

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Meal Plan Occasions 2

Seven more celebration meals with a main course and a dessert each, from Burns Night to Hogmanay, with a shopping list for every recipe.

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Meal Plan Occasions 2: More Special Occasions

Occasion 1 · Burns Night

Welcome to More Special Occasions. This second collection has seven more celebrations, each with a **main meal and a dessert**, written for **4 people** (except Valentine's Day, which is for 2). Healthy rules are relaxed here too. We start with **Burns Night**, the supper held on or around 25 January to celebrate the poet Robert Burns, which is a good one for Edinburgh. The meal takes about **1 hour**, and the cranachan is made while the haggis cooks. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · SCOTTISH

Haggis, Neeps and Tatties with a Creamy Mustard Sauce

Prep: 20 minutes | Cooking: about 1 hour | About 35 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

454 g	haggis (1 standard pack), in its casing or vacuum pack
1	large swede (about 800 g), peeled and cut into 3 cm chunks (the "neeps")
1 kg	floury potatoes (such as Maris Piper), peeled and cut into chunks (the "tatties")
60 g	butter (30 g for the neeps, 30 g for the tatties)
100 ml	milk, for the tatties
1 pinch	black pepper
1	small onion, finely chopped (for the sauce)
15 g	butter, for the sauce
1 tbsp	wholegrain mustard
½ cube	chicken or vegetable stock cube
150 ml	hot water for the sauce
100 ml	double cream

THE ADDRESS TO A HAGGIS

At a traditional Burns Supper, the haggis is brought to the table and Robert Burns's poem begins with "Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face, Great chieftain o' the puddin'-race!". If you feel like it, read a verse out before you cut the haggis open. If not, a cheer will do.

MAKE IT AHEAD

Peel the swede and potatoes in the morning and keep the potatoes in cold water. The sauce can be made earlier in the day and reheated gently.

METHOD

1. **The haggis:** heat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan). Take the haggis out of any plastic or netting that is not edible (check the pack: some can go straight in the oven in a casing, and some need to come out). Wrap it loosely in foil with 2 tbsp of water and put it in a small baking dish. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes, until it is piping hot all the way through (75°C or more in the middle).
2. **The neeps:** put the swede in a large pan of cold salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for 20 to 25 minutes, until a knife slides in easily. Drain very well (let it steam dry for 2 minutes), then mash with 30 g of the butter and plenty of pepper.
3. **The tatties:** 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 other 30 g of butter and the milk until smooth. Season.
4. **The sauce:** melt the 15 g of butter in a small pan over a medium heat. Cook the onion for 5 minutes, until soft. Stir in the mustard and the stock cube dissolved in 150 ml of hot water. Bubble for 3 minutes, then add the cream and simmer gently for 3 minutes, until it coats the back of a spoon.
5. Take the haggis out of the foil, put it on a board and cut it open down the middle. Spoon the haggis onto each plate, with a generous spoonful of neeps and tatties alongside, and pour over the sauce.

> **HAGGIS MUST BE PIPING HOT**
>
> Haggis is made with offal and oatmeal and must be cooked right through. Check that it is steaming hot in the middle before serving. Chill any leftovers within 2 hours and eat them within 2 days, reheated once until steaming hot.

SWAPS

Vegetarian haggis in place of the traditional kind (it needs 5 minutes less in the oven). A whisky and cream sauce instead of the mustard sauce, if you like. Butter and chives on the tatties.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4

Cranachan

15 minutes | About 15 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

50 g	medium oatmeal or porridge oats
300 ml	double cream
3 tbsp	runny honey (2 tbsp in the cream, 1 tbsp to finish)
400 g	fresh raspberries (or frozen, defrosted and drained)

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> Toast the oats the day before and keep them in a jar. Whip the cream and assemble the glasses about 1 hour before you serve, because the oats go soft if they sit in the cream for much longer. Or serve it deconstructed, with the parts in bowls, and let everyone build their own.

METHOD

1. Toast the oatmeal in a dry frying pan over a medium heat for 4 to 5 minutes, stirring often, until it smells nutty and turns light golden. Tip onto a plate to cool.
2. Whip the cream with 2 tbsp of the honey in a large bowl until it makes soft peaks (do not overwhip). Fold in about two thirds of the toasted oats.
3. Crush about a third of the raspberries roughly with a fork.
4. Layer 4 tall glasses or bowls: a spoonful of the crushed raspberries, a big spoonful of the oat cream, a few whole raspberries, and repeat.
5. Finish each glass with a little cream, the rest of the whole raspberries, a sprinkle of the remaining oats and a drizzle of the last tablespoon of honey. Serve at once or chill for up to 1 hour.

SWAPS

A splash of whisky (1 tbsp) folded into the cream, as it is traditionally made. Blackberries or strawberries in place of the raspberries. Half cream and half Greek yoghurt for a lighter version.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Occasion 2 is Chinese New Year, with sticky soy-honey chicken thighs, longevity noodles and pak choi, followed by mango, coconut and ginger biscuit pots.

