

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Meal Plan Occasions 1

Seven celebration meals with a main course and a dessert each, from New Year's Day to Christmas Day and a treat of your own, with a shopping list for every recipe.

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MEAL PLAN OCCASIONS 1

Contents

Chapter 1	New Year's Day	2
Chapter 2	Pancake Tuesday	8
Chapter 3	Easter	14
Chapter 4	Halloween	20
Chapter 5	Birthday	26
Chapter 6	Christmas Day	33
Chapter 7	Treat Yourself	39
Chapter 8	Occasions Planner	44

Meal Plan Occasions 1: Special Occasions

Occasion 1 · New Year's Day

Welcome to Special Occasions. There are no healthy-eating rules here: these are meals for celebrating, so butter, cream and crackling are all welcome. Each chapter has a **main meal and a dessert**, written for **4 people** (except Christmas Day and the final "I feel like celebrating" meal, which are for one). New Year's Day is a long, slow roast that you start late morning, with a few lucky foods on the plate. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · PORK

Slow-Roast Pork Belly with Lentils, Roast Apples and Mustard Mash

Prep: 30 minutes | Oven: about 3 hours 15 minutes | About 30 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1 kg	boneless pork belly joint, skin on and scored (ask the butcher to score it)
2 tsp	sea salt flakes, for the skin
1 tbsp	olive oil
2 tsp	dried thyme
2	onions, thickly sliced
3	eating apples, each cut into 6 wedges
250 g	dried Puy or green lentils
1	carrot, finely diced
1	stick of celery, finely diced (optional)
2 cloves	garlic, chopped
1 cube	chicken or vegetable stock cube
750 ml	hot water for the lentils
1 kg	floury potatoes (such as Maris Piper), peeled and cut into chunks
50 g	butter
100 ml	milk
2 tbsp	wholegrain mustard

LUCKY FOOD

In many countries, pork and lentils on New Year's Day are said to bring luck and money for the year ahead. Pigs root forwards, and lentils look like little coins. Whether or not you believe it, it is a great meal.

MAKE IT AHEAD

The day before, pat the pork skin completely dry with kitchen paper, rub it with the salt and leave it uncovered in the fridge overnight. A very dry skin is the secret to crisp crackling. You can also peel the potatoes and keep them in a pan of cold water in the fridge.

PLAN OF ATTACK

Pork in at 12:00 for a 3:30 pm lunch. Crumble (dessert) is assembled while the pork rests, then bakes while you eat. Times below are counted from when the pork goes in (0:00).

METHOD

1. **Before you start:** heat the oven to 230°C (210°C fan). Take the pork out of the fridge 30 minutes before cooking. Pat the skin dry again and rub in the oil, the thyme and the salt, pushing it into the cuts.
2. **0:00** Put the sliced onions in the middle of a roasting tin and sit the pork on top, skin side up. Roast for 30 minutes, until the skin starts to blister and crackle.
3. **0:30** Turn the oven down to 150°C (130°C fan). Roast for another 2 hours, without opening the door too often. The meat will turn very tender.
4. **2:00** Put the lentils in a saucepan with the carrot, celery, garlic, stock cube and 750 ml of hot water. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 25 to 30 minutes, until the lentils are tender but still hold their shape. Drain any extra liquid if needed. Keep warm.
5. **2:15** Put the potatoes in a pan of cold salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, until soft. While they cook, toss the apple wedges in the roasting tin around the pork (this goes back in the oven).
6. **2:30** Turn the oven up to 200°C (180°C fan). Return the tin to the oven for 30 to 40 minutes, so the apples soften and the skin turns golden and crisp. If the skin is not crisp by then, give it 5 to 10 minutes under a hot grill.
7. **3:00** Drain the potatoes, return them to the warm pan and mash with the butter, milk and mustard until smooth. Season with pepper. Take the pork out of the oven and rest it on a board, loosely covered with foil, for 20 minutes.
8. Carve the pork into thick slices (the crackling can be snapped off in pieces). Serve each person some lentils, a few slices of pork, a piece of crackling, the roast apple and onion from the tin and a big spoonful of mash.

IS IT COOKED?

Pork belly must be cooked right through. After 3 hours it will be, but check that the thickest part is at least 75°C on a thermometer, and that the juices run clear with no pink. Chill any leftovers

within 2 hours and eat them within 2 days. Reheat once, until steaming hot.

SWAPS

Pork shoulder, boneless, in place of the belly (cook for the same time, but without the crackling steps). Green cabbage or savoy cabbage as a side. Beans in place of lentils.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4

Apple and Blackberry Crumble with Proper Custard

Prep: 20 minutes | Oven: 35 minutes | About 25 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

3	large cooking apples (such as Bramley), about 700 g
150 g	frozen blackberries
2 tbsp	caster sugar, for the fruit
150 g	plain flour
75 g	cold butter, cubed
75 g	light brown soft sugar
50 g	porridge oats
500 ml	whole milk, for the custard
4	egg yolks (keep the whites for another day)
50 g	caster sugar, for the custard
1 tsp	cornflour
1 tsp	vanilla extract

METHOD

1. **The crumble:** peel, core and cut the apples into 2 cm chunks. Put them in a saucepan with the blackberries, the 2 tbsp of sugar and 3 tbsp of water. Cover and cook gently for 8 minutes, until the apple starts to soften, but still has some bite. Tip into a baking dish (about 1.5 litres).
2. Rub the cold butter into the flour with your fingertips until it looks like breadcrumbs. Stir in the brown sugar and oats. Scatter this over the fruit in an even layer, without pressing it down.
3. Bake in an oven at 190°C (170°C fan) for 30 to 35 minutes, until the top is golden and the fruit is bubbling up at the edges. (This goes in the oven when the pork comes out, while you eat the main course.)

4. **The custard:** heat the milk in a saucepan until just steaming (do not boil). In a bowl, whisk the egg yolks, sugar, cornflour and vanilla until pale and smooth.
5. Pour the hot milk slowly onto the yolks, whisking all the time. Pour it all back into the clean pan and cook over a low heat for 5 to 8 minutes, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until it is thick enough to coat the back of the spoon. Do not let it boil, or it will scramble.
6. If you see any lumps, pour the custard through a sieve. Serve it hot, poured over the crumble. Keep it warm, covered with a lid, until you are ready.

MAKE IT AHEAD

Make the crumble up to the end of step 2 the day before, cover it and keep it in the fridge (the oven time goes up by about 5 minutes). Custard is best fresh, but you can also make it a few hours ahead, cover the surface with cling film so no skin forms, and reheat it gently.

