

## Middle Eastern everything free feast

### BABA GANOUSH ~ ROASTED RED PEPPER HUMMUS ROASTED ZATAR CHICKEN ~ PISTACHIO AND CORIANDER PESTO ROASTED AUBERGINES WITH TAHINI SAUCE ~ ROASTED SWEET POTATOES GREEN BEAN, PRESERVED LEMON AND OLIVE SALAD BEETROOT AND COCOA CAKE WITH PEANUT BUTTER ICING

Each individual element here is super simple in itself, but there are quite a lot of different dishes to get done. The whole feast takes a few hours to put together, so is best to tackle when you have a bit of time to while away. I've written the recipes in the order in which I'd recommend you prepare them, starting with dessert. I made the cake the day before, which might be a good idea to allow enough time to let it cool before icing. Or just get going early. After the cake I suggest you roast the aubergines for the baba ganoush first, then roast the pepper for the hummus and the rest of the aubergines together. Meanwhile make the salad and the pesto, and finally cook the chicken along with the sweet potatoes. As a guide, I'd put the chicken in the oven about an hour and 40 minutes before you want to sit down to eat.

#### **Beetroot and cocoa cake with peanut butter icing**

Serves 8 - 10, takes 20 minutes, plus oven time

I made the cake in one 18cm cake tin, then cut it in half through the middle to make a layer cake. If you have two small cake tins, divide the mixture between the two to bake. Alternatively use a larger tin and make a single layer cake. I prefer the double layer of icing you get with a layer cake.

##### *For the cake*

- \* Cooked beetroot - 300g, cut into chunks
- \* Pitted dates - 220g
- \* Coconut oil - 115g
- \* Baking powder - 1/2 tsp
- \* Vanilla essence - 2 tsp
- \* Salt - a couple of pinches
- \* Cocoa powder - 100g
- \* Eggs - 4

##### *For the icing*

- \* Peanut butter - 2 heaped tbsp
- \* Coconut oil - 1/2 cup, melted
- \* Maple syrup - 1/4 cup
- \* Salt - a generous pinch

1 or 2 small cake tins (18cm diameter), or one large cake tin

Preheat the oven to 170 degrees C.

In a blender, blend the beetroot, dates, coconut oil, baking powder, vanilla essence and salt until you have a smooth paste. Add the cocoa powder and blend to combine, then blend in the eggs.

Pour the mixture into a greased cake tin (or divide between two) and bake for 40 minutes (30 minutes if divided between two tins, or if using a large tin). The cake is ready when it looks slightly crusty on the top, but is still slightly soft in the middle. Leave to cool a little before turning out.

To make the icing, blend the ingredients together until just combined. Try not to over mix here, otherwise the mixture will separate (as you can see happened with mine). It's not the end of the world but it won't look as pretty.

If you've made a single cake in an 18cm tin, once the cake is cool use a bread knife (a large serrated knife) to carefully score a line all the way around the circumference of the cake half way up the side. Then little by little cut into the cake along the line, trying to keep the knife level as possible, so you end up with two equal sized cakes. Slide a spatula between the two halves to then lift the top one off.

Divide the icing between each layer and spread evenly. I think it looks prettier as a 'naked' cake, where you don't ice the sides. Serve at room temperature.

#### **Baba ganoush**

Makes 1 bowl, takes 10 minutes, plus oven time

- \* Aubergines - 2 large
- \* Lemon - juice of 1/2

\* *Tahini - 2 tbsp*

\* *Salt - 1/2 tsp*

\* *Fresh coriander - a small handful*

\* *Olive oil - a glug*

*To serve - a few leaves of coriander and some pomegranate seeds (optional but so pretty).*

Preheat the oven to its highest setting.

Place the aubergines, whole, on a baking tray and cook for about 40 minutes. The skin should be starting to blacken and the flesh should be very soft. Set aside to cool.

When the aubergines have cooled a little, peel off the skin and discard. Place the aubergines, along with the rest of the ingredients and some black pepper, in a blender and blend until you have a smooth paste. Serve at room temperature.

