (or soy sauce)
 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
 ¼ cup pumpkin seeds
 3 tablespoons cacao nibs
 1 tablespoon cocoa powder

130g (¾ cup, tightly packed) dried apricots, chopped
 ¼ cup chopped crystallised ginger
 ½ cup coconut thread
 1 orange, zest and juice
 ⅔ cup of your favourite nut or seed butter (eg peanut, almond or sunflower)
 6 tablespoons liquid honey

Heat oven to 160°C. Line a 23cm square baking tin with baking paper.

Spread oats on a baking tray. Toss almonds and walnuts in a small bowl with tamari and oil. Spread out on another baking tray. Toast both trays in the oven for 10–15 minutes, stirring the nuts every 5 minutes until the liquid has evaporated.

Remove from oven to cool.

Place oats, almonds, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, cacao nibs, cocoa powder, apricots and ginger in a food processor and pulse to a medium-fine texture. Transfer to a mixing bowl then stir in coconut and orange zest.

In a small bowl or pot combine nut butter with orange juice and honey and microwave or heat, stirring until smooth. Add to oat mixture and stir until combined.

Press mixture firmly into prepared pan and bake 20 minutes or until lightly coloured. Cool completely before cutting into bars.

Makes about 25 pieces