Meal Plan Occasions 2: More Special Occasions

Occasion 2 · Chinese New Year

Today at a glance. Chinese New Year falls between late January and mid-February, and the date moves every year (see the planner in chapter 8). This feast for **4 people** has sticky chicken and long noodles for long life, followed by fresh mango pots. The chicken can be marinated the day before, and the dessert is made earlier in the day. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · CHICKEN

Sticky Soy-Honey Chicken Thighs with Longevity Noodles and Pak Choi

Prep: 20 minutes, plus 30 minutes' marinating | Oven: about 40 minutes | About 40 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

8	bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 1 kg)
4 tbsp	reduced-salt soy sauce, for the marinade
3 tbsp	runny honey
2 tbsp	rice vinegar (or white wine vinegar)
3 cloves	garlic, crushed
3 cm	fresh root ginger, peeled and grated
1 tbsp	toasted sesame oil, for the marinade
300 g	dried egg noodles (keep them long: do not cut them, as long noodles mean a long life)
2	pak choi, halved lengthways
2	carrots, cut into thin matchsticks
4	spring onions, sliced
1 tbsp	sunflower or vegetable oil, for the stir-fry
2 tbsp	reduced-salt soy sauce, for the noodles
1 tsp	toasted sesame oil, for the noodles
1 tbsp	sesame seeds, to finish

WHY LONG NOODLES?

In Chinese tradition, long noodles represent a long life, so you should not cut them or bite them in half while eating. Slurp them whole. Serving whole fish, dumplings (shaped like gold ingots) and oranges and tangerines (symbols of luck) are other classic New Year foods.

MAKE IT AHEAD

Marinate the chicken the day before, covered, in the fridge on the bottom shelf. Chop the vegetables in the morning. The noodles and stir-fry take only about 12 minutes at the end.

METHOD

1. **The marinade:** whisk the 4 tbsp of soy sauce, honey, rice vinegar, garlic, ginger and 1 tbsp of sesame oil in a large bowl. Add the chicken, turn each thigh in the marinade, cover and chill for at least 30 minutes (up to 24 hours).
2. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Lift the chicken into a roasting tin, skin side up, in a single layer, and pour over the marinade left in the bowl. Roast for 35 to 40 minutes, basting twice with the juices, until the chicken is sticky and golden, and cooked right through with no pink (75°C in the thickest part).
3. **The noodles:** when the chicken has 12 minutes left, cook the noodles in a pan of boiling water following the packet (usually 4 minutes). Drain, rinse under hot water and toss with 1 tsp of sesame oil to stop them sticking.
4. **The stir-fry:** heat the sunflower oil in a wok or large frying pan over a high heat. Stir-fry the carrots and pak choi for 3 minutes. Add the spring onions and the 2 tbsp of soy sauce, then the noodles, and toss for 2 minutes until hot.
5. Put the noodles and greens on a big dish, lay the chicken on top, spoon over the sticky juices from the tin, and scatter with the sesame seeds. Eat with the noodles whole.

CHICKEN AND THE MARINADE

The marinade that touched raw chicken goes into the oven and cooks with the chicken for at least 35 minutes, so it is safe. Do not use any left in the bowl as a dipping sauce unless you boil it for 3 minutes first. Wash your hands, the board and the knife after handling raw chicken.

SWAPS

Chicken wings or drumsticks in place of the thighs. Rice noodles or udon in place of the egg noodles. Broccoli or bean sprouts in place of the pak choi. A pinch of chilli flakes in the marinade.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4

Mango, Coconut and Ginger Biscuit Pots

Prep: 20 minutes, plus 30 minutes' chilling | No cooking | About 20 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2	large ripe mangoes (or 1 tin of mango pulp, about 425 g)
1	lime, juiced
250 ml	double cream
2 tbsp	icing sugar
30 g	desiccated coconut
8	ginger nut biscuits
2	mandarins or satsumas, peeled and segmented, to decorate

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> Make the pots in the morning, or the day before, and keep them covered in the fridge. Add the crushed biscuit on top just before you serve, so it stays crunchy.

METHOD

1. Toast the desiccated coconut in a dry frying pan over a medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring all the time, until pale gold. Tip onto a plate to cool. It burns very fast, so do not leave it.
2. Peel the mangoes, cut the flesh from the stone and chop it roughly. Blend or mash with the lime juice until smooth (a stick blender or fork works). If you use tinned pulp, stir in the lime juice.
3. Whip the cream with the icing sugar to soft peaks. Fold in half of the toasted coconut.
4. Put the biscuits in a freezer bag and crush them roughly with a rolling pin.
5. Layer 4 glasses: a spoonful of mango, a spoonful of coconut cream, and repeat. Chill for at least 30 minutes.
6. Just before serving, top each pot with the crushed biscuits, the rest of the coconut and a few mandarin segments.

SWAPS

Passion fruit pulp or pineapple in place of the mango. Digestive biscuits or shortbread in place of the ginger nuts. Coconut yoghurt in place of the cream for a lighter pot.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Occasion 3 is Valentine's Day, written for 2: a seared duck breast with orange sauce, crispy potatoes and green beans, followed by molten chocolate fondants with raspberries.

Meal Plan Occasions 2: More Special Occasions

Occasion 3 · Valentine's Day

Today at a glance. A romantic dinner for **2 people** (or for you with a treat to share on the next day). A restaurant-style duck with a sharp, shiny orange sauce, followed by chocolate fondants that look impressive and can be filled the day before. The two recipes together take about **1 hour**, and the fondants bake while you clear the plates. Quantities are for two, in metric with UK names, with notes on scaling up.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 2 · DUCK

Seared Duck Breast with Orange Sauce, Crispy Potatoes and Green Beans

Prep: 15 minutes | Cooking: about 40 minutes | About 30 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 2

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	duck breasts, skin on (about 200 g each)
400 g	baby new potatoes, halved
1 tbsp	olive oil, for the potatoes
200 g	green beans, trimmed
10 g	butter, for the beans
1	orange (zest of half, juice of the whole, about 100 ml)
1 tbsp	runny honey
½ cube	chicken stock cube
100 ml	hot water for the stock
1 tsp	cornflour, mixed with 1 tbsp cold water
15 g	cold butter, cubed, to finish the sauce
2 sprigs	fresh thyme (or ½ tsp dried thyme)
1 tsp	flaky sea salt, for the duck
1 pinch	black pepper

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> Halve the potatoes and trim the beans earlier in the day. Score the duck skin and keep the breasts uncovered on a plate in the fridge for an hour or two: a drier skin crisps better. Take them out 30 minutes before you cook them.

