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# Introduction

The chances are you've bought or borrowed this book because you are looking for a bit of advice on how to use your freezer more effectively. And when I started writing *Freeze* I probably needed just the same thing. I didn't begin the book thinking I was an expert but as the months went by, I managed to work out – by trial and error and a few spectacular successes and failures – what worked for me.

I spoke to lots of women – and some men. How did they use their freezers? The findings weren't much of a surprise. Most people seemed to use them as a storage space for the odd loaf of bread, fish fingers, maybe a couple of pizzas, an unidentifiable collection of leftovers that they felt too guilty to bin – and of course, frozen peas. Every freezer contains them. Perhaps freezer manufacturers should provide free peas with every freezer – just to get you started.

What I found surprising though, is that without exception, all these people, cooks and non-cooks alike, wanted to know how they could make better use of the freezer and would it really make life easier. They didn't use the freezer to its maximum capability because they didn't want to, but because they didn't know how to.

## Revolutionising the way you *Freeze*

When I was growing up in the 1970s it seemed that every other mum had a huge chest freezer in the garage, utility room or shed. (My brothers and I were always being told not to climb inside when playing hide and seek, which made us somewhat wary.) And they'd all be off to Bejam, cash and carry or the butcher, stocking up with Findus crispy pancakes, arctic rolls and beef burgers or bulk cooking massive casseroles and meat pies.

There were a great many freezer cookbooks written in the Seventies and Eighties. Some of them offered sensible advice on freezing vegetables and fruit from the garden – this being the era of recession and 'The Good Life'. Other books were packed full of recipes for dishes that could be frozen and then whipped out when unexpected guests appeared and needed to be fed. Is it just me, or is the chance of unexpected guests suddenly turning up the most ridiculous reason to stock your freezer full of rustic pâtés and fancy canapés?

Even contemporary freezer cookbooks – and there are a few – seem to be written for women who either have the time to spend a whole weekend sweating over the stove batch cooking, or contain recipes that you could find in lots of other books and just happen to freeze. Most of the time these recipes require thorough and lengthy defrosting before reheating, which means you have to plan your weekly meals well ahead of time. I don't cook like that. No one I know cooks like that. I'm taking a guess that you probably don't either. And that's the point of this book. To show you how to use your freezer for the way we cook – and eat – today.

## Flexible food

The possibility that the whole family is in the house at the same time and also ready to eat together remains a dream. That is not to say that I've given up on family meals, I certainly haven't. I just need my food to be flexible. Very flexible.

With a well stocked freezer you can have a variety of quick meals at your fingertips. Even if you aren't a brilliant cook, or if you work full time, have a family to look after and are still trying to have a bit of time for yourself, you can still produce a selection of homemade dishes that you will feel proud to put on the table.

How about a Thai chicken curry within 15 minutes and without spending a fortune on a ready meal? Or a chicken in a creamy tarragon sauce minutes after coming through the door yet not having to stop and shop on your way home. Your family could be sitting down together on a weekday night and tucking into proper family-sized fish pie – real food straight from the freezer. Dining in and entertaining could be a darn sight more relaxing and enjoyable when beef in Burgundy and lemon and raspberry pavlova are on the menu. You'll find all these recipes and a hundred more within the pages of this book.

Only dishes that made it through the cooking, freezing and reheating process with no compromise in quality or appearance are in this book. So whether it's a family favourite such as cottage pie, lasagne or my quick mix carrot cake, all have been freezer and kitchen triple tested.

It's not all about batch baking or bulk buying though, my contemporary take on freezer cooking takes into account those homes with only 2–3 freezer drawers as well as those with massive chest freezers in the garage. For me, freezer cooking in the 21st century can relate more to quick dishes that can be prepared in a flash – often using both fresh and frozen ingredients – and clever ways of maximising space.

I've come up with lots of new but very practical ways that I hope will make freezing work for you. From flat freezing to frozen super-quick strips, this book is bursting with ideas and innovations, tips and techniques to help you revolutionise the way you *Freeze*.

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### Recipe notes

All the recipes in this book have been carefully tested but by following a few simple tips, you can ensure perfect results. Before you start preparing any of the recipes, I recommend you read the back section of techniques first as it will help you understand how the book works and give you all the advice you need to guarantee success.

Weigh all the ingredients carefully – I rely on my digital scales for accuracy – and use proper 15ml tablespoon and 5ml teaspoon measures plus a measuring jug.

I've made cooking times and oven temperatures as accurate as I possibly can, but all ovens are different. Keep an eye on your food and be prepared to cook for a longer or shorter time if necessary.

Try to choose a dish or tin as close as possible to the one recommended in the recipe for best results for cooking or freezing.

All the onions and garlic used in my recipes are to be peeled, unless otherwise specified. All citrus fruit skins are unwaxed or well scrubbed for grating. Vegetables, such as peppers, should be cut into roughly 2cm pieces, unless otherwise stated.

I always use free-range eggs. Use the size recommended in each recipe for the best results.

Microwave oven wattages vary hugely. My recipes have been tested using an 900W microwave, so you will need to adjust the timings if using an oven with a different wattage. Refer to the manufacturer's guidelines for details.

It's especially important to cook or reheat frozen food to a high enough temperature to ensure it is safe to eat. This is particularly important when cooking meat, poultry or fish from frozen. Invest in a digital food thermometer (see page 223).

## Top reasons to freeze

### Flexibility

With a well-stocked freezer you have access to a huge variety of meals without constant trips to the shops. It's also the perfect way of catering for fussy eaters while giving you the chance to feed family members at different times.

### Convenience

Cooking from frozen saves time preparing meals when life is busy and also means you can get well ahead when there's a bit of spare time to hand.

### Money saving

Freezing gives you the opportunity to buy in bulk or take advantage of price offers. You can also freeze your garden produce and enjoy it all year round.

### Less waste

Freezing is the perfect way to preserve leftovers from one meal to make into another. It's also the best and quickest way of storing foods that you might have overbought.

### You know what's in it

Making your own food for the freezer means you'll know exactly what is in each dish. The food doesn't need additional preservatives and will remain fresh as long as you wrap it well and freeze it quickly.

### Effortless entertaining

Freeze-ahead meals take the hassle out of entertaining, leaving you happy and relaxed instead of hot and flustered.

### Best nutrition

Freezing ensures foods remain closer to their natural state and retain more nutrients than other methods of preserving.

**M**ost of the time, freezer cooking isn't about cooking at all. It's about reheating something that's already been cooked. This book is a bit different because I often use raw frozen ingredients and then cook them from frozen.