CUSTARD SAFETY

Heat the custard until it is steaming hot and thick, which cooks the egg yolks. Chill any leftover custard within 2 hours and eat it within 2 days.

SWAPS

Rhubarb or plums in place of the blackberries. A handful of chopped hazelnuts in the crumble topping. Vanilla ice cream or cream in place of the custard.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Occasion 2 is Pancake Tuesday (Shrove Tuesday), with baked chicken, leek and mushroom pancakes, followed by lemon and sugar pancakes and a banana and chocolate version. The batter can be made the day before.

Meal Plan Occasions 1: Special Occasions

Occasion 2 · Pancake Tuesday

Today at a glance. A full pancake feast for **4 people**: a savoury baked main and a sweet dessert, with the batter made the day before if you like. You will make **16 pancakes** in total, 8 for the main and 8 for dessert, so cook them in batches with a stack of baking paper and a warm oven. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · CHICKEN

Baked Chicken, Leek and Mushroom Pancakes with Cheese Sauce

Prep: 30 minutes | Cooking: about 50 minutes | About 40 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4 (2 pancakes each)

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

100 g	plain flour, for the pancakes
2	eggs
300 ml	whole milk, for the pancakes
1 pinch	salt
1 tbsp	sunflower or vegetable oil, for frying the pancakes
400 g	chicken breast, cut into 2 cm pieces
2	leeks, trimmed, rinsed and sliced
250 g	mushrooms, sliced
2 tbsp	olive oil, for the filling
50 g	butter, for the sauce
50 g	plain flour, for the sauce
600 ml	whole milk, for the sauce
125 g	strong Cheddar, grated
2 tsp	mustard
1 tsp	dried thyme
1 pinch	black pepper

MAKE IT AHEAD

The pancakes can be made the day before. Stack them with a piece of baking paper between each, cover and keep them in the fridge. The whole dish can be assembled earlier in the day and baked when you need it (add 10 minutes).

METHOD

1. **The pancakes:** whisk the 100 g of flour, the eggs, the 300 ml of milk and the salt in a jug until completely smooth (a stick blender makes this easy). Rest it for 15 minutes.
2. Heat a 20 cm non-stick frying pan over a medium-high heat and brush it lightly with oil. Pour in about a ladleful (about 40 ml) of batter and tip the pan so it covers the base. Cook for about 1 minute, until the edges lift and the underneath is golden. Flip (or turn with a spatula) and cook for 30 seconds. Slide onto a plate. Repeat with the rest of the batter to make 8 pancakes, oiling the pan only when it looks dry. Stack them under a clean tea towel.
3. **The filling:** heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat. Cook the chicken for 6 to 8 minutes, turning, until golden and cooked through. Lift it out onto a plate.
4. In the same pan, cook the leeks and mushrooms for 8 to 10 minutes, until soft and the water from the mushrooms has gone. Return the chicken to the pan with its juices.
5. **The sauce:** melt the butter in a saucepan over a medium heat. Stir in the 50 g of flour and cook for 1 minute. Add the 600 ml of milk a little at a time, whisking, to make a smooth sauce. Simmer for 5 minutes, stirring, until thick. Take it off the heat and stir in 100 g of the cheese, the mustard, thyme and pepper.
6. Stir about a third of the sauce into the chicken filling. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).
7. Lay the pancakes out, put a spoonful of filling along the middle of each, and roll them up. Lay them side by side in a large baking dish (about 30 x 20 cm). Pour the rest of the sauce over the top and scatter with the last 25 g of cheese.
8. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until golden and bubbling at the edges. Serve 2 pancakes each, with a green salad or peas.

> **CHICKEN AND THE SAUCE**
>
> Cook the chicken until it is white all the way through, with no pink, and check the pancakes are bubbling hot in the middle before you serve them. Wash your hands, the board and the knife after handling raw chicken. Chill leftovers within 2 hours and eat them within 2 days, reheated once until steaming hot.

SWAPS

Ham and cheese, or spinach and ricotta, as the filling. Ready-made pancakes if you are short of time. Cooked chicken (leftover roast) in place of fresh.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4

Classic Lemon and Sugar Pancakes, plus Banana and Chocolate

Prep: 10 minutes, plus 30 minutes' resting | Cooking: about 20 minutes | About 30 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4 (2 pancakes each)

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

100 g	plain flour
2	eggs
300 ml	whole milk
1 pinch	salt
1 tbsp	butter, melted, for the batter
1 tbsp	sunflower or vegetable oil, for frying
2	lemons
4 tbsp	caster sugar
2	ripe bananas
4 tbsp	chocolate spread

MAKE IT AHEAD

The batter keeps in the fridge for up to 24 hours (whisk it again before you use it). The pancakes themselves can be made earlier and kept warm on a plate over a pan of hot water, or in a low oven at 100°C, covered with foil.

METHOD

1. Whisk the flour, eggs, milk, salt and melted butter in a jug until completely smooth (a stick blender makes this easy). Rest it for at least 30 minutes, which makes the pancakes tender.
2. Heat a 20 cm non-stick frying pan over a medium-high heat and brush it lightly with oil. Pour in about a ladleful (about 40 ml) of batter and tip the pan so it covers the base. Cook for about 1 minute, until the edges lift and the underneath is golden. Flip and cook for 30 seconds.

3. Slide each pancake onto a warm plate and cover with foil while you cook the rest, to make 8 pancakes. The first one is often a failure (the pan was not hot enough). Do not worry: that is the cook's treat.
4. **Lemon and sugar:** cut the lemons into wedges. Sprinkle a pancake with caster sugar, squeeze over lemon juice, roll it up or fold it into a triangle, and add more sugar and lemon on top.
5. **Banana and chocolate:** peel and slice the bananas. Spread a pancake with a spoonful of chocolate spread (warm it in the microwave for 10 seconds if it is stiff), add banana slices and fold it up.
6. Serve at once, 2 pancakes each, any way round: both fillings are good.

> **A BIT OF PANCAKE LORE**
>
> Pancake Tuesday, also called Shrove Tuesday, falls the day before Lent begins. Using up eggs, milk and flour before the fast is how the tradition began. The date moves every year, because it depends on Easter. See the planner in chapter 8.

SWAPS

Maple syrup, honey, berries or Greek yoghurt as toppings. A scoop of vanilla ice cream. Orange juice and zest in place of the lemon.