METHOD

1. **The potatoes:** heat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan). Toss the potatoes with the oil and a pinch of salt on a baking tray and roast for 35 to 40 minutes, turning once, until golden and crisp.

2. **The duck:** pat the duck dry. With a sharp knife, score the skin in a criss-cross pattern, cutting through the fat but not into the meat. Season both sides with the salt and pepper.
3. Put the breasts skin side down in a cold, dry, ovenproof frying pan. Turn on a medium-low heat and cook for 8 to 10 minutes, without moving them, until a lot of fat has run out and the skin is deep golden and crisp. Pour off the fat into a heatproof bowl once or twice as it builds up (keep it: it makes wonderful roast potatoes another day).
4. Turn the breasts over and cook for 3 to 4 minutes for medium-rare (the middle is pink, about 55 to 60°C), or 6 to 7 minutes for medium to well done. Lift them onto a warm plate, cover loosely with foil and rest for 8 minutes.
5. **The sauce:** pour away almost all of the fat from the pan, leaving 1 tsp. Add the orange juice, zest, honey, thyme and the stock cube dissolved in 100 ml of hot water. Bubble for 4 to 5 minutes, until reduced by half. Stir in the cornflour mixture and simmer for 1 minute, until glossy. Take off the heat and swirl in the cold butter. Season.
6. **The beans:** boil the green beans in salted water for 4 to 5 minutes, drain and toss with the 10 g of butter.
7. Slice the duck breasts thinly on the diagonal, fan them out on warm plates with the potatoes and beans, and spoon over the sauce.

> **COOKING DUCK**
>
> Duck breast is a whole muscle, so it is safe to serve pink in the middle if the skin is well seared. If you prefer it cooked through, or you are cooking for anyone pregnant or unwell, cook it until there is no pink (about 70°C). Wash your hands, the board and the knife after handling raw duck.

SWAPS

A cherry or redcurrant sauce in place of the orange. Chicken breast (cooked through) in place of the duck. Sweet potato wedges or mashed potato in place of the crispy potatoes.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 2

Molten Chocolate Fondants with Raspberries

Prep: 15 minutes | Oven: 10 to 12 minutes | About 20 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 2

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

100 g	dark chocolate (about 70% cocoa), broken into pieces
100 g	butter, plus extra for the ramekins
2	eggs
2	egg yolks
50 g	caster sugar
2 tbsp	plain flour (about 25 g)
1 tbsp	cocoa powder, for the ramekins
100 g	fresh raspberries, to serve
1 tbsp	icing sugar, to dust

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> Fill the ramekins up to 24 hours ahead, cover and keep them in the fridge. Cook straight from the fridge, adding 2 minutes to the baking time. This leaves you free to enjoy the main course.

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Grease two 150 ml ramekins well with butter, using a pastry brush and brushing upwards. Dust the insides with cocoa, tipping out any extra.
2. Melt the chocolate and the 100 g of butter in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of barely simmering water (the bowl must not touch the water), stirring until smooth. Leave for 5 minutes to cool a little.
3. Whisk the eggs, egg yolks and sugar in a large bowl for 3 to 4 minutes, until thick, pale and doubled in volume. Fold in the chocolate mixture, then the flour, until just combined.
4. Divide the mixture between the ramekins. Put them on a baking tray and bake for 10 to 12 minutes (12 to 14 from the fridge), until the tops are risen and set but the middle

still wobbles when you shake the tray.

5. Leave to stand for 1 minute. Run a knife around the edge, put a plate on top, flip it over and lift off the ramekin. Dust with icing sugar and serve straight away with the raspberries.

> **MOLTEN MEANS A SOFT MIDDLE**
>
> The fondant is meant to have a runny centre, but the outside is cooked. If anyone at the table is pregnant, very young, elderly or unwell, bake for 2 to 3 minutes longer so that the middle is set, or make a sponge pudding instead. Eat straight away.

SWAPS

A square of caramel or a teaspoon of peanut butter pushed into the middle. Orange zest in the mixture. Vanilla ice cream or cream on the side.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Occasion 4 is Mother's Day (Mothering Sunday in the UK), with a chicken, ham and leek pie with a puff pastry lid, followed by a lemon drizzle traybake with strawberries and cream.