I realised when I came to write this book that I had been cooking from frozen for a while anyway. When desperate for something to cook for supper, I would chase hard blocks of frozen mince around the saucepan, squishing off chunks with a spatula whenever they became soft enough. I've even cooked a block of eight lamb chops, carefully prying them apart with a knife as they thawed in the pan. None of this unusual activity gave rise to food poisoning, the food didn't taste spoiled and no one noticed that their Bolognese or lamb casserole wasn't cooked in exactly the same way as usual.

It got me wondering how I could make cooking from frozen easier. After all, 500g blocks of frozen mince do take a

while to thaw, even if you are chipping away at them like a mountain climber attempting to reach the summit by nightfall. I soon worked out that the shape of the food made all the difference. Food that is frozen in large, solid masses not only takes longer to freeze, which will affect the texture and overall quality, but also takes longer to cook or reheat from frozen.

My solution was to cut meat, poultry and fish into thin strips for freezing and then cook them from frozen. I'll often buy a large pack of free-range chicken breasts, at a good price, cook a couple that evening and slice up the rest for the freezer. I do exactly the same with steaks, pork fillet, fish and even sausages – basically any lean cut that's sure to cook fast and will be used within a month or so. I call them my super-quick strips and you can find out how to prepare them on page 200. Using additional improvised ingredients from the store cupboard, freezer or fridge, they offer the answer to a myriad of lovely meals.

# QUICK FIXES

# Thai chicken and coconut curry

Serves 2

*A delicious Thai-style green or red chicken curry with fragrant spices, tender strips of chicken and colourful vegetables. This is enough chicken for two servings, but you could easily add more and stretch the curry to serve three to four people instead. I've given the weights for chicken and vegetables but a generous handful of each will do fine. Serve with rice and prawn crackers and don't forget to remove the kaffir lime leaves after cooking.*

2 tbsp sunflower oil	1½ tbsp nam pla (Thai fish sauce)
200g frozen super-quick chicken strips (see page 200)	100g frozen or fresh green beans, trimmed
400ml can coconut milk	125g mixed frozen peppers or 1 red or yellow pepper, deseeded and cut into thin strips or chunks
2 heaped tbsp Thai green or red curry paste	2–3 tbsp chopped fresh or frozen coriander (optional)
5 kaffir lime leaves (fresh or frozen, see page 208)	
1 tsp caster sugar	

Heat the oil in a large non-stick saucepan or deep frying pan. Add the frozen super-quick chicken strips and fry for 2 minutes until lightly coloured on all sides, turning regularly. Pour over the coconut milk and add the curry paste, lime leaves, caster sugar and fish sauce. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 5 minutes.

Add the fresh or frozen vegetables and return to a gentle simmer. Cook for a further 5 minutes until the chicken is thoroughly cooked, vegetables are tender and the coconut milk has slightly thickened, stirring regularly. Remove the lime leaves and scatter the curry with chopped coriander, if using. Serve in deep bowls.





## Fast fish stew

Serves 3–4

*This is a really easy one-pot supper that can be ready in just 25 minutes. Add extra fish for very hungry people, or decrease the amount if cooking for two. If you don't have any potatoes to hand, stir in some freshly cooked pasta or rice. This speedy stew makes use of lots frozen foods: fish chunks, mixed seafood and green beans. To make things even faster you can also use frozen onion and garlic (see page 208).*

1 tbsp olive oil	2 tsp caster sugar
1 medium onion, finely sliced	3 medium potatoes (roughly 375g), peeled and cut into 2cm chunks
2 large garlic cloves, finely sliced	150g frozen green beans
1 heaped tsp ground coriander	400g frozen chunks of cod, haddock or salmon or a mixture (see page 198), plus frozen prawns if you like
good pinch saffron strands	flaked sea salt
2 bay leaves	freshly ground black pepper
150ml white wine	freshly chopped flat-leaf parsley (optional)
400g can chopped tomatoes	
1 tbsp tomato purée	
350ml cold water	

Heat the oil in a large flame-proof casserole dish or non-stick saucepan and gently fry the onion and garlic for 5 minutes until well softened, stirring occasionally. Stir in the ground coriander, saffron and bay leaves. Cook for a couple of minutes, stirring occasionally. Season with a good pinch of salt and plenty of ground black pepper.

Pour over the wine and bubble for a few seconds before adding the tomatoes, tomato purée, water, sugar and potatoes. Increase the heat a little, bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally until the potatoes are softened but not breaking apart. Add the frozen green beans and return to a simmer.

Drop the frozen fish pieces or mixed seafood on top of the bubbling liquid and cover with a lid. Poach over a medium heat for 8–10 minutes or until the fish and seafood is cooked (it should be firm but not dry). Carefully hold the lid in place and shake the pan gently a couple of times as the fish cooks. Add frozen prawns, if using, for the last 5 minutes of the cooking time.

Ladle into warmed deep plates or bowls and scatter with flat-leaf parsley, if using. Serve with spoonfuls of garlic mayonnaise and toasted French bread.



## Warm chicken salad with lemon and herb dressing

Serves 3–4

*This delicious warm chicken salad is made with tender chicken breast escalopes cooked from frozen and can be ready in less than 10 minutes. For a super-fast salad, use a ready-made dressing – Caesar is good or even just a drizzle of olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Romaine lettuce has a lovely crisp texture but any variety will be fine and if you have extra salad ingredients to hand, toss in some cucumber, celery, fennel or peppers for extra crunch.*

1 tbsp sunflower oil	<b>Lemon and herb dressing</b>
4 frozen chicken escalopes (see Clever idea)	4 tbsp mayonnaise
1 romaine lettuce, leaves separated, washed and drained	2–3 tsp fresh lemon juice
12 cherry tomatoes, halved	1 tsp cold water
handful frozen croutons (see page 184)	1 tsp finely chopped parsley, tarragon or young thyme leaves (fresh or frozen) or ½ tsp dried mixed herbs
40g fresh or frozen Parmesan cheese, shaved with a peeler or grated	freshly ground black pepper

### Clever idea

Chicken escalopes are easy to prepare and are a great way to cook quickly from frozen. To prepare them, cut boneless, skinless chicken breasts in half horizontally through the middle. Rub both sides of the escalopes with sunflower oil – one tablespoon should be enough for 8 escalopes. Season well with freshly ground black pepper and flaked sea salt. Place on a lined baking tray and open freeze for 2 hours. Take the escalopes off the tray and pop them into a freezer bag. Label, seal and freeze for up to one month.

Heat the oil in a large non-stick frying pan. Fry the frozen chicken over a medium-high heat for 3–4 minutes on each side until golden brown and cooked through. There should be no pink remaining. Don't be tempted to turn the chicken too early or it could stick.