Shopping list for this recipe

> **COMING UP NEXT**
>
> Occasion 3 is Easter, with a roast half leg of lamb with garlic and rosemary, roast potatoes and mint sauce, followed by a hot cross bun and butter pudding. The dessert is a good use for any leftover hot cross buns.

Meal Plan Occasions 1: Special Occasions

Occasion 3 · Easter

Today at a glance. Easter is the classic lamb roast for **4 people**, followed by a warm pudding that is also a good use for any stale hot cross buns. The oven is busy, so the plan of attack below tells you when each thing goes in and out. Allow about **3 hours from the first prep** for a relaxed lunch. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · LAMB

Roast Half Leg of Lamb with Garlic and Rosemary, Roast Potatoes and Mint Sauce

Prep: 30 minutes | Oven: about 1 hour 45 minutes | About 40 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1.3 kg	half leg of lamb, bone in
4 cloves	garlic, cut into slivers
3 sprigs	fresh rosemary (or 2 tsp dried rosemary)
2 tbsp	olive oil, for the lamb
1.2 kg	floury potatoes (such as Maris Piper), peeled and cut into large chunks
4 tbsp	sunflower oil or goose fat, for the potatoes
300 g	spring greens or green cabbage, shredded
15 g	butter, for the greens
1 tbsp	plain flour, for the gravy
400 ml	hot lamb or vegetable stock, from 1 stock cube
3 tbsp	finely chopped fresh mint, for the mint sauce
1 tsp	caster sugar, for the mint sauce
2 tbsp	boiling water, for the mint sauce
2 tbsp	white wine vinegar or malt vinegar, for the mint sauce

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> Stud the lamb with garlic and rosemary the day before and keep it covered in the fridge, which gives it more flavour. Peel and parboil the potatoes in the morning, shake them in the colander and leave them to steam dry. Make the mint sauce a few hours ahead.

PLAN OF ATTACK

For a 2:30 pm lunch, the lamb goes in at 12:15. Timings are counted from when the lamb goes in (0:00).

METHOD

1. **Before you start:** take the lamb out of the fridge 45 minutes before cooking. Heat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan). Make small deep cuts all over the lamb with the tip of a sharp knife and push a sliver of garlic and a small piece of rosemary into each. Rub the lamb with the 2 tbsp of oil, plenty of black pepper and a little salt. Put it in a large roasting tin.
2. **Parboil the potatoes:** put them in a large pan of cold salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for 8 minutes. Drain well in a colander, shake it hard to roughen the edges and leave for 5 minutes to steam dry.
3. **0:00** Put the lamb in the oven and roast for 20 minutes to brown the outside. Turn the oven down to 180°C (160°C fan).
4. **0:30** Put the oil or goose fat in a second roasting tin and put it in the oven on the top shelf for 5 minutes, to get very hot. Carefully tip in the potatoes (they will sizzle), turn them in the fat and season with salt. Roast for 60 to 70 minutes, turning once, until golden and crisp.
5. **1:00 to 1:15** The lamb needs about 1 hour 15 minutes in total for pink in the middle (60°C on a thermometer), or about 1 hour 40 minutes for well done (no pink, 75°C). Check with a thermometer in the thickest part away from the bone.
6. **When the lamb is done:** lift it onto a board, cover tightly with foil and rest it for 25 to 30 minutes. Turn the oven up to 220°C (200°C fan) so the potatoes get extra crisp.
7. **The gravy:** pour off most of the fat from the lamb tin and keep the dark juices. Put the tin over a low heat, stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute. Gradually add the stock, stirring and scraping up all the sticky bits, and simmer for 5 minutes. Strain it into a jug.
8. **The greens:** steam or boil the spring greens for 4 to 5 minutes, drain, and toss with the butter and a little pepper.
9. **Mint sauce:** stir the mint, sugar and boiling water in a small bowl until the sugar dissolves, then add the vinegar. Leave for 10 minutes.
10. Carve the lamb into thick slices and serve with the roast potatoes, greens, gravy and mint sauce.

> **LAMB SAFETY**
>
> A whole joint of lamb can be served a little pink in the middle, because bacteria are on the outside, which is seared in the oven. If you prefer it well done, or are cooking for anyone pregnant, elderly or unwell, cook it until there is no pink and the juices run clear. Chill leftovers within 2 hours and eat them within 2 days, cold or reheated once until steaming hot.

SWAPS

A boneless leg or a shoulder of lamb (shoulder needs 3 hours at 160°C for pull-apart tender meat). New potatoes with butter and mint in place of the roast potatoes. Peas or carrots in place of the greens.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4

Hot Cross Bun and Butter Pudding with Custard

Prep: 15 minutes, plus 15 minutes' soaking | Oven: 30 minutes | About 20 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

6	hot cross buns (slightly stale ones are best)
40 g	butter, softened
3	eggs
300 ml	whole milk
150 ml	double cream
50 g	caster sugar
1 tsp	vanilla extract
2 tbsp	apricot jam, to glaze
1 tbsp	demerara sugar, for the top (optional)

MAKE IT AHEAD

Assemble the pudding right up to the end of step 3 the day before. Cover it and keep it in the fridge. Take it out 30 minutes before baking, and allow 5 extra minutes in the oven.

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Butter a 1.2 litre baking dish (about 20 x 25 cm) with a little of the butter.
2. Slice each hot cross bun in half and spread the cut sides with the rest of the butter. Cut each half into 2 triangles and stand or lay the pieces in the dish, overlapping them, with the crosses on top.
3. In a jug, whisk the eggs, milk, cream, caster sugar and vanilla until well mixed. Pour it slowly over the buns and press them down gently. Leave for 15 minutes so the buns soak up the custard.
4. Sprinkle with the demerara sugar if you like, and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until the custard is just set (it should wobble slightly in the middle) and the top is golden.

5. Warm the apricot jam with 1 tbsp of water in a small pan or the microwave for 20 seconds, and brush it over the top for a shiny glaze. Rest for 5 minutes.
6. Serve warm, with cream, custard or ice cream.

> **COOKED EGG CUSTARD**
>
> The custard should be set in the middle and steaming hot. Check by pushing a knife into the centre: it should come out clean. Chill any leftovers within 2 hours and eat them within 2 days, reheated once.

SWAPS

Brioche or panettone in place of the hot cross buns. Orange zest in the custard. Chocolate chips scattered between the layers.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Occasion 4 is Halloween, with mummy sausages wrapped in puff pastry, mash and onion gravy, followed by a chocolate brownie graveyard with biscuit tombstones.