Meal Plan Occasions 2: More Special Occasions

Occasion 4 · Mother's Day

Today at a glance. Mothering Sunday in the UK falls on the fourth Sunday of Lent, three weeks before Easter, so the date moves every year (see the planner in chapter 8). This is a comforting lunch for **4 people**, with a creamy pie and a zesty traybake. The filling and the cake can both be made the day before. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · CHICKEN

Chicken, Ham and Leek Pie with a Puff Pastry Lid, Peas and Carrots

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

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

600 g	chicken breast, cut into 2 cm pieces
150 g	cooked ham, cut into 1 cm pieces
2	leeks, trimmed, rinsed and sliced
1	onion, finely chopped
2 tbsp	olive oil
40 g	butter
40 g	plain flour
1 cube	chicken stock cube
400 ml	hot water for the stock
150 ml	double cream
1 tbsp	wholegrain mustard
1 tsp	dried thyme
1 sheet	ready-rolled puff pastry (about 320 g), chilled
1	egg, beaten, to glaze
400 g	frozen peas
4	carrots, peeled and sliced
15 g	butter, for the vegetables
1 pinch	black pepper

MAKE IT AHEAD

Make the filling and cool it completely the day before (the pastry lid goes on cold filling). Keep it covered in the fridge, then put on the lid and bake. Add 10 minutes to the baking time if the filling is cold from the fridge.

METHOD

1. Heat the oil in a large, deep 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.
2. Add the leeks and onion to the pan and cook for 8 to 10 minutes, until soft. Stir in the thyme. Add the butter, and when it has melted, stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute.
3. Dissolve the stock cube in 400 ml of boiling water. Add it a little at a time to the pan, stirring, then the cream and mustard. Simmer for 5 minutes, until thick.
4. Return the chicken to the pan, add the ham and pepper, and stir. Tip the filling into a 1.5 litre pie dish and leave to cool for 20 minutes (a hot filling melts the pastry).
5. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Unroll the pastry and lay it over the dish, trimming the edges to fit with a knife. Press the edges onto the rim with a fork. Cut a small hole in the middle for steam. Use the offcuts to make decorations, such as leaves or a heart for Mother's Day.
6. Brush with the beaten egg and bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until the pastry is puffed, deep golden and the filling is bubbling.
7. While the pie bakes, steam or boil the carrots for 8 minutes, add the peas for the last 3 minutes, drain and toss with the 15 g of butter and a little pepper.
8. Serve big spoonfuls of pie with the vegetables.

> **COOK THE CHICKEN AND THE PIE THROUGH**
>
> The chicken must be cooked through with no pink, and the pie must be bubbling and steaming hot in the middle before you serve it. 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

Mushrooms or sweetcorn in the filling. Cooked leftover roast chicken in place of the raw (skip step 1). Shortcrust pastry for a base and a lid.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4 TO 9

Lemon Drizzle Traybake with Strawberries and Cream

Prep: 20 minutes | Oven: 35 minutes | About 25 minutes of hands-on work | Cuts into 9 squares, so serves 4 with leftovers

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

225 g	soft butter, plus a little for the tin
225 g	caster sugar
4	eggs
225 g	self-raising flour
2	lemons (zest of both, juice of both)
4 tbsp	milk
85 g	caster sugar, for the drizzle
400 g	strawberries
250 ml	double cream
1 tbsp	icing sugar

> **MAKE IT AHEAD**
>
> The cake is better the day after it is baked. Bake it the day before, keep it in the tin, and add the drizzle while it is still warm. Whip the cream and slice the strawberries just before you serve.

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Grease a 23 cm square tin with butter and line the base with baking paper.
2. Beat the 225 g of butter and 225 g of sugar in a large bowl with an electric whisk (or a wooden spoon and effort) for 3 to 4 minutes, until pale and fluffy.
3. Beat in the eggs one at a time, adding a spoonful of flour with each egg to stop the mixture curdling. Sift in the rest of the flour and fold gently. Fold in the zest of both lemons and the milk, to make a soft dropping consistency.

4. Scrape into the tin, level the top and bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until golden and risen, and a skewer pushed into the middle comes out clean.
5. **The drizzle:** while the cake is hot, squeeze the juice of both lemons into a small pan with the 85 g of sugar and warm it for 1 minute until the sugar dissolves. Prick the hot cake all over with a skewer and spoon the syrup over, letting it soak in. Leave it to cool in the tin.
6. Hull and slice the strawberries. Whip the cream with the icing sugar to soft peaks.
7. Cut the cake into 9 squares and serve with the strawberries and a big spoonful of cream.

SWAPS

Orange in place of the lemon. Poppy seeds in the batter. Raspberries or blueberries in place of the strawberries. A crunchy topping of caster sugar mixed with the drizzle.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Chapters 5 to 7 cover a summer barbecue, Bonfire Night and Hogmanay, and chapter 8 is the Occasions planner.

Meal Plan Occasions 2: More Special Occasions

Occasion 5 · Summer Barbecue

Today at a glance. A relaxed summer meal for **4 people**, for a bank holiday or any warm weekend. The chicken is marinated in advance and the potato salad is made earlier in the day, so you only need to cook the skewers and corn at the table. No barbecue? Everything works under the grill or in the oven. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · CHICKEN

Honey-Lemon Chicken Skewers with Chilli-Lime Corn and New Potato Salad

Prep: 30 minutes, plus 1 hour's marinating

Cooking: about 25 minutes

About 50 minutes of hands-on work

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

700 g	boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 3 cm pieces
2	peppers (1 red, 1 yellow), cut into 3 cm pieces
2	red onions, cut into wedges (leaving the root end on holds them together)
3 tbsp	olive oil, for the marinade
2 tbsp	runny honey
1	lemon (zest and juice)
3 cloves	garlic, crushed
2 tsp	smoked paprika
1 tsp	dried oregano
4	corn on the cob, husks removed
50 g	butter, softened
1	lime (zest and juice)
½ tsp	dried chilli flakes
800 g	baby new potatoes
4	spring onions, finely sliced
3 tbsp	mayonnaise
3 tbsp	plain Greek-style yoghurt
1 tbsp	Dijon mustard
2 tbsp	chopped fresh mint or chives
8	wooden or metal skewers

NO BARBECUE? NO PROBLEM

Cook the skewers under a hot grill (about 12 to 15 minutes, turning) or on a baking tray in a 220°C (200°C fan) oven (about 20 minutes, turning once). The corn can be boiled for 6 minutes and then blackened under the grill for 5 minutes, or roasted in the oven with the skewers.