While the chicken is cooking, make the dressing. Put the mayonnaise in a small bowl and stir in the lemon juice, to taste, and water until smooth. Add the finely chopped herbs and stir well.

Tear the lettuce leaves and arrange in deep plates or bowls (or one big dish if you prefer). Scatter with the cherry tomatoes. Take the chicken out of the pan and put on a board to rest for a couple of minutes. Put the croutons in the frying pan and toast lightly from frozen for 1–2 minutes, turning occasionally until hot.

Slice the chicken and place it on the lettuce leaves. Scatter with the Parmesan cheese and croutons. Drizzle over the dressing and serve.

# Easy chicken and mushroom risotto

Serves 4

*This delicious and creamy risotto uses frozen super-quick chicken strips and the staple for any freezer – frozen peas. The only effort involved is to be sure to stir the risotto regularly for a creamy texture. Use home-made chicken stock from the freezer or good-quality chicken stock cubes. If you have some Parmesan in the freezer it can be grated into the risotto straight from frozen. Serve with rocket leaves, drizzled with a little olive oil and some good-quality balsamic vinegar.*

25g butter	250g Arborio (risotto) rice
1 medium onion, finely chopped	100ml dry white wine
2 garlic cloves, crushed	1 litre hot chicken stock (home-made or made from 1½ chicken stock cubes)
1 large bay leaf	150g frozen peas
1 tbsp olive oil	25g fresh or frozen Parmesan cheese, finely grated
300g frozen super-quick chicken strips (see page 200)	freshly ground black pepper
150g fresh or frozen chestnut mushrooms, sliced	

Melt the butter in a large non-stick saucepan over a medium heat. Fry the onion, garlic and bay leaf for 2–3 minutes or until they begin to soften, stirring occasionally.

Add the oil, frozen super-quick chicken strips and mushrooms. Season with lots of freshly ground black pepper. Increase the heat a little and continue cooking for a further 6–8 minutes or until the chicken is lightly coloured and the mushrooms are pale-golden.

Add the rice and stir around for a few seconds before pouring over the wine. Allow to bubble for a few seconds more then add all the stock. Stir well and bring to the boil.

Reduce the heat to a fast simmer and cook uncovered for a further 12 minutes, or until the rice is almost tender and the risotto is creamy, stirring regularly, especially towards the end of the cooking time. Often with risotto, the stock is added a ladleful at a time, but this method is a lot less bother and gives great results.

Add the frozen peas and Parmesan to the risotto and cook for 4–5 minutes more until the peas are hot and the cheese has melted. Adjust the seasoning to taste before serving in warmed bowls topped with a rocket salad if you like.

# 30-minute meatballs

Serves 6

*When you are next in the supermarket, pop a couple packs of meatballs in the trolley and freeze them when you get home. As with all the recipes in this Quick Fix chapter, they can be cooked straight from frozen. I've also given a recipe for my easy parsley and lemon meatballs below so you can always give them a go if you have a bit more time.*

1 tbsp sunflower oil	150ml water
2 x packs of 12 frozen meatballs	1 tbsp tomato purée
1 medium onion, chopped	1 tsp dried oregano
2 garlic cloves, crushed	flaked sea salt
400g can chopped tomatoes	freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oil in a large, deep non-stick frying pan over a medium-high heat and fry the frozen meatballs for 8–10 minutes, turning regularly until lightly browned. Add the onion and cook with the meatballs for 5 minutes, stirring often and adding the garlic after 3 minutes.

Tip the tomatoes into the pan and add the water, tomato purée, oregano, a good pinch of salt and plenty of ground black pepper. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring regularly for 15 minutes or until the sauce is thick and the meatballs are thoroughly cooked. If in doubt, cut one of the meatballs open – there should be no pink remaining.

## Meatballs with parsley and lemon

Put one finely chopped onion, 3 crushed garlic cloves, 250g each lean minced beef and pork, 2 teaspoons dried oregano, 6 heaped tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley, the finely grated zest of one lemon and 20g fresh white breadcrumbs in a large bowl. Season well with 1 teaspoon flaked sea salt and lots of ground black pepper. Mix with your hands until thoroughly combined.

Roll into 24 walnut-sized small balls and open freeze on 2 lined trays (see page 214). Pack into labelled freezer bags. Seal and freeze for up to 3 months. Thaw or cook from frozen. Makes 24.

# Super-quick beef and noodle stir-fry

Serves 2

*This recipe uses frozen super-quick beef steak strips straight from the freezer, stir-fried in a lovely rich sauce flavoured with ginger and garlic. If you've previously frozen a quantity of beef steak strips then a handful taken from the bag is all you need for this recipe. The beef stays really succulent and the noodles make it go a long way. Using ready prepared stir-fry vegetables will make this super-super quick but you can also chop or slice anything that you may have in the fridge.*

125g dried medium egg noodles	2 tbsp sunflower oil
1½ tbsp dark soy sauce	150g frozen super-quick beef steak strips (see page 200)
2 tsp cornflour	300g pack fresh mixed stir-fry vegetables
100ml fresh orange juice (or from a carton)	freshly ground black pepper
1 plump garlic clove, crushed (or 1 heaped tsp frozen chopped garlic)	
20g chunk fresh root ginger, peeled and finely grated (or 2 tsp frozen chopped ginger)	

## Clever idea

This recipe is a good way to use up any vegetables you may have in the fridge. Always include a little onion; spring onions or sliced red onions are good. Cut peppers and carrots into thin strips, and top and tail mangetout. Sliced courgettes, runner beans, broccoli florets and shredded cabbage or kale all work well. You can also use frozen vegetables straight from the freezer but you will have to increase the cooking time by a minute or so.

Bring a medium pan of water to the boil. Add the noodles and return to the boil. Cook for 3 minutes or according to packet instructions then drain in a colander, rinse under cold water and leave to stand.

While the noodles are boiling, mix 1 tablespoon of the soy sauce with the cornflour in a small bowl until smooth. Stir in the remaining soy sauce, orange juice, garlic and ginger then set aside.

Heat the oil in a large non-stick frying pan or wok over a high heat. Add the frozen super-quick beef strips and stir-fry for 2 minutes until lightly browned. Remove the beef with a slotted spoon and put it on a plate. Add the stir-fry vegetables to the pan and cook for 2–3 minutes until they are just tender, adding an extra slurp of oil if the pan becomes a little dry.

Tip the drained noodles into the pan and add the beef and sauce. Stir-fry for a further 1–2 minutes until the noodles and beef are hot and sauce is glossy. Season with black pepper. Serve at once.