Meal Plan Occasions 1: Special Occasions

Occasion 4 · Halloween

Today at a glance. Halloween is a fun one for **4 people**, with sausages wrapped like mummies and a brownie graveyard for pudding. The sausages bake while you make the mash and gravy, and the brownies can be made a day ahead. There is an optional pumpkin soup starter in the main meal. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · PORK

Mummy Sausages in Puff Pastry with Mash, Peas and Onion Gravy

Prep: 30 minutes | Oven: 25 minutes | About 40 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4 (2 mummies each)

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

8	good-quality pork sausages
1 sheet	ready-rolled puff pastry (about 320 g), chilled
1	egg, beaten, to glaze
2 tsp	mustard, for the eyes
1 kg	floury potatoes (such as Maris Piper), peeled and cut into chunks
50 g	butter
100 ml	milk
2	onions, thinly sliced
1 tbsp	olive oil, for the gravy
1 tbsp	plain flour, for the gravy
1 cube	beef stock cube
400 ml	hot water for the gravy
1 tsp	brown sugar, for the gravy
300 g	frozen peas (the "slime")

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> Wrap the sausages in the pastry up to 24 hours ahead. Cover them and keep them on a baking tray in the fridge, and glaze them just before baking. The gravy can also be made the day before and reheated.

METHOD

1. **The mummies:** heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan) and line a large baking tray with baking paper. Unroll the pastry and cut it lengthways into about 24 thin strips, about 1 cm wide.

2. Wrap 3 strips around each sausage, overlapping and leaving a small gap near one end for the mummy's face. Press the ends underneath so they stick. Put them on the tray with the gap facing up.
3. Brush the pastry with beaten egg and bake for 22 to 25 minutes, until the pastry is deep golden and the sausages are cooked through. Cut one open to check there is no pink.
4. **The mash:** put the potatoes in a pan of cold salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, until soft. Drain, return to the warm pan and mash with the butter and milk until smooth. Season with pepper.
5. **The onion gravy:** heat the oil in a saucepan over a medium heat. Cook the onions for 15 minutes, stirring now and then, until soft and golden. Stir in the sugar for 1 minute, then the flour for 1 minute. Dissolve the stock cube in 400 ml of boiling water and add it gradually, stirring. Simmer for 10 minutes, until thickened.
6. **The slime:** boil the peas for 3 minutes, drain and serve them alongside.
7. **Eyes:** when the sausages come out of the oven, dot two tiny spots of mustard in the gap of each mummy for eyes (a cocktail stick works well). Serve each person 2 mummies on a mound of mash, with gravy and peas.

OPTIONAL EXTRA: PUMPKIN SOUP

For a starter, soften 1 chopped onion in 1 tbsp of oil, add 800 g of peeled and cubed pumpkin or butternut squash and 700 ml of hot stock (1 stock cube), simmer for 20 minutes, blend until smooth and season. Swirl a spoonful of cream on top and drag a cocktail stick through it for a spider web. Serve 4 small bowls.

SAUSAGES MUST BE COOKED THROUGH

Sausages must be cooked until there is no pink in the middle and the juices run clear. Cut one open to check. Chill leftovers within 2 hours and eat them within 2 days, reheated once until steaming hot.

SWAPS

Vegetarian sausages in place of pork (they need about 5 minutes less). Sweet potato mash. A spoonful of ketchup "blood" on the plate.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4 TO 8

Chocolate Brownie Graveyard with Biscuit Tombstones

Prep: 20 minutes | Oven: 25 minutes | About 35 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4 generously (8 squares)

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

150 g	dark chocolate, broken into pieces
150 g	butter, cubed
3	eggs
200 g	caster sugar
100 g	plain flour
30 g	cocoa powder
1 pinch	salt
6	chocolate sandwich biscuits (the "soil")
4	shortbread fingers or rectangular biscuits (the tombstones)
1 tube	white writing icing
1 handful	jelly worms or sweets, to decorate (optional)

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> The brownies keep well. Bake them the day before and keep them in an airtight tin. Assemble the graveyard on the plates just before you serve.

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Line a 20 cm square tin with baking paper.
2. Put the chocolate and butter in a heatproof bowl over a pan of barely simmering water (the bowl must not touch the water), and stir until melted and smooth. Take it off the heat and leave to cool for 5 minutes.
3. Whisk the eggs and sugar in a large bowl for 2 to 3 minutes, until thick and pale. Pour in the chocolate mixture and stir to combine.

4. Sift in the flour, cocoa and salt and fold gently until just combined. Do not overmix. Pour into the tin and smooth the top.
5. Bake for 22 to 25 minutes, until the top is set and has a crackly crust, but a skewer pushed into the middle still comes out with a few moist crumbs. Leave to cool in the tin. A slightly gooey middle is exactly right.
6. **The soil:** put the sandwich biscuits in a freezer bag and crush them to fine crumbs with a rolling pin.
7. **The tombstones:** use the writing icing to write "RIP" on each shortbread finger, and add a few lines or a small cross if you like.
8. Cut the brownie into 8 squares. Put 2 squares on each plate, sprinkle crumb soil around them, stand a tombstone up in the crumbs and add a jelly worm crawling out of the soil.

> **SERVING IDEA**
>
> Serve warm, with a scoop of vanilla ice cream melting on the side. Or a pouring of cream.

SWAPS

Chopped nuts or white chocolate chips folded into the brownie batter. Orange zest. Raspberries on the plate for "blood".

Shopping list for this recipe

> **COMING UP NEXT**
>
> Occasion 5 is a birthday, with a build-your-own burger night and a chocolate fudge birthday cake.

Meal Plan Occasions 1: Special Occasions

Occasion 5 · Birthday

Today at a glance. A birthday meal for **4 people**: everybody builds their own burger at the table, then you bring out a rich chocolate cake with candles. The cake makes 8 slices, so you will have leftovers. It is best to bake the sponges the day before. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · BEEF

Build-Your-Own Burger Night with Wedges and Slaw

Prep: 30 minutes | Cooking: about 40 minutes | About 45 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

600 g	beef mince, 12 to 15% fat (the fat keeps burgers juicy)
4	burger buns (brioche or seeded)
4 slices	Cheddar cheese slices
8 rashers	streaky or back bacon
1	little gem or iceberg lettuce, leaves separated
2	tomatoes, sliced
1	red onion, cut into thin rings
8	sliced pickled gherkins
4 tbsp	mayonnaise, for the burger sauce
2 tbsp	tomato ketchup, for the burger sauce
1 tsp	mustard, for the burger sauce
1 kg	potatoes (such as Maris Piper), unpeeled and cut into wedges
3 tbsp	sunflower or olive oil, for the wedges
2 tsp	smoked paprika
250 g	white cabbage, finely shredded
2	carrots, grated
3 tbsp	mayonnaise, for the slaw
1 tbsp	lemon juice, for the slaw
1 tbsp	oil, for frying the burgers

MAKE IT AHEAD

Shape the burgers up to 24 hours ahead. Put them on a plate with baking paper between them, cover them and keep them on the bottom shelf of the fridge. Make the slaw and the burger

sauce in the morning and keep them in the fridge too. Cut the wedges and keep them in a bowl of cold water, then drain and dry them well.