MAKE IT AHEAD

Marinate the chicken in the morning, or the evening before, covered, on the bottom shelf of the fridge. Boil and dress the potato salad earlier in the day and keep it in the fridge. Make the chilli-lime butter and keep it covered.

METHOD

1. **The marinade:** in a large bowl mix the olive oil, honey, lemon zest and juice, garlic, paprika, oregano, a good pinch of salt and pepper. Add the chicken, stir to coat, cover and chill for at least 1 hour (up to 24).
2. If using wooden skewers, soak them in cold water for 30 minutes so they do not burn.
3. **The potato salad:** boil the potatoes in salted water for 12 to 15 minutes, until tender. Drain, halve any large ones and leave to cool for 10 minutes. Mix the mayonnaise, yoghurt and mustard in a large bowl, add the warm potatoes and spring onions, and toss gently. Add the mint or chives and season. Serve at room temperature or chilled.
4. **The butter:** mix the soft butter with the lime zest and juice, the chilli flakes and a pinch of salt in a small bowl.
5. **The skewers:** thread the chicken, peppers and onions alternately onto the 8 skewers, pressing the pieces close but not packed, so the chicken cooks through.
6. **The corn:** boil the corn in a large pan of water for 6 minutes. Drain.
7. **Barbecuing:** make sure the coals are covered in grey-white ash, with no flames. Cook the skewers on the grill for 12 to 15 minutes, turning every few minutes, until golden with charred edges and cooked through. Put the corn on the grill for the last 6 minutes, turning, until lightly charred.
8. Brush the hot corn with the chilli-lime butter. Serve everything together: skewers, corn and potato salad.

BARBECUE FOOD SAFETY

Chicken must be cooked right through, white all the way, with no pink and the juices running clear (75°C in the thickest piece). Use separate plates and tongs for raw and cooked meat, and

wash your hands after handling raw chicken. Do not put cooked food back on the plate that held raw chicken. Do not leave food out in the sun for more than 1 hour, and chill leftovers within 2 hours.

SWAPS

Lamb, beef or halloumi on the skewers. Courgette or mushrooms in place of the peppers. A ready-made coleslaw as a side. Sausages and burgers cooked alongside.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4

Grilled Peaches with Honey and Mascarpone Cream

10 minutes | Grill: 8 minutes | About 15 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

4	ripe peaches (or nectarines), halved and stoned
1 tbsp	butter, melted
3 tbsp	runny honey (1 tbsp for brushing, 2 tbsp for the cream)
250 g	mascarpone cheese
100 ml	double cream
1 tsp	vanilla extract
4	shortbread biscuits, crushed, to top

MAKE IT AHEAD

Make the mascarpone cream in the morning and keep it covered in the fridge. The peaches take only 8 minutes on the barbecue (while you finish the main course) or under the grill.

METHOD

1. Mix the mascarpone, cream, 2 tbsp of the honey and the vanilla in a bowl, beating for 30 seconds until smooth and just thick. Chill.
2. Heat the barbecue or grill to medium-hot. Brush the cut sides of the peaches with the melted butter and the remaining 1 tbsp of honey.
3. Put the peaches cut side down on a clean, oiled grill rack (or on a baking tray, under a hot grill). Cook for 4 minutes, until they have golden grill marks. Turn them over and cook for 3 to 4 minutes more, until soft but not collapsing.
4. Put 2 peach halves on each plate, spoon a big dollop of the mascarpone cream into and beside them, and finish with the crushed shortbread and an extra drizzle of honey.

SWAPS

Pineapple rings or halved apricots in place of the peaches (pineapple needs 3 to 4 minutes on each side). Vanilla ice cream in place of the cream. Chopped pistachios or toasted almonds on top.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Occasion 6 is Bonfire Night, with sticky honey-mustard sausages, jacket potatoes and smoky beans, followed by sticky parkin with toffee sauce.

Meal Plan Occasions 2: More Special Occasions

Occasion 6 · Bonfire Night

Today at a glance. A warming meal for **4 people** for 5 November, easy to eat outside by a fire or at a firework display with a mug of something hot. The jacket potatoes take the longest, so start them first. The parkin is best baked a day or two earlier. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · PORK

Sticky Honey-Mustard Sausages with Jacket Potatoes and Smoky Beans

Prep: 15 minutes | Cooking: about 1 hour 15 minutes | About 30 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

4	large baking potatoes (about 300 g each)
2 tsp	olive oil, for the potatoes
8	good-quality pork sausages
2 tbsp	runny honey
2 tbsp	wholegrain mustard
1 tbsp	soy sauce
2 tins (400 g each)	baked beans in tomato sauce
1 tbsp	tomato purée
1 tsp	smoked paprika
1 tsp	mustard
1 tbsp	dark brown sugar
60 g	butter, for the potatoes
100 g	strong Cheddar, grated
1 bunch	spring onions, sliced, to serve

MAKE IT AHEAD

Prick and oil the potatoes and bake them earlier if you like: bake for 1 hour 15 minutes, leave them in the oven with the heat off, and put them back in at 200°C for 15 minutes before serving. Make the beans earlier and reheat them. Wrap in foil to keep warm if you are eating outside by the fire.