## Very easy lamb with red wine gravy

Serves 4

*This is a very simple supper that can be knocked together in no time. Cook as many chops as you need – cutlets will take a little less time. The red wine and redcurrant gravy is so easy that you might as well make the whole quantity even if you are serving fewer than four people. Delicious served with my dauphinoise potatoes (see page 165).*

2 tbsp sunflower oil	½ lamb stock cube
8 frozen lamb loin chops or cutlets (ideally herb rubbed, see my tip below)	150ml cold water, plus 2 tbsp
100ml red wine	1 tbsp redcurrant jelly
	1 tbsp cornflour

Heat the oil in a large non-stick frying pan and fry the frozen lamb for 8–10 minutes on each side, depending on thickness, until hot throughout. Keep the heat to a medium setting so the lamb sizzles without burning. Turn the lamb on to its side to brown the fat and continue cooking for a further 2–3 minutes until golden.

Remove the lamb to a plate and leave to rest. Spoon the fat out of the pan; discard and return the pan to the heat. Pour the wine into the pan and bring to a simmer. Drop the stock cube into the pan and break it up with a wooden spoon so that it dissolves into the wine. Add the water and redcurrant jelly and return to a simmer. Cook for 2–3 minutes until the stock cube dissolves and the jelly melts, stirring regularly.

Mix the cornflour with 2 tablespoons of cold water and stir into the sauce. Cook for 1–2 minutes more, stirring constantly until thickened and glossy. Return the chops to the pan and warm through gently in the sauce until hot throughout.

### Clever idea

Lamb cutlets taste even better if you coat them lightly with fresh herbs before freezing. If freezing 8 lamb chops, simply rub all over with 1 tbsp sunflower oil and then coat in a mixture of 3 tbsp of finely chopped mint leaves, 2 tbsp of finely chopped fresh thyme leaves, 1 tsp of ground black pepper and ½ tsp of flaked sea salt. Open freeze on a lined tray for 2 hours then pack in a freezer bag or rigid container. Cover, label and freeze for up to 3 months. Cook from frozen or thaw first and shorten the cooking time by 4–5 minutes on each side.

# Bangers with onion gravy

Serves 4

*A family favourite that I now make with sausages I've previously frozen. Making this dish with frozen sausages means I can pick up good-quality sausages in the supermarket when they are on offer or when I'm at the butcher's or farmers' market. Team them with my cheesy mash (see page 164) for a quick midweek meal.*

2 tbsp sunflower oil	1 tbsp tomato ketchup
8–12 good-quality frozen pork sausages	1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
1 medium onion, finely sliced	flaked sea salt
1 tbsp plain flour	freshly ground black pepper
450ml pork or beef stock, made with 1 stock cube	

Heat the oil in a large non-stick frying pan and fry the frozen sausages over a medium heat for 12 minutes, turning occasionally until nicely browned. Add the onion to the pan and cook with the sausages for a further 8 minutes, stirring every now and then until the sausages are cooked through and the onion is softened and deep golden brown. Keep an eye on the onion so it doesn't burn.

Transfer the sausages to a plate and stir the flour into the pan. Cook for 20–30 seconds, stirring constantly. Gradually start adding the stock to lift the juices and sediment from the bottom of the pan, stirring well in between each addition. Finally, add the ketchup and Worcestershire sauce to the pan and bring to a simmer. Cook the gravy for 2–3 minutes, stirring constantly. Season to taste.

Return the sausages to the pan and reheat them in the hot gravy for a couple of minutes until piping hot throughout. Serve with cheesy mashed potato and fresh or frozen vegetables.

# Pasta with spicy sausage ragù

Serves 4–5

*A full-flavoured supper dish that uses frozen bacon lardons and frozen sausage pieces to make a rich, tasty sauce for pasta. Onion, capers and olives can also be used straight from the freezer. If you like your food a little milder, reduce the quantity of chilli flakes.*

1 tbsp olive oil	2 tbsp tomato purée
150g frozen diced smoked lardons or streaky bacon	1 tsp caster sugar
250g frozen skinned sausage pieces or sausage meat (see page 196)	1 tsp dried chilli flakes
1 medium onion, finely chopped	40g baby capers, drained and roughly chopped
3 large ripe tomatoes (roughly 350g) or 400g can chopped tomatoes	50g good-quality pitted black or green olives
200g dried pasta shapes, such as penne	flaked sea salt
150ml red wine	freshly ground black pepper
	handful of fresh basil, roughly torn (optional)

Place a large non-stick frying pan over a medium heat. Add the oil, frozen lardons, frozen sausage pieces and onion. Cook together for about 20 minutes, until well browned, stirring regularly to break up the sausage meat. You want it to become quite sticky and to pick up lots of smoky flavours.

While the onion and sausage are cooking, half-fill a large saucepan with water and bring to the boil. Make a small cross in the bottom of each of the fresh tomatoes and add them to the water. Dunk for around 30 seconds, to allow the skins to wrinkle back. Remove with a slotted spoon and put the tomatoes on a chopping board to cool for a short while. Add the pasta to the same water and return to the boil. Cook for 10–12 minutes, or according to the packet instructions, until tender.

When the tomatoes are cool enough to handle, slip off the skins and discard. Roughly chop the flesh, throwing away any tough central cores but leaving the seeds. Pour the wine into the frying pan with the sausages and add the chopped tomatoes (and seeds), tomato purée, sugar, chillies and capers. Press the olives between your thumb and finger to roughly crush, add to the sauce and cook for a further 5 minutes or until rich and thick, stirring regularly. Season to taste.

Drain the cooked pasta and return to the saucepan. Tip the sausage ragù into the same pan and toss together. Spoon into warmed bowls and serve scattered with torn basil leaves if you have some handy.

# Somerset pork with apples

Serves 2

*I love the traditional combination of pork with apples. This recipe makes a regular appearance in my kitchen and makes the most of frozen pork loin steaks. Serve with my mashed or microwave jacket potatoes (see page 207) or freshly cooked rice.*

2 tbsp sunflower oil	1 tbsp finely shredded fresh sage leaves or ½ tsp dried sage
1 eating apple, quartered, cored and sliced	100ml double cream or crème fraîche
2 frozen pork loin steaks	flaked sea salt
½ medium onion, sliced	freshly ground black pepper
150ml dry cider or pork stock	

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a large non-stick frying pan and fry the apple pieces over a high heat for 3–4 minutes until golden brown, turning once or twice. Transfer to a plate with a slotted spoon.