METHOD

1. **The wedges:** heat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan). Dry the potato wedges very well with a tea towel. Toss them on a large baking tray with the 3 tbsp of oil, the paprika and a little salt, and spread out in a single layer. Roast for 35 to 40 minutes, turning once, until golden and crisp.
2. **The burgers:** divide the mince into 4 equal balls (about 150 g each). Flatten each into a patty about 2 cm thick and 10 cm wide, pressing a shallow dent in the centre with your thumb, which stops them puffing up into balls. Season both sides with salt and pepper just before cooking.
3. **The slaw:** mix the cabbage, carrots, 3 tbsp of mayonnaise and the lemon juice in a bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Cover and chill.
4. **The sauce:** stir the 4 tbsp of mayonnaise, ketchup and mustard together in a small bowl.
5. **The bacon:** heat the grill to high. Lay the bacon on a grill tray and grill for 4 minutes on each side, until crisp. Keep it warm.
6. Heat the oil in a large frying pan over a high heat until very hot. Cook the burgers for 4 to 5 minutes on each side, pressing down only once at the start. For the last minute of cooking, lay a slice of cheese on each, and add a splash of water and cover the pan with a lid to melt it.
7. While the burgers rest for 2 minutes, split the buns and toast them, cut side down, in the pan or under the grill for 1 minute.
8. Put everything on the table and let each person build their own: bun, sauce, lettuce, tomato, burger, bacon, onion rings and gherkins, with the wedges and slaw alongside.

BURGERS MUST BE COOKED ALL THE WAY THROUGH

Mince burgers must be cooked right through, with no pink in the middle and the juices running clear (at least 75°C). Never serve a rare burger. Wash your hands, the board and the plate after handling raw mince. Chill leftovers within 2 hours and eat them within 2 days.

SWAPS

Chicken or lamb mince in place of the beef. Sweet potato wedges. Blue cheese or a fried egg on top. Halloumi or a big portobello mushroom for a vegetarian burger.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 8

Chocolate Fudge Birthday Cake

Prep: 30 minutes | Oven: 25 minutes, plus cooling and chilling | About 45 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 8 (so there is plenty left over)

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

175 g	soft butter (out of the fridge for 1 hour), plus a little for the tins
175 g	caster sugar
3	eggs
150 g	self-raising flour
25 g	cocoa powder
1 tsp	baking powder
2 tbsp	milk
1 tsp	vanilla extract
250 g	dark chocolate (about 50 to 70% cocoa), chopped, for the ganache
250 ml	double cream
3 tbsp	raspberry or cherry jam, for the middle
1 pack	birthday candles

MAKE IT AHEAD

Bake the sponges the day before, wrap them in cling film and keep them at room temperature. Make the ganache and fill and top the cake on the day, or the evening before and keep it in a cool place (not the fridge). It is best eaten within 3 days.

METHOD

1. **The sponges:** heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Grease two 18 cm sandwich tins with butter and line the bases with baking paper.
2. Beat the 175 g of butter and the sugar in a large bowl with an electric whisk (or a wooden spoon and some effort) for 3 to 4 minutes, until pale and fluffy.

3. Beat in the eggs one at a time, adding a spoonful of the flour with each egg so the mixture does not curdle. Sift in the rest of the flour, the cocoa and the baking powder, and fold gently with a metal spoon. Fold in the milk and vanilla to give a soft dropping consistency.
4. Divide the mixture evenly between the tins and smooth the tops. Bake for 22 to 25 minutes, until the sponges are risen and spring back when pressed, and a skewer comes out clean. Leave in the tins for 5 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack and cool completely, which takes about 1 hour.
5. **The ganache:** put the chopped chocolate in a heatproof bowl. Heat the cream in a small pan until it is just steaming and starting to bubble at the edges (do not let it boil hard). Pour it over the chocolate, leave for 2 minutes, then stir until completely smooth and glossy. Leave it at room temperature for about 1 hour, stirring now and then, until it thickens like thick custard. Do not put it in the fridge.
6. **Putting it together:** put one sponge on a plate, spread it with the jam, then 4 tbsp of the ganache. Put the second sponge on top, flat side up.
7. Pour the rest of the ganache over the top, spread it over the top and sides with a palette knife or the back of a spoon, and swirl it for a rustic finish. Let it set for 30 minutes.
8. Press in the candles, light them, sing, and cut into 8 slices.

> **CAKE THAT IS NOT QUITE RIGHT**
>
> If the ganache is too runny, leave it longer. If it is too stiff, warm it over a pan of hot water for 10 seconds. If the sponges sink in the middle, the oven door was opened too early. Piled with ganache, nobody will notice.

> **EGGS AND STORING**
>
> Cooked cakes with a cream-based ganache can be kept at a cool room temperature for 1 day, or in the fridge for up to 3 days (bring it out 1 hour before serving).

SWAPS

Fresh raspberries on top. Whipped cream in the middle. Orange zest in the sponge. Chopped hazelnuts pressed into the sides.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Occasion 6 is Christmas Day, written for one person: a T-bone steak with proper chips and peppercorn sauce, followed by a sticky toffee pudding for one.