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Scrub the potatoes, prick them all over with a fork, rub them with the oil and a little salt and put them straight on the oven shelf. Bake for

1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes, until the skins are crisp and the middles are soft when squeezed.

2. **The sausages:** 35 minutes before the potatoes are ready, put the sausages in a roasting tin and cook for 15 minutes. Mix the honey, wholegrain mustard and soy sauce, pour it over the sausages and turn them to coat. Roast for 15 to 20 minutes more, turning twice, until deep golden, sticky and cooked right through.
3. **The smoky beans:** tip the beans into a saucepan with the tomato purée, paprika, mustard and sugar. Simmer gently for 10 minutes, stirring now and then, until thick and glossy.
4. Cut a deep cross in the top of each potato, squeeze the ends to open it up, and put in the butter and a handful of cheese, letting it melt.
5. Serve each person a jacket potato topped with beans, 2 sticky sausages on the side, and a scatter of spring onions.

> **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. If you are cooking outdoors, keep raw and cooked meat apart. Chill leftovers within 2 hours and eat them within 2 days, reheated once until steaming hot.

SWAPS

Vegetarian sausages in place of pork. A chilli beef topping (leftover chilli) in place of the beans. Hot dog rolls and onions for a hot dog bar. Sweet potatoes in place of the baking potatoes.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4 TO 9

Sticky Parkin with Toffee Sauce

Prep: 20 minutes | Oven: 45 to 50 minutes | About 30 minutes of hands-on work | Cuts into 9 squares, so serves 4 with leftovers

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

100 g	butter, plus a little for the tin
100 g	dark brown soft sugar
100 g	golden syrup
50 g	black treacle
100 g	self-raising flour
150 g	medium oatmeal (or porridge oats, blitzed for 10 seconds)
2 tsp	ground ginger
1 tsp	ground cinnamon
1	egg, beaten
100 ml	milk
50 g	butter, for the toffee sauce
75 g	dark brown soft sugar, for the toffee sauce
100 ml	double cream, for the toffee sauce

MAKE IT AHEAD

Parkin improves with keeping. Bake it up to 3 days ahead, wrap it in foil and keep it in an airtight tin, and it becomes stickier and more gingery. Reheat the toffee sauce just before serving.

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 150°C (130°C fan). Grease a 20 cm square tin and line the base with baking paper.
2. Put the 100 g of butter, 100 g of sugar, golden syrup and treacle in a large saucepan over a low heat. Stir until the butter has melted and the sugar has dissolved. Do not let

it boil. Take it off the heat and cool for 5 minutes.

3. Stir in the flour, oatmeal, ginger and cinnamon. Beat in the egg and milk to give a thin, pourable batter. It will look runny, and that is right.
4. Pour it into the tin and bake for 45 to 50 minutes, until the top is firm and springy, and the edges are coming away from the tin. Leave to cool in the tin.
5. **The sauce:** put the 50 g of butter, 75 g of sugar and the cream in a small pan over a medium heat. Stir until the sugar dissolves, then simmer for 3 minutes, until thick and glossy.
6. Cut the parkin into 9 squares, warm one for each person for 20 seconds in the microwave, and pour over the toffee sauce.

SWAPS

Ice cream or custard in place of the toffee sauce. Chopped stem ginger in the batter. A baked apple on the side.

Shopping list for this recipe

COMING UP NEXT

Occasion 7 is Hogmanay on 31 December, with a steak and onion pie with a puff pastry lid, mash and buttered cabbage, followed by a shortbread and raspberry trifle.

Meal Plan Occasions 2: More Special Occasions

Occasion 7 · Hogmanay

Today at a glance. A proper Scottish New Year's Eve meal for **4 people**, with a slow-cooked steak pie that you can make the day before and a trifle that must be made ahead. Both mean you are free to see out the year with your guests, and have a plate of shortbread ready for the first-footer. Quantities are for the whole table, in metric with UK names.

Main meal

MAIN MEAL · SERVES 4 · BEEF

Steak and Onion Pie with a Puff Pastry Lid, Mash and Buttered Cabbage

Prep: 30 minutes | Cooking: about 3 hours 15 minutes | About 45 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

900 g	braising steak (chuck or shin), cut into 3 cm chunks
2 tbsp	plain flour, for coating the beef
3 tbsp	olive oil
2	onions, sliced
2	carrots, peeled and cut into 1 cm pieces
2 tbsp	tomato purée
1 tsp	dried thyme
2 cubes	beef stock cubes
600 ml	hot water for the stock
1 sheet	ready-rolled puff pastry (about 320 g), chilled
1	egg, beaten, to glaze
1 kg	floury potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
50 g	butter, for the mash
100 ml	milk, for the mash
1	savoy cabbage (about 500 g), shredded
25 g	butter, for the cabbage
1 pinch	black pepper

FIRST-FOOTING

At Hogmanay, the first person to step across the threshold after midnight, the "first-foot", traditionally brings gifts such as shortbread, a piece of coal and a black bun, to bring good luck to the house for the year. A tall, dark-haired man is the luckiest first-foot, according to tradition. A plate of shortbread by the door works well.

MAKE IT AHEAD

Make the filling the day before: it improves overnight. Cool it completely, cover and chill. Put the filling in the dish and top with the pastry just before baking, and allow 40 minutes in the oven from cold.