Return the pan to the heat, add the remaining oil and the frozen pork loin steaks. Cook for 5 minutes over a medium heat or until lightly browned then turn over and season with salt and ground black pepper.

Add the onion to the pan and cook with the pork for a further 10 minutes, stirring occasionally until the onion is softened and browned and the pork is cooked. If the pork steaks are particularly thick, you may need to cook them for up to 5 minutes more, turning a few times. The pork is cooked when it is no longer pink inside but remains juicy.

Turn the pork once more and season with more salt and pepper. Brown the sides of the pork by leaning it against the side of the pan. Cook for 2 minutes.

Transfer the pork to the plate with the apples and pour the cider or stock into the pan. Stir in the sage and bring to the boil. Cook until the liquid has reduced by half. Stir in the cream or crème fraîche and cook for 1–2 minutes more, stirring constantly. Season to taste.

Return the pork and apples along with any extra juices that may have collected on the plate to the pan and warm through in the bubbling cream sauce for a minute or so before serving.



**T**his chapter is dedicated to complete meals in single portions. I've attempted to give you a simple selection of dishes that are easy to assemble and will suit those occasions when you are simply too tired to cook, too busy to start from scratch or need to leave something ready for the rest of the family to prepare.

Cooking individual meals from frozen takes a little more time than reheating a chilled ready-meal but the freezer offers more choice. There is no reason why any of these dishes can't be frozen in larger portions for family meals or likewise any of the family meals in the next chapter can't be adapted to freeze as meals for one. It's crucial to make your freezer work for you in order to get the most out of it.

I always think some chilli or spice really perks up a meal, so you'll find more than a fair share of Indian and Asian inspired dishes and curries here. Freeze the meals in foil containers or freezer-proof plastic ones and always put the reheating instructions on the label, that way there is no confusion when you are not around to take charge. Some of the recipes give an alternative number of servings, so you can adjust according to your family's appetite.

If reheating more than one portion, you will need to increase the time. Check your microwave manufacturer's instructions for details. Microwave ovens do vary so I advise you to check the internal temperatures of meat or chicken with a digital food thermometer so you can be sure the dish is hot throughout (see page 223).

I used to try and freeze my rice, pasta and mash alongside the main part of the meal but through testing several versions of each recipe I discovered that it made far more sense to freeze the parts separately so they are ready to reheat from frozen at the same time. The only exceptions to this are the noodle meals, which seem to lend themselves to freezing combined. You'll find out how to freeze accompaniments on page 206. I find that freezing cooked rice, pasta or mash in individual portions, flattened into zip-seal freezer bags, gives the best – and fastest – results. Either keep them in a different section of the freezer or place them on top of each main dish so it's simple to assemble a complete meal. Secure with freezer tape if you have some.

# MEALS FOR ONE



## Creamy smoked haddock and spinach bakes

Makes 4 servings

*Like a pie but quicker. Toasted bread and cheese make a brilliant, quick and easy crunchy topping under which nestle tender pieces of fish and spinach in a lovely, velvety sauce. These bakes make a perfect supper or lunch dish – served just as they are or with an extra portion of vegetables.*

500g smoked haddock fillet	50g plain flour
½ medium onion, cut into 6 wedges	4 tbsp double cream or milk
1 bay leaf	medium bag of baby spinach leaves (roughly 150g)
600ml semi-skimmed or whole milk	50g mature Cheddar cheese, coarsely grated
3 slices of thick white bread, crusts removed, torn into 2cm pieces	50g butter
	freshly ground black pepper

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### To FREEZE (up to 3 months)

Allow the bread and cheese topped bakes to cool completely without baking in the oven. Cover, label and freeze.

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### To SERVE

Uncover as many bakes as you need and place on a baking tray. Cook from frozen in a preheated oven at 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas 6 for 25–30 minutes or until piping hot throughout.

Put the haddock, onion and bay leaf in a large frying pan and pour over the milk. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for just one minute. Remove from the heat and leave to stand for 15 minutes.

While the fish is standing, put the bread pieces in a large frying pan and toast over a medium-high heat for about 5 minutes until golden and crisp around the edges, turning regularly. Remove from the heat.

Strain the fish in a large colander, reserving the cooking liquor. Discard the onion wedges and bay leaf and peel off and discard the fish skin. Melt the butter in a large non-stick saucepan over a low heat. Add the flour and cook for 30 seconds. Gradually add the reserved cooking liquor and double cream or additional milk, stirring continuously. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 2–3 minutes until the sauce is thick and glossy, while stirring.

Add the baby spinach to the pan, it will look like a lot but will quickly wilt into the sauce. Cook for 2 minutes further, stirring constantly until the leaves soften. Flake the fish into chunky pieces and stir lightly into the sauce. Season with ground black pepper.

Divide the mixture between 4 individual shallow freezer-proof baking dishes or foil containers. Scatter the toasted bread pieces over the fish and sauce. Sprinkle with the cheese.

To cook now, place the containers on a baking tray and cook in a preheated oven at 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas 6 for 15–20 minutes until golden brown and bubbling.

# Moroccan chicken with apricots and almonds

Makes 6–8 servings

*This mildly spiced casserole freezes well and heats up perfectly to make a comforting supper after a busy day. Scatter with a few sprigs of fresh coriander and serve alongside a large bowl of fluffy couscous or rice.*

12 boneless, skinless chicken thighs	400ml chicken stock (made with 1 chicken stock cube)
3 tbsp sunflower oil	3 tbsp runny honey
2 medium onions, halved and thinly sliced	50g sultanas
3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced	75g ready-to-eat dried apricots, quartered
50g chunk fresh root ginger, peeled and finely chopped	finely grated zest ½ lemon
2 heaped tsp ground cumin	50g blanched almonds (optional)
2 heaped tsp ground coriander	400g can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
1 tsp dried chilli flakes	small bunch fresh coriander, roughly chopped (or 3 tbsp frozen coriander)
generous pinch saffron	flaked sea salt
1 cinnamon stick	freshly ground black pepper
2 tbsp plain flour	
2 x 400g cans chopped tomatoes	

Trim any excess fat from the chicken thighs and cut each one into 4 pieces. Season well with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Heat one tablespoon of the oil in a large non-stick frying pan. Fry the chicken in 2 batches over a medium-high heat for 3–4 minutes or until lightly coloured, turning every now and then. Transfer to a large non-stick saucepan or flameproof casserole and add a tablespoon of oil between batches.

Add the remaining oil, onions, garlic and ginger to the frying pan and cook over a medium heat for 6–8 minutes, stirring occasionally until softened and beginning to brown. Stir in the spices and fry for one minute. Sprinkle over the flour and stir well.