Meal Plan Occasions 1: Special Occasions

Occasion 6 · Christmas Day

Today at a glance. A Christmas Day meal for **one person** (and a cat or two to watch): no turkey, just a really good T-bone steak with proper chips and a peppercorn sauce, and a sticky toffee pudding that makes a second one for Boxing Day. The pudding can be made on Christmas Eve, so on the day you only need to cook the steak. Quantities are for one, in metric with UK names, with notes on scaling up.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 1 · BEEF

T-Bone Steak with Garlic Thyme Butter, Proper Chips and Peppercorn Sauce

Prep: 15 minutes, plus 45 minutes' resting at room temperature

Cooking: about 40 minutes

About 30 minutes of hands-on work

Serves 1

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1	T-bone steak, about 450 to 550 g and 3 to 4 cm thick
300 g	floury potatoes (such as Maris Piper), for the chips
2 tbsp	sunflower or olive oil, for the chips
1 tbsp	sunflower or olive oil, for the steak
25 g	butter, for basting
2 cloves	garlic, left in their skins and lightly crushed
3 sprigs	fresh thyme (or ½ tsp dried thyme)
1 tsp	flaky sea salt, for the steak
1	small shallot (or ¼ of a small onion), finely chopped
1 tbsp	green peppercorns in brine, drained and lightly crushed (or 1 tsp crushed black peppercorns)
¼ cube	beef stock cube
60 ml	hot water for the sauce
3 tbsp	double cream (about 45 ml)
1 tsp	mustard
100 g	green beans or tenderstem broccoli
10 g	butter, for the greens

CHOOSING THE STEAK

A T-bone is two steaks in one: a large strip (sirloin) on one side of the bone and a small, tender fillet on the other. Choose one that is at least 3 cm thick, with good marbling, and ask the

> butcher to cut it fresh. A thick steak cooks evenly, and gives you more time to get the colour. Take it out of the fridge 45 minutes before cooking, so it is not cold in the middle.

METHOD

1. **45 minutes before:** take the steak out of the fridge, pat it completely dry with kitchen paper (a wet steak will steam instead of sear), and leave it on a plate at room temperature. Peel the potatoes and cut them into chips about 1.5 cm thick.
2. **The chips:** heat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan) and put a baking tray in to heat. Put the chips in a pan of cold salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for 5 to 6 minutes, until just soft at the edges. Drain well, shake the colander to roughen them, and leave for 3 minutes to dry. Toss them with the 2 tbsp of oil and salt, tip them onto the hot tray in a single layer and roast for 30 to 35 minutes, turning once, until crisp and golden.
3. **The sauce:** melt 10 g of the butter (from the 25 g) in a small pan over a medium heat. Cook the shallot for 3 minutes until soft. Add the peppercorns and the stock cube dissolved in 60 ml of hot water, and let it bubble for 3 minutes until reduced by half. Stir in the cream and mustard, and simmer for 2 minutes. Season with a little salt. Keep warm over a very low heat.
4. **The greens:** when the chips have 8 minutes left, boil the green beans in salted water for 4 to 5 minutes, until tender. Drain and toss with the 10 g of butter.
5. **The steak:** season both sides with the salt and plenty of pepper. Heat the 1 tbsp of oil in a heavy frying pan (cast iron is best) over a high heat until it is smoking hot. Open the window or turn on the extractor.
6. Lay the steak in the pan and do not move it. Cook for 3 minutes, then turn it over and cook for another 3 minutes. Stand it on its fat edge for 1 minute to render it.
7. Turn the heat down to medium, add the remaining 15 g of butter, the garlic and the thyme. Tilt the pan and spoon the foaming butter over the steak for 1 to 2 minutes. This is about 3 to 4 minutes per side in total for medium-rare. For medium, add 1 to 2 minutes. For well done, add 4 minutes and use a lower heat.
8. Lift the steak onto a warm plate, pour over the butter from the pan, and rest it for 5 to 8 minutes. This is not optional: it keeps the juices in.
9. Serve the steak with the chips, greens and peppercorn sauce. Cut the meat off the bone in slices, and do not leave the little fillet on the bone: it is the best part.

COOKING A STEAK SAFELY

A whole steak can be served pink in the middle, because any bacteria are on the surface, which is seared in the pan. If you prefer it well done, or are cooking for anyone pregnant or unwell, cook it until there is no pink (70°C or more). Thermometer guide: rare 50°C, medium-rare 55°C, medium 60°C, well done 70°C and over. Do not wash the raw steak. Wash your hands, the board and the plate after handling it.

SWAPS

A ribeye or a thick sirloin in place of the T-bone. Garlic butter mushrooms in place of the green beans. A mushroom sauce in place of the peppercorn sauce. Onion rings or a jacket potato in place of the chips.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 1, PLUS 1 FOR BOXING DAY

Sticky Toffee Pudding for One (and One More)

Prep: 15 minutes | Oven: 20 minutes | About 25 minutes of hands-on work | Makes 2 small puddings: serves 1, plus 1 for Boxing Day

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

60 g	pitted dates, chopped
100 ml	boiling water
½ tsp	bicarbonate of soda
40 g	soft butter, plus a little for the ramekins
60 g	light brown soft sugar
1	egg
60 g	self-raising flour
½ tsp	vanilla extract
40 g	butter, for the toffee sauce
60 g	light brown soft sugar, for the toffee sauce
60 ml	double cream, for the toffee sauce

MAKE IT AHEAD

Bake the puddings and make the sauce on Christmas Eve, and keep both covered. On Christmas Day, warm a pudding in the microwave for 40 to 50 seconds (or 10 minutes in a 160°C oven, covered with foil) and warm the sauce in a small pan. The second pudding is Boxing Day's treat.

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Butter two 200 ml ramekins or small ovenproof cups, and put them on a baking tray.
2. Put the chopped dates in a small bowl with the boiling water and the bicarbonate of soda. Leave for 10 minutes, until soft. Mash roughly with a fork.
3. Beat the 40 g of soft butter and 60 g of sugar in a bowl for 2 minutes, until pale. Beat in the egg and the vanilla. Fold in the flour, then stir in the date mixture, with its water.

The batter will be quite runny, and that is right.

4. Divide the batter between the ramekins and bake for 18 to 20 minutes, until risen and springy to the touch.
5. **The sauce:** while they bake, put the 40 g of butter, 60 g of sugar and cream in a small pan over a medium heat. Stir until the sugar dissolves, then simmer for 3 minutes, until it is thick and glossy. Take it off the heat.
6. Turn one pudding out onto a plate (or leave it in its ramekin), pierce it all over with a skewer and pour over a few spoonfuls of the hot sauce. Eat it while it is warm, with ice cream or cream if you like.
7. Cool the second pudding, cover it and keep it in the fridge for Boxing Day, with the rest of the sauce in a small jar.

> **KEEP THE SECOND ONE SAFE**
>
> The second pudding must be cooled, covered and chilled within 2 hours of baking. Eat it the next day, reheated until steaming hot all the way through.

SWAPS

A chocolate fondant in place of the pudding (bake 2 fondants at 200°C for 10 minutes). A splash of whisky or brandy in the sauce, if you like. A handful of chopped pecans in the batter.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Occasion 7 is your own "I feel like celebrating" meal, for one: a garlic king prawn and chorizo linguine with garlic bread, followed by a tiramisu pot.