METHOD

1. **The filling:** put the flour in a large bowl with a little salt and pepper, add the beef and toss until coated. Heat 2 tbsp of the oil in a large, heavy casserole dish or pan with a lid over a high heat. Brown the beef in 3 batches for 3 to 4 minutes each, turning, and lift it onto a plate.
2. Add the last 1 tbsp of oil and the onions and carrots to the pan and cook for 8 minutes, until soft and golden. Stir in the tomato purée and thyme for 1 minute.
3. Dissolve the 2 stock cubes in 600 ml of boiling water. Return the beef and its juices to the pan, pour in the stock and scrape up the sticky bits from the bottom. Bring to the boil, then turn down to a low simmer, cover and cook for 2 hours to 2 hours 30 minutes, stirring now and then, until the beef is meltingly tender and the gravy thick. Take the lid off for the last 20 minutes if it is too thin.
4. Spoon the filling into a 2 litre pie dish and leave it to cool for 30 minutes (a hot filling melts the pastry).
5. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Lay the pastry over the dish, trim and press the edges with a fork, cut a small hole in the top for steam, brush with beaten egg and decorate with pastry offcuts if you like. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until the pastry is puffed and deep golden and the filling is bubbling.
6. **The mash:** while the pie bakes, put the potatoes in a pan of cold salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, until soft. Drain and mash with the 50 g of butter and the milk until smooth. Season.
7. **The cabbage:** steam or boil the cabbage for 4 to 5 minutes, until tender but still bright green. Drain well and toss with the 25 g of butter and plenty of pepper.
8. Serve big spoonfuls of the pie with mash and cabbage.

COOK THE BEEF THROUGH

The beef must be tender and the pie bubbling and steaming hot in the middle. Cool any leftover filling within 2 hours, chill it and eat it within 2 days, reheated once until steaming hot.

SWAPS

Mushrooms or a handful of frozen peas in the filling. Shortcrust pastry for a full pie with a base. Swede (neeps) in place of the cabbage. Scotch broth as a starter.

Shopping list for this recipe

Dessert

DESSERT · SERVES 4 TO 6

Shortbread and Raspberry Trifle

Prep: 20 minutes, plus 2 hours' chilling | No cooking | About 20 minutes of hands-on work | Serves 4 generously (6 if small helpings)

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

250 g	shortbread biscuits
3 tbsp	raspberry jam
400 g	raspberries (fresh, or frozen and defrosted)
500 g	fresh chilled custard (shop-bought), or the custard from chapter 1
300 ml	double cream
2 tbsp	icing sugar
20 g	flaked almonds, toasted

MAKE IT AHEAD

This must be made ahead. Assemble it up to the end of step 4 the evening before, or at least 2 hours before serving, so the shortbread softens and the layers settle. Add the cream and almonds just before serving.

METHOD

1. Toast the flaked almonds in a dry frying pan over a medium heat for 2 minutes, until golden. Tip onto a plate to cool.
2. Break about two thirds of the shortbread into chunks and arrange them in the base of a glass trifle bowl (about 2 litres). Crumble the rest for the topping and keep it to one side.
3. Warm the jam with 1 tbsp of water for 20 seconds in the microwave, and spoon it over the shortbread. Add most of the raspberries, keeping a handful for decoration, and press some of them gently into the jam.
4. Pour the custard over the raspberries and smooth the top. Cover and chill for at least 2 hours.

5. Just before serving, whip the cream with the icing sugar to soft peaks. Spoon it over the custard and smooth it with the back of a spoon.
6. Scatter over the crushed shortbread, toasted almonds and the rest of the raspberries.

SWAPS

Strawberries or blackberries in place of the raspberries. A little sherry or whisky sprinkled over the shortbread, as in a traditional tipsy laird. Lemon curd in place of the jam.

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, a scaling guide and food-safety reminders.

Meal Plan Occasions 2: More 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, 2 and 4 to 7 are written for 4 people, and chapter 3 (Valentine's Day) is for 2.

When each occasion falls

Chinese New Year moves every year, because it follows the lunar calendar, and Mothering Sunday falls 21 days before Easter Sunday (the fourth Sunday of Lent). The barbecue is whenever the weather is good: the Scottish August bank holiday is the first Monday in August, and the English one is the last Monday.

OCCASION	2027	2028	2029
Burns Night	Mon 25 Jan 2027	Tue 25 Jan 2028	Thu 25 Jan 2029
Chinese New Year	Sat 6 Feb 2027	Wed 26 Jan 2028	Tue 13 Feb 2029
Valentine's Day	Sun 14 Feb 2027	Mon 14 Feb 2028	Wed 14 Feb 2029
Mother's Day (Mothering Sunday, UK)	Sun 7 Mar 2027	Sun 26 Mar 2028	Sun 11 Mar 2029
Summer barbecue (Scottish August bank holiday)	Mon 2 Aug 2027	Mon 7 Aug 2028	Mon 6 Aug 2029
Bonfire Night	Fri 5 Nov 2027	Sun 5 Nov 2028	Mon 5 Nov 2029
Hogmanay	Fri 31 Dec 2027	Sun 31 Dec 2028	Mon 31 Dec 2029