Tip the spiced onions into the pan with the chicken pieces and add the canned tomatoes, stock, honey, sultanas, apricots, lemon zest and almonds if using. Stir well and bring to a gentle simmer. Cover loosely with a lid and cook for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Stir in the chickpeas, increase the heat and cook uncovered for 10 minutes more or until the sauce has thickened. Stir regularly so the sauce doesn't stick. Remove the cinnamon stick and stir in the coriander.



## To FREEZE (up to 3 months)

Divide the chicken mixture between 8 freezer-proof containers. Cool. Cover, label and freeze.

## To SERVE

Turn one portion of the frozen chicken mixture out of the container and into a wide microwave-proof bowl. Cover with cling film and microwave on HIGH for 5 minutes. Stand for 2 minutes. Press the chicken and vegetables with a spoon to separate into chunks. Microwave on HIGH for a further 2 minutes or until piping hot throughout. Stand for 2–3 minutes before serving.

# Chinese ginger chilli chicken

Makes 6 servings

*Chicken, ginger, chilli and peppers cooked in a delicious, slightly spicy sweet and sour sauce. Add some chunks of fresh pineapple or halved water chestnuts if you like. Freshly cooked noodles can be divided between the freezer-proof containers before spooning the chicken mixture on top ready to freeze (see page 206). Alternatively, serve with frozen rice that can be reheated while the chicken is resting.*

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts	3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
3 tbsp sunflower oil	40g chunk fresh root ginger, peeled and finely chopped
2 small onions, each cut into 12 wedges	2 tsp dark soy sauce
4 peppers, red, green, orange and yellow for a colourful mix, deseeded	2 tsp white wine vinegar
	3 tsp soft light brown sugar
<b>Sauce</b>	5 tbsp tomato ketchup
2 tbsp cornflour	1–1½ tsp dried chilli flakes
300ml pineapple juice (from a carton)	freshly ground black pepper
150ml water	

## To FREEZE (up to 2 months)

Divide the chicken mixture between 6 freezer-proof containers. Cool. Cover, label and freeze.

## To SERVE

Turn one portion of the frozen chicken mixture out of the container and into a wide microwave-proof bowl. Cover with cling film and microwave on HIGH for 5 minutes. Stand for 2 minutes. Press the chicken and vegetables with a spoon to separate into chunks. Microwave on HIGH for a further 2 minutes or until piping hot throughout. Stand for 2–3 minutes before serving.

To make the sauce, put the cornflour in a large bowl and stir in 3 tablespoons of the pineapple juice to make a smooth paste. Add the remaining pineapple juice and water and stir in the garlic, ginger, soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, ketchup and chilli flakes until thoroughly combined. Set aside.

Cut each chicken breast into 7–9 even pieces, depending on size. Heat 2 tbsp of the oil in a large non-stick frying pan or wok and stir-fry the onion and peppers for 2 minutes over a high heat. Add the remaining oil and the chicken to the pan and stir-fry for 2 minutes until coloured on all sides.

Give the sauce a mix and add to the pan with the chicken and vegetables. Stir well, season with some ground black pepper and bring to a simmer. Cook for 5 minutes until the sauce is thickened and glossy and the chicken is cooked, turning the chicken and vegetables occasionally. Serve with rice or noodles.

# Char siu pork with noodles

Makes 6 servings

*Although not a strictly traditional recipe, this stir-fry is inspired by the sweet, spicy flavour of Chinese barbecue char siu pork. It's packed with flavour and miraculously it heats up brilliantly in the microwave. Be sure to get all of the ingredients prepared before you begin to stir-fry.*

## To FREEZE (up to 1 month)

Spread the pork, vegetables and noodles over 2 baking trays and leave to cool quickly. As soon as they are cold, divide them between 6 labelled zip-seal bags. Press out as much air as possible and seal. Place the bags on a baking tray and freeze until solid, then remove the baking tray.

## To SERVE

Rinse a bag of the frozen pork and vegetables under a hot tap for a few seconds. Unseal and shake onto a microwave-proof plate. Cover with cling film and cook in the microwave on HIGH for 3 minutes. Stand for 60 seconds then cook for a further minute until piping hot throughout. Stand for 2 minutes before serving. You can also let the pork and noodles thaw in the fridge for a few hours and then reheat them in the microwave or a wok for 2–3 minutes until hot.

450g pork tenderloin, well trimmed	2 small red onions, cut into thin wedges
5 tbsp hoisin sauce	3 peppers (any colours), deseeded and sliced
3 tbsp dry sherry	100g small chestnut mushrooms, sliced
2 tbsp dark soy sauce	2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 tbsp runny honey	25g chunk fresh root ginger, peeled and finely chopped
1 tsp Chinese five-spice powder	1 bunch spring onions (roughly 10), trimmed and diagonally sliced
3 tbsp sunflower oil	freshly ground black pepper
250g dried medium egg noodles	
1 tsp cornflour	
1 tbsp cold water	

Put the hoisin sauce, sherry and soy sauce in a large bowl and stir in the honey and five-spice powder. Add the pork and turn to coat in the sticky marinade. Cover and chill for 30–60 minutes, turning the pork in the marinade every 15 minutes or so.

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas 6. Drain the pork well, reserving the marinade. Place the pork on a small foil-lined tray. Roast in the centre of the oven for 20 minutes. Remove from the oven and leave to stand.

While the pork is roasting, cook the noodles in a large pan of boiling water for 3 minutes or according to the packet instructions until tender. Drain well in a colander. Rinse under running water until cold, then drain. Mix the cornflour with the water and stir into the reserved marinade. Cut the pork lengthways in half and then slice thinly.

Place a large non-stick frying pan or wok over a high heat. Add 2 tablespoons of the oil and stir-fry the onions, peppers and mushrooms for 3–4 minutes or until beginning to soften and lightly colour. Add the remaining oil and stir in the garlic and ginger. Stir-fry with the vegetables for one minute more.

Tip the sliced pork into the hot pan and add the noodles, spring onions and reserved marinade. Toss together for 2–3 minutes until piping hot throughout. Serve hot.



#### To FREEZE (up to 1 month)

Divide the chicken and rice mixture between 6 or 8 freezer-proof containers. There should be enough liquid to almost cover the chicken and rice. Cool. Cover, label and freeze.

#### To SERVE

Turn the frozen chicken and rice out of the container and into a wide microwave-proof bowl. Cover with cling film and microwave on HIGH for 5 minutes. Stand for 2 minutes. Press the chicken and vegetables with a spoon to separate into chunks. Microwave on HIGH for a further 2 minutes or until piping hot throughout. Stand for 2–3 minutes before serving.