### **Roasted red pepper hummus**

Takes 10 minutes, plus oven time, makes two bowls

\* *Red pepper - 1, halved and deseeded*

\* *Chickpeas - 1 large can (560g)*

\* *Tahini - 200g*

\* *Lemon juice - juice of 1*

\* *Salt - 1 tsp*

\* *Garlic - 1 clove, peeled and chopped*

\* *Olive oil - to serve*

Preheat the oven to 210 degrees C. Place the pepper on a roasting tray with a drizzle of olive oil and roast for about 30 minutes, until tender.

Drain the chickpeas, reserving the liquid. Place the all ingredients (including the cooked pepper), along with half of the chickpea water, in a blender. Blend until smooth. If the mixture is too thick, add extra cold water, little by little, until you reach your desired consistency. Add lemon or salt to taste. Serve with a drizzle of olive oil and a selection of fresh crudités.

### **Roasted Aubergines with tahini sauce**

Serves 6, takes 10 minutes, plus oven time

\* *Aubergines - 2 large*

\* *Tahini - 3 tbsp*

\* *Lemon - juice of 1/2*

*To serve, fresh parsley, coriander or mint*

Preheat the oven to 210 degrees C.

Cut the aubergines into quarters lengthways, then place them on a roasting tray in a single layer. Drizzle with olive oil, season with salt, then roast for 40 minutes until lovely and golden brown.

To make the tahini sauce, whisk together the tahini and 4 tbsp of cold water in a glass to make a smooth paste. Add the lemon juice and a generous pinch of salt. You want a texture like double cream, so if the sauce is too thick, add a few extra drops of water and whisk to combine.. Add salt or lemon to taste.

Serve the aubergines warm or at room temperature with a generous drizzle of sauce and some freshly chopped herbs.

### **Green bean, preserved lemon and olive salad**

Serves 6, takes 15 minutes

\* *Green beans - three big handfuls, topped and tailed*

\* *Black olives - 2 handfuls, pitted*

\* *Preserved lemon - 1/2, finely sliced*

\* *Fresh parsley - a handful, chopped*

\* *Lemon - juice of 1/2*

\* *Olive oil - a couple of glugs*

*\* Zatar - a couple of tbsp*

Cook the beans in salted water for around five minutes, or until tender. Drain and set aside. Combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper.

### **Coriander pesto**

Makes a bowl, takes 10 minutes

- \* Pistachio nuts - 125g, shelled*
- \* Fresh coriander - a decent handful*
- \* Fresh parsley - a small handful*
- \* Salt - 1/2 tsp*
- \* Lemon - juice of 1*
- \* Garlic - 1 clove, peeled*
- \* Olive oil - about 150ml*

Place all the ingredients except the olive oil in a blender and blend until you have a smooth paste. Slowly drizzle in olive oil with the mixer running (you don't really need to measure here) until you have a thick pesto consistency. Check for seasoning and add extra lemon or salt if you think it needs it.

### **Roasted zatar chicken**

Serves 6, takes 10 minutes, plus oven time

- \* Free range chicken - 1 large*
- \* Lemon - a couple of quarters of lemons you have already squeezed*
- \* Garlic - a few cloves*
- \* Olive oil - 3 tbsp*
- \* Zatar - 2 tbsp*

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees C.

Stuff the lemon skins and the garlic cloves into the cavity of the chicken.

In a small bowl, mix together the zatar and olive oil with a couple of pinches of salt and plenty of black pepper. Rub all over the chicken so the skin is evenly covered. Place the chicken in a roasting tray breast side down. Roast in the oven for an hour.

After an hour, remove the roasting tray from the oven and carefully flip the chicken over. Return to the oven for 20 minutes.

Leave the chicken to rest for 20 minutes before cutting into it. This will keep the juices in the meat and give you time to crisp up any roasted veggies.

### **Roasted sweet potatoes**

Serves 6, takes 5 minutes plus oven time

- \* Sweet potatoes - enough for six*
- \* Paprika - a few pinches*
- \* Olive oil - a glug*

Scrub the potatoes clean (I like to leave the skins on). Cut them into wedges and place on a large roasting tray, ideally in a single layer. Toss with olive oil, salt, pepper and a few pinches of paprika.

If you're cooking the potatoes at the same time as the roast chicken, pop them in the oven half an hour before the bird is cooked, then boost the temperature up to 220 for a final twenty minutes of crisping. Serve hot with plenty of coriander pesto.

If you're roasting the sweet potatoes on their own, I usually do them at 210 degrees C for 40 minutes. You want them tender on the inside and golden brown on the outside.