The seven occasions at a glance

CH	OCCASION	SERVES	MAIN MEAL	DESSERT	TIME NEEDED
1	Burns Night	4	Haggis, neeps and tatties with a creamy mustard sauce	Cranachan	About 1 hour 15 minutes
2	Chinese New Year	4	Sticky soy-honey chicken thighs with longevity noodles	Mango, coconut and ginger biscuit pots	About 1 hour 30 minutes
3	Valentine's Day	2	Seared duck breast with orange sauce and crispy potatoes	Molten chocolate fondants	About 1 hour
4	Mother's Day	4	Chicken, ham and leek pie with peas and carrots	Lemon drizzle traybake with strawberries and cream	About 2 hours 15 minutes
5	Summer barbecue	4	Honey-lemon chicken skewers, chilli-lime corn and potato salad	Grilled peaches with mascarpone cream	About 1 hour 30 minutes, plus marinating
6	Bonfire Night	4	Sticky honey-mustard sausages, jacket potatoes and smoky beans	Sticky parkin with toffee sauce	About 1 hour 30 minutes
7	Hogmanay	4	Steak and onion pie with mash and buttered cabbage	Shortbread and raspberry trifle	About 4 hours (mostly hands-off)

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
Burns Night	Order the haggis if you want a particular butcher's one. Buy the swede, potatoes and raspberries.	Peel the swede and potatoes in the morning (potatoes in cold water). Toast the oatmeal for the cranachan.	Haggis in the oven 1 hour before you want to eat. Neeps on 25 minutes before, tatties on 20 minutes before. Assemble the cranachan about 1 hour ahead.

OCCASION	A FEW DAYS BEFORE	THE DAY BEFORE	ON THE DAY
Chinese New Year	Buy the chicken, noodles, pak choi and mangoes. Ripen the mangoes in a paper bag if they are hard.	Marinate the chicken. Make the mango pots (keep the biscuit topping separate).	Chicken in the oven 45 minutes before you eat. Noodles and stir-fry in the last 12 minutes.
Valentine's Day	Buy the duck, chocolate and raspberries.	Fill the fondant ramekins, cover and chill. Score the duck skin and keep it uncovered in the fridge.	Potatoes in the oven 40 minutes before you eat. Duck takes 20 minutes. Fondants bake while you clear the plates.
Mother's Day	Buy the chicken, ham, leeks, pastry and strawberries.	Make the pie filling and cool it. Bake the lemon drizzle cake and add the drizzle.	Add the pastry lid and bake for 40 minutes. Vegetables for the last 10 minutes. Whip the cream and slice the strawberries.
Summer barbecue	Buy the chicken, corn and potatoes. Check you have fuel for the barbecue.	Marinate the chicken. Make the potato salad and the chilli-lime butter.	Light the barbecue 40 minutes before. Skewers 15 minutes, corn 6 minutes. Peaches for dessert while the coals are still hot.
Bonfire Night	Buy the sausages, potatoes and tins of beans. Buy the treacle and golden syrup if you do not have them.	Bake the parkin (it improves with keeping). Make the smoky beans.	Potatoes in the oven 1 hour 15 minutes before you eat. Sausages 35 minutes before. Warm the sauce and the parkin at the end.
Hogmanay	Buy the steak, pastry, cabbage and raspberries. Make or buy shortbread for the first-footers.	Make the pie filling. Assemble the trifle to the end of the custard layer.	Pie in the oven 45 minutes before you eat. Mash and cabbage in the last 20 minutes. Cream on the trifle at the last minute.

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, your pie dish and your oven. If a dish will not fit, cook it in two tins or in two batches.
- **Cooking times:** do not simply double the time. Pies and pastry lids bake in about the same time, but a bigger filling takes longer to heat through in the middle. Skewers, sausages and duck breasts take the same time per piece, but you need more space.

- **Valentine's Day for 4:** double everything, use a large frying pan or two pans for the duck, and bake the fondants in four ramekins.
- **Scaling down (fewer guests):** the pies, the haggis and the lemon drizzle cake keep well and make good leftovers. The pie fillings and the haggis freeze for up to 3 months (the cream, trifle and fondants do not freeze well).
- **Desserts for a crowd:** the parkin, the lemon drizzle and the trifle all stretch to 8 to 10 small portions. The fondants, cranachan and mango pots are best made to the exact number of guests.

Equipment

- A large roasting tin, a pie dish (1.5 litre and 2 litre), a baking dish and a baking tray (pies, sausages, chicken, parkin)
- A 23 cm square tin, a 20 cm square tin and two 150 ml ramekins (lemon drizzle, parkin, fondants)
- A large casserole or heavy pan with a lid and a large frying pan (steak pie, noodles, duck, chicken filling)
- A barbecue with coals or gas, tongs, and 8 skewers (summer barbecue). A grill and baking tray work as a backup.
- A meat thermometer, a stick blender or whisk, a potato masher and a sieve
- A glass trifle bowl and 4 tall glasses (trifle, cranachan, mango pots)
- 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, chicken and haggis right through, with no pink and clear juices. Duck breast, 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.
- At a barbecue, use separate plates and tongs for raw and cooked meat, cook until the juices run clear, and do not leave food out in the sun for more than 1 hour.

- Keep raw meat on the bottom shelf, away from other food, and wash your hands, boards and knives after handling it. Defrost frozen meat in the fridge, never refreeze it after defrosting.

SHOPPING ACROSS THE OCCASIONS

Because each occasion is a different day, shop for each one a few days before. Cream is used in several recipes (the haggis sauce, the cranachan, the pie, the parkin sauce and the trifle), so buy a large carton or check the amounts on each shopping list. Honey, mustard, spices, golden syrup and treacle keep for months.