Meal Plan Occasions 1: Special Occasions

Occasion 7 · Treat Yourself

Today at a glance. This is the meal for "I feel like celebrating": for **one person**, any day of the year, with the quantities easy to scale up for friends. A quick, glamorous pasta, ready in about **25 minutes**, and a tiramisu pot that you make earlier and leave in the fridge. Quantities are for one, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 1 · SEAFOOD

Garlic King Prawn and Chorizo Linguine with Garlic Bread

Prep: 10 minutes | Cooking: about 20 minutes | About 25 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 1

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

100 g	dried linguine
100 g	raw king prawns, peeled (defrosted if frozen)
40 g	cooking chorizo, cut into small cubes
2 cloves	garlic, finely chopped
100 g	cherry tomatoes, halved
1 pinch	dried chilli flakes (optional)
1 tbsp	olive oil
10 g	butter
1 tbsp	lemon juice
1 tbsp	chopped fresh parsley
½	small baguette (or 2 thick slices of ciabatta), for the garlic bread
20 g	soft butter, for the garlic bread
1 clove	garlic, crushed, for the garlic bread

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> Make the garlic butter an hour or more in advance (mix the 20 g of soft butter, the crushed garlic and half of the parsley). You can also chop the garlic and halve the tomatoes ahead of time.

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Slice the baguette in half lengthways, or cut it into thick slices without cutting all the way through. Spread the garlic butter on the cut sides, wrap it loosely in foil and bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until hot and golden (open the foil for the last 3 minutes).

2. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Cook the linguine for 1 minute less than the packet says, usually about 9 minutes. Save a mugful of the cooking water, then drain.
3. While the pasta cooks, put the chorizo in a large cold frying pan, turn on a medium heat and cook for 3 to 4 minutes, stirring, until the fat runs out and the chorizo is crisp. Lift it out onto a plate, leaving the red oil in the pan.
4. Add the olive oil to the pan, then the garlic and chilli flakes, and cook for 30 seconds. Add the prawns and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, turning once, until they have turned pink and opaque all the way through. Add the tomatoes and cook for 2 minutes more.
5. Add the drained pasta, the chorizo, the butter, lemon juice and about 4 tbsp of the cooking water to the pan. Toss over the heat for 1 to 2 minutes, until the sauce coats the pasta and is glossy.
6. Pile it into a warm bowl, scatter over the parsley and eat it with the garlic bread.

COOK THE PRAWNS AND CHORIZO THROUGH

Raw prawns must be cooked until pink and opaque all the way through. Cooking chorizo (the raw kind, not the dried, ready-to-eat kind) must be cooked until it is sizzling and no longer pink inside. Defrost frozen prawns in the fridge overnight. Eat the dish straight away, and do not keep leftover seafood.

SCALING UP

Multiply everything by the number of people, but cook the pasta in one large pan and the prawns in two batches if your frying pan is small. For 4 people use 400 g of linguine, 400 g of prawns, 160 g of chorizo and a 400 g tin of chopped tomatoes in place of the cherry tomatoes.

SWAPS

Chicken pieces in place of the prawns (cook for 6 to 8 minutes). Spinach or peas added with the pasta. A splash of white wine in the pan (optional, not needed).

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 1

Tiramisu Pot for One (No Alcohol Needed)

Prep: 10 minutes | Chilling: at least 2 hours | About 10 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 1

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

50 ml	strong coffee (1 shot of espresso, or 1 tsp instant coffee in 50 ml hot water), cooled
3	sponge fingers (savoiardi)
60 g	mascarpone cheese, at room temperature
40 ml	double cream
1 tbsp	icing sugar or caster sugar
¼ tsp	vanilla extract
1 tsp	cocoa powder, for dusting

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> Make it the evening before or in the morning. It needs at least 2 hours in the fridge, and is even better after 8 hours. You can make several pots in advance for a party.

METHOD

1. Make the coffee and leave it to cool in a shallow bowl. Choose a glass or small dish (about 250 ml).
2. In a bowl, beat the mascarpone, cream, sugar and vanilla with a whisk or fork for about 1 minute, until smooth and thick enough to hold its shape. Do not overbeat, or it will go grainy.
3. Break the sponge fingers in half. Dip each half in the coffee for 1 to 2 seconds only on each side (they soak up a lot), and lay half of them in the base of the glass.
4. Spoon over half the mascarpone cream and smooth it. Add another layer of dipped sponge fingers, and finish with the rest of the cream.
5. Cover and chill for at least 2 hours. Dust with the cocoa just before serving, through a small sieve.

> **CHILLING AND EGGS**

> This version has no raw egg, so it is safe to make ahead. Keep it in the fridge and eat it within 2 days.

SWAPS

A splash of coffee liqueur, amaretto or Marsala in the coffee, if you like. Grated dark chocolate in place of the cocoa. Berries in place of the coffee for a fruit version.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Chapter 8 is the Occasions planner, with the dates for each occasion for the next three years, a make-ahead timeline for each, and a guide to scaling the recipes up or down.

Meal Plan Occasions 1: Special Occasions

Chapter 8 · Occasions planner

How to use this chapter. The occasions fall on different days, so there is no single weekly shopping list. Each of the 14 recipes has its own shopping list (follow the link on the recipe), and this chapter helps you plan: when each occasion falls, how much time it needs, what to do the day before, and how to scale the recipes up or down. Chapters 1 to 5 are written for 4 people, and chapters 6 and 7 are for one.

When each occasion falls

Pancake Tuesday falls 47 days before Easter Sunday, and Easter moves every year (it is the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after 21 March). Your birthday and your own celebration are whenever you choose.