## Chicken with chorizo, peppers and rice

Makes 6–8 servings

*A simple chicken and rice dish packed with robust Spanish flavours. It's a bit like paella but without the seafood. Feel free to chuck in a few frozen prawns before the end of the reheating time. You can add frozen peas rather than the beans if you like, just stir them into the chicken and rice five minutes before the end of the cooking time.*

12 boneless, skinless chicken thighs	1 tsp dried chilli flakes
4 tbs olive oil	275g easy-cook long grain rice, such as Uncle Ben's
150g chorizo (picante) sausage	1.2 litres hot chicken stock (made with 1 chicken stock cube)
2 medium onions, sliced	400g can chopped tomatoes
2 red peppers, deseeded	flaked sea salt
2 yellow peppers, deseeded	freshly ground black pepper
250g green beans, trimmed	
2 garlic cloves, crushed	
good pinch saffron strands	

Trim any excess fat from the chicken thighs and cut each one into 4 pieces. Season well with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Pour 2 tablespoons of the oil into a large non-stick frying pan and place over a medium-high heat. Fry the chicken in 2 batches for 4–5 minutes, turning regularly until lightly coloured. Transfer to a large flameproof casserole or non-stick saucepan as soon as each batch is done.

Skin the chorizo and cut into 5mm slices. Add the chorizo to the frying pan and cook for 30 seconds until it begins to release oil but do not allow it to overcook or it could become tough. Scatter over the chicken and return the pan to the heat.

Add the onions to the pan and fry for 5 minutes until softened and very lightly browned, stirring occasionally. Add the remaining oil, peppers and green beans to the onions and cook for 2 minutes until they begin to soften. Stir in the garlic, saffron, chilli flakes and rice and cook for one minute more, stirring constantly.

Tip the rice mixture into the casserole with the chicken then pour over the chicken stock and canned tomatoes. Stir together well and bring to a gentle simmer. Cook uncovered for 12 minutes, stirring regularly until the rice is almost tender. Remove it from the heat immediately as it will continue to cook and absorb liquid as it stands. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

# Extra special chilli con carne

Makes 6 servings

*The secret to a decent chilli is a long slow simmer to help mellow the spices and enrich the sauce. I prefer to use a combination of hot chilli powder for heat and smoked chilli for a more authentic flavour although you can infuse the stew with a couple of halved chipotle chillies too. It's a perfect freeze-ahead meal for friends or family.*

1kg braising steak (such as chuck steak)	600ml beef stock (made with
4 tbsp sunflower oil	1 beef stock cube)
2 medium onions, chopped	400g can chopped tomatoes
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped	2 tsp caster sugar
2 tsp hot chilli powder	1 tsp dried oregano
2 tsp smoked paprika, preferably sweet	400g can red kidney beans, drained and rinsed
2 tsp ground cumin	freshly squeezed juice 1 lime
2 tsp ground coriander	flaked sea salt
2 tbsp plain flour	freshly ground black pepper
150ml red wine or extra stock	

Trim off any fat from the beef and cut the meat into roughly 3cm chunks. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large non-stick frying pan. Season the beef with salt and pepper and fry in 2 batches over a fairly high heat until browned on all sides. Tip into a large flameproof casserole dish and add a little extra oil to the frying pan to prevent the beef sticking. Preheat the oven to 180°C/Fan 160°C/Gas 4.

Return the frying pan to the heat and add 2 tablespoons more of the oil along with the onions. Cook over a medium heat for 5 minutes until softened, stirring regularly. Add the garlic, chilli powder, paprika, cumin and coriander. Fry for 2–3 minutes more, stirring constantly. Sprinkle over the flour and stir well.

Gradually stir in the wine and half of the beef stock. Bring to a simmer, stirring. Pour the onions and liquid over the beef in the casserole and add the tomatoes, remaining stock, sugar and oregano. Season with salt and plenty of freshly ground black pepper.

Bring the liquid to a simmer, then cover with a lid and transfer carefully to the oven. Cook for 1 hour. Remove from the oven and stir in the kidney beans. Return to the oven and cook for a further 45–60 minutes or until the beef is very tender and the sauce has thickened. Stir in the lime juice and serve.



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**To FREEZE** (up to 3 months)  
Divide the chilli con carne between 6 freezer-proof containers. Cool. Cover, label and freeze.

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**To SERVE**  
Turn one portion of the frozen chilli con carne out of the packaging and into a wide microwave-proof bowl. Cover with cling film and microwave on HIGH for 5 minutes. Stand for 2 minutes. Press with a spoon to separate into chunks and stir. Microwave on HIGH for a further 2 minutes or until piping hot throughout. Stand for 2–3 minutes before serving.

# Pasta Bolognese

Makes 8 servings

*A rich, meaty Bolognese with a velvety cheese sauce and tender pasta makes a welcome meal. Pasta can become a little soft when frozen so choose a good quality pasta for the best results.*

## To FREEZE (up to 3 months)

Divide the pasta and Bolognese between 8 freezer-proof containers or individual foil dishes. Spoon the cheese sauce on top. Sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Cool. Cover, label and freeze.

## To SERVE

Rinse the base of one of the containers with hot water for a few seconds. Remove the packaging and place the frozen pasta Bolognese in a microwave-proof dish, making sure the cheese sauce is on top. Cover with cling film and microwave on HIGH for 3 minutes. Stand for 2 minutes. Microwave on HIGH for a further 2–3 minutes or until piping hot throughout. Stand for 2–3 minutes before serving.

Alternatively, if using an individual foil dish, thaw completely in the fridge. Remove the lid. Bake in a preheated oven at 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas 6 for 25–30 minutes until piping hot.

400g lean minced beef, or a mixture of pork and beef mince  
2 medium onions, finely chopped  
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped  
2 tbsp plain flour  
150ml red wine or extra stock  
400g can chopped tomatoes  
2 tbsp tomato purée  
500ml beef stock (made with 1 beef stock cube)  
1 tsp caster sugar  
1 heaped tsp dried oregano  
2 bay leaves

400g dried pasta shapes, such as penne, rigatoni or paccheri  
flaked sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

## Cheese sauce

50g butter  
50g plain flour  
600ml full-fat or semi-skimmed milk  
150g mature Cheddar cheese, coarsely grated

Place a large non-stick saucepan or flameproof casserole over a medium heat and cook the mince with the onions and garlic for 10 minutes until lightly coloured. Use a wooden spoon to break up the meat as it cooks, squishing it against the base and sides of the pan.

Stir in the flour followed by the wine, tomatoes, tomato purée, beef stock, sugar, oregano and bay leaves. Season with a good pinch of salt and plenty of freshly ground black pepper. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer gently for 40 minutes, stirring occasionally until the mince is tender. Remove from the heat.

To make the cheese sauce, melt the butter in a large non-stick saucepan and stir in the flour. Cook over a low heat for about 30 seconds. Gradually add the milk to the pan, stirring constantly between each addition. Increase the heat a little and bring to a gentle simmer. Cook for 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Stir in 100g of the cheese and simmer for 1–2 minutes more until melted. Season the sauce with salt and pepper.

While the sauce is being prepared, cook the pasta in a large pan of boiling water until almost tender. It is important not to overcook the pasta at this stage if freezing, as it will be cooked again when reheated. Drain in a colander and stir into the Bolognese.



To eat now, spoon the Bolognese and pasta into a warmed serving dish or divide between deep plates or bowls. Pour over the hot cheese sauce and serve sprinkled with the remaining cheese or finely grated Parmesan if you prefer. If making ahead, layer into a large lasagne dish and allow to cool before covering and chilling (or freezing). Reheat from chilled in a preheated oven at 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas 6 for around 40 minutes or until piping hot before serving.

# Lovely lamb curry

Makes 6 servings

*Nothing matches a curry for hitting the spot after a tiring day and most home-made curries freeze and reheat brilliantly as long as you follow the proper steps. I've developed this curry specifically for freezing and reheating in the microwave. It uses lamb neck fillet simmered in a rich tasting medium spiced sauce, fresh garlic, ginger and chilli for flavour and a good curry paste for convenience. All you need to do is top with a spoonful of natural yogurt and serve with hot rice. Follow the instructions on page 206 for how to cook and freeze the rice.*

1.2kg lamb neck fillets	2 tbsp plain flour
3 tbsp sunflower oil	400g can chopped tomatoes
3 medium-large onions, roughly chopped	450ml water
4 large garlic cloves, roughly chopped	2 bay leaves
25g chunk fresh root ginger, peeled and roughly chopped	2 tsp flaked sea salt, plus extra to season
1 plump fresh red chilli, roughly chopped (deseed first if you like your curry a little milder)	2 tsp caster sugar
4 tbsp medium curry paste	bag young spinach leaves (roughly 100g, optional)
	freshly ground black pepper

## To FREEZE (up to 3 months)

Divide the curry between 6 freezer-proof containers. Cool. Cover, label and freeze.

## To SERVE

Turn one portion of the frozen curry out of the packaging and into a wide microwave-proof bowl. Cover with cling film and microwave on HIGH for 5 minutes. Stand for 2 minutes. Stir well. Microwave on HIGH for a further 2 minutes or until piping hot throughout. Stand for 2–3 minutes before serving.

Trim the lamb of any hard fat and cut into roughly 3cm chunks. Heat one tablespoon of oil in a large non-stick frying pan and fry the lamb in 2–3 batches until lightly coloured on all sides. Transfer to a flameproof casserole or large non-stick saucepan as soon as each batch is browned.

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in the same frying pan and add the onions. Cook over a medium heat for 5 minutes or until lightly browned, stirring constantly. Reduce the heat, add the garlic, ginger and chilli and cook for 5 minutes more, stirring. Don't allow the garlic to burn or it will make your curry sauce taste bitter.

Tip the vegetables into a food processor and leave to cool for 10 minutes. Add the curry paste and blend until it is as smooth as you can make it. You may need to remove the lid and push the mixture down a couple of times with a rubber spatula until the right consistency is reached.

Add the spiced onion mixture to the lamb. Place the casserole over a medium heat and stir together for 2–3 minutes. Stir in the flour then add the tomatoes, water, bay leaves, salt and sugar.



Bring to a gentle simmer then reduce the heat. Cover the pan loosely with a lid and simmer gently for 50–60 minutes or until the lamb is very tender, stirring occasionally. Adjust the seasoning to taste and stir in the spinach if using.

To eat now, cook for another minute or so until the spinach wilts, stirring constantly. Serve with rice or naan bread for mopping up the delicious sauce.



## Roast butternut squash with goat's cheese and pine nuts

Makes 6 servings

*You need to choose small squashes for this recipe as each person is served half a squash stuffed with roasted vegetables, goat's cheese, pine nuts and sun-dried tomatoes. Perfect for supper or lunch for one, but also ideal to have as a veggie choice at a bigger gathering. It also works well with Stilton or Cheddar instead of the goat's cheese. For a non-veggie version, fried bacon or some chorizo make a nice addition.*

3 small butternut squashes (each around 1kg)	10 sun-dried tomato pieces in oil, drained and roughly chopped
2 tbsp olive oil	75g pine nuts, preferably Italian
2 tsp dried chilli flakes	1 tbsp fresh thyme leaves or 1 tsp dried thyme
3 medium courgettes, halved lengthways and cut into thick slices	200g fairly firm goat's cheese, chopped into small pieces (with or without rind)
2 red peppers, deseeded	flaked sea salt
2 yellow or orange peppers, deseeded	freshly ground black pepper
2 small red onions, cut into thin wedges	

### To FREEZE (up to 2 months)

Do not return the stuffed squash to the oven for the final 15 minutes but allow it to cool instead. Place each squash half in an individual foil dish, filled side up. Cool. Cover, label and freeze.

### To SERVE

Take one of the frozen stuffed squash halves and transfer to a baking tray. Cook in a preheated oven at 190°C/Fan 170°C/Gas 5 for around 40 minutes or until the squash and vegetables are hot and lightly charred. If reheating more than 2 squash at a time, add an extra 5–10 minutes to the time.

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas 6. Cut the squash in half and scrape out the seeds with a teaspoon. Set the squash halves on a large baking tray, cut side up and score in a criss-cross pattern across the top, going about 5mm down into each squash.

Drizzle with one tablespoon of the oil and season with a little salt, plenty of freshly ground black pepper and a sprinkling of dried chilli flakes. Bake for 30 minutes or until the squash begins to soften.

While the squash are baking, put the courgettes, peppers and onions in a large mixing bowl and toss with the remaining oil. Stir-fry in 2 batches in a large non-stick frying pan or wok over a high heat for 4–5 minutes until softened and lightly browned. Cooking the vegetables slightly before freezing will help maintain their colour and taste. As soon as each batch is ready, tip into a large mixing bowl and toss with the sun-dried tomato pieces, pine nuts and thyme.

Take the butternut squash out of the oven and fill the hollows with the stir-fried vegetables. Dot with the goat's cheese. To eat now, return to the oven for a further 15 minutes or until the vegetables are lightly charred and the goat's cheese has melted.