OCCASION	2027	2028	2029
New Year's Day	Fri 1 Jan 2027	Sat 1 Jan 2028	Mon 1 Jan 2029
Pancake Tuesday (Shrove Tuesday)	Tue 9 Feb 2027	Tue 29 Feb 2028	Tue 13 Feb 2029
Easter Sunday	Sun 28 Mar 2027	Sun 16 Apr 2028	Sun 1 Apr 2029
Halloween	Sun 31 Oct 2027	Tue 31 Oct 2028	Wed 31 Oct 2029
Birthday	Your date	Your date	Your date
Christmas Day	Sat 25 Dec 2027	Mon 25 Dec 2028	Tue 25 Dec 2029
"I feel like celebrating"	Any day	Any day	Any day

The seven occasions at a glance

CH	OCCASION	SERVES	MAIN MEAL	DESSERT	TIME NEEDED
1	New Year's Day	4	Slow-roast pork belly with lentils and roast apples	Apple and blackberry crumble with custard	About 4 hours
2	Pancake Tuesday	4	Baked chicken, leek and mushroom pancakes	Lemon and sugar and banana and chocolate pancakes	About 2 hours
3	Easter	4	Roast half leg of lamb with roast potatoes	Hot cross bun and butter pudding	About 3 hours
4	Halloween	4	Mummy sausages with mash and onion gravy	Chocolate brownie graveyard	About 1 hour 30 minutes
5	Birthday	4 (cake serves 8)	Build-your-own burger night with wedges and slaw	Chocolate fudge birthday cake	About 2 hours, plus cake the day before
6	Christmas Day	1	T-bone steak with chips and peppercorn sauce	Sticky toffee pudding (makes 2: one for Boxing Day)	About 1 hour 15 minutes
7	"I feel like celebrating"	1	Garlic king prawn and chorizo linguine	Tiramisu pot	About 30 minutes, plus 2 hours' chilling

Make-ahead timelines

Almost all of the work can be done before the day. Here is what to do when.

OCCASION	A FEW DAYS BEFORE	THE DAY BEFORE	ON THE DAY
New Year's Day	Order the pork belly from the butcher if you want it scored. Buy the apples, lentils and custard ingredients.	Dry the pork skin with kitchen paper, rub in the salt and leave it uncovered in the fridge. Peel the potatoes and keep them in cold water.	Pork in the oven about 3 hours 30 minutes before you want to eat. Lentils at 2:00, mash at 3:00. Crumble goes in the oven when the pork comes out.
Pancake Tuesday	Buy the chicken, leeks, mushrooms and cheese.	Make both batters and keep them in the fridge. Make the 8 savoury	Make the filling and sauce, assemble and bake for 20 to 25 minutes. Make the sweet

OCCASION	A FEW DAYS BEFORE	THE DAY BEFORE	ON THE DAY
		pancakes if you like, and stack them with baking paper in between.	pancakes while it bakes, and keep them warm.
Easter	Take the lamb out of the freezer if it is frozen. Buy the mint, rosemary and hot cross buns.	Stud the lamb with garlic and rosemary. Assemble the bread and butter pudding, cover and chill. Make the mint sauce.	Parboil the potatoes in the morning. Lamb in the oven about 2 hours 30 minutes before you want to eat. Potatoes go in 30 minutes later. Pudding bakes while you eat.
Halloween	Buy the sausages, puff pastry, chocolate and biscuits.	Wrap the sausages in pastry and chill them. Bake the brownies. Make the onion gravy.	Bake the sausages, boil and mash the potatoes, reheat the gravy. Decorate the graveyard on each plate at the last minute.
Birthday	Buy everything, including candles. Take the mince out of the freezer if it is frozen.	Bake the cake sponges. Shape the burgers (chill them on the bottom shelf). Make the slaw and the burger sauce.	Make the ganache and finish the cake in the morning. Wedges in the oven 40 minutes before you eat. Burgers and bacon last.
Christmas Day	Buy the steak, dates and cream.	Christmas Eve: bake the 2 puddings and make the toffee sauce. Keep both covered.	Take the steak out 45 minutes before you cook it. Chips in the oven 40 minutes before you eat. Steak last, rested while you finish the sauce. Warm the pudding while you eat.
"I feel like celebrating"	Buy the prawns, chorizo and mascarpone.	Make the tiramisu pot the day before or in the morning, so it chills for at least 2 hours. Make the garlic butter.	Garlic bread in the oven, pasta on, chorizo and prawns in the pan. 25 minutes from start to the table.

Scaling the recipes

- **Scaling up (more guests):** multiply the quantities by the number of people, then check the biggest limits: the size of your roasting tin, the size of your baking dish, and the space in your oven. If a dish will not fit, cook it in two tins or two batches.

- **Cooking times:** do not simply double the time. Roasts need more time by weight (the lamb and pork recipes tell you the minutes per 500 g). Pasta, rice and steaks take the same time per person, but need a bigger pan or more batches.
- **Scaling down (fewer guests):** the main meals for 4 can be halved easily, apart from the pork belly and lamb. The leftover roast is good cold, in sandwiches, within 2 days.
- **Scaling the Christmas T-bone:** one steak per person. Cook them one at a time or in a very large pan, and keep the first ones warm on a plate under foil while you cook the next.
- **Scaling the celebration pasta (chapter 7):** up to 4 people, multiply the quantities (400 g linguine, 400 g prawns, 160 g chorizo, and a tin of chopped tomatoes in place of the cherry tomatoes). Cook the prawns in two batches.
- **Cakes:** the birthday cake already serves 8. The brownie graveyard can be cut into 8 or 9 squares, and the pancakes can be stacked up and kept warm.

Equipment

- A large roasting tin, a lidded casserole or foil, and a meat thermometer (New Year's Day, Easter, Christmas Day, burgers)
- Two 18 cm sandwich tins, a 20 cm square tin, a 1.2 litre baking dish and a 1.5 litre baking dish (cake, brownies, puddings, crumble)
- A 20 cm non-stick frying pan and a large heavy frying pan (pancakes, steak, burgers, linguine)
- A wire rack, a stick blender or a whisk, and a sieve (pancake batter, ganache, custard, tiramisu)
- 2 ramekins of about 200 ml (sticky toffee puddings) and a glass or small dish of about 250 ml (tiramisu)
- A large baking tray with baking paper, and a grill tray (wedges, sausages, bacon)
- Kitchen paper, cling film, foil and covered containers for the make-ahead steps

Food-safety reminders

THE FOUR RULES FOR EVERY OCCASION

- Cook pork, sausages, burgers and chicken right through, with no pink and clear juices. Steak and lamb joints can be served pink in the middle if you like (the outside is the part that is seared).

- Cool leftovers quickly, within 1 to 2 hours, keep them covered in the fridge and eat them within 2 days. Reheat only once, until steaming hot.
- Keep raw meat on the bottom shelf, away from other food, and wash your hands, boards and knives after handling it.
- Defrost frozen joints in the fridge, allowing about 18 hours for the lamb, 24 hours for a big joint, and overnight for mince and chicken. Never refreeze them after defrosting.

SHOPPING ACROSS THE OCCASIONS

Because each occasion is a different day, shop for each one a few days before. Cream is bought in a small pot for both Christmas Day recipes (about 105 ml in total), and mascarpone for the tiramisu keeps for 3 days after opening.