

The Canberra Times
FOOD AND WINE
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**Go on,
make her day**
Mother's Day recipe ideas

INSIDE • What's with all the nostalgia food? • We review Sabayon • Edgar Riek at 90 • World's best restaurants

Food cocooning, it's all the rage

With Mother's Day on Sunday
Rosslyn Beeby asks what's
with the slew of nostalgia
cookbooks on the shelves?

Baked beans are back on the dinner-party menu, but not the glutinous variety dumped straight on to the plate from a freshly opened tin.

The new – or is it the old – home-cooked baked beans recipe involves tipping a handful of dried haricot, borlotti or cannellini beans into a bowl, soaking them overnight and simmering in a thick, luscious crimson sauce of tinned tomatoes, crushed garlic, red onions, maple syrup, Dijon mustard and Worcester sauce.

Canadian history professor Nathan Kozuskanich has a slightly fancier recipe on his popular cooking blog Vegan Dad, adding molasses, cumin, coriander and cinnamon to the tomato sauce. On the Jamie Oliver.com recipe forum, there's a meaty version with shredded ham hock, and the *Masterchef* Australia website has a new-take recipe by George Calombaris with lima beans, carrots, celery, crumbled feta cheese and mint (another *Masterchef* judge, Gary Mehigan, in keeping with the theme, has just released a book called *Comfort Food*).

Comfort food, nonna recipes, family favourites, or traditional home cooking – whatever you choose to call it, simple fare like casseroles, pot pies, hearty soups, crockpot stews and sticky, custard-drenched puddings are making a comeback. Could this really be the end of an era of celebrity culinary narcissism?

Last year, consumer trendspotters writing for food-industry news outlets predicted a nostalgic yearning for

comfort food as a response to the global economic crisis. In Britain, sales of custard rose by 20 per cent – that's a national market already worth £82 million (\$A136 million) a year – with supermarket giant Tesco reporting a 62 per cent jump in sales of rice pudding and a rush for old-fashioned pre-prepared meals like shepherd's pie.

“With all of this doom and gloom, lots of people want to return to 1950s values of cooking from scratch and rustling up good, basic British recipes. And I can't think of anything nicer than proper, home-made custard. It really is the most delicious, joyous thing,” London's *Daily Telegraph*'s cookery writer, Xanthe Clay, said.

Australian Food News suggests simple, home-cooked meals are a form of “food cocooning”, with consumers wanting to spend more time cooking at home in an attempt to “reestablish the heart of the home in the kitchen”.

It's all about memories of happier, less financially fraught times, as well as a return to the commonsense household frugality drummed into female baby boomers during the 1960s in their home-economics classes.

But the trendspotters also suggest a return to comfort food signals a consumer backlash against expensive and bewildering restaurant fads like molecular gastronomy. Consumers want familiar foods and value for money when ponying up for a meal at a local restaurant. They haven't warmed to haute-chef talk about deconstructing flavour chemistry compounds or the use of food-processing

ingredients like methyl cellulose, tragacanth gum and sodium alginate powder.

Australian Food News says consumers are spending less in restaurants – with the exception of quick-service restaurants – pointing to a trend toward less formal, more convivial dining.

“Simplicity will have a greater voice in food over the coming year with brands and restaurants alike cutting waffle,” it says.

The return of comfort food has also produced a welter of books based on culinary nostalgia for mum's trifle or nonna's pasta. From across the ditch, there's *Gran's Kitchen*, based on the recipe notebooks of 95-year-old former dressmaker and hairdresser, Dulcie May Booker.

“Her recipes tell the story of a busy community lifestyle, once common, now disappearing,” granddaughter Natalie Oldfield writes.

“The kitchen was, and still is, the focal point – the heart – of her home. The cooking as well as the eating is a social activity she shares with those she loves . . . the importance of jam and cream in bonding a community should not be underestimated.”

There are morning-tea recipes for pikelets, English jam madelines, and shortbread made with cornflour. Even a recipe for porridge with no fancy extras – just rolled oats, water, a knob of butter and “salt to taste”; another for sausage rolls made only of an onion, sausage meat and mince. A section called “Fred's dinners” offers



recipes for main meals that were favourites with Dulcie's husband, a professional fisherman who "didn't want airy fairy food". He tucked into hearty home-baked fare like fish pie, roast chicken, Cornish pasties and a baked vegetable, egg and bacon slice topped with grated tasty cheese.

University of Adelaide food historian Professor Barbara Santich says comfort food has been an Australian staple since the 1980s when it re-emerged as a reaction to minimalist-inspired nouveau cuisine.

"Honestly, I don't think it's ever been out of fashion," she says. "But I think we're seeing a reaction to the over-complication of food. Recipes have become very complex, with lengthy lists of special ingredients and people simply don't have the time to cook these things."

The current wave of nostalgia for "mum's cooking" is also about harking back to a time when food was part of a comforting routine, rather

than the food itself.

But it can be a kind of selective faux nostalgia that ignores some of the less appealing dishes of the past – rissoles, Irish stew, boiled corned beef, salted cod, and lamb cutlets dipped in egg and rolled in crushed cornflakes.

With endearing honesty, Sydney chef Sean Moran wrote in his cookbook *Let it Simmer* (Penguin 2006) that he could "lay no claim to an upbringing nurtured by gastronomic delights". His mother's style of cooking was "conveyor-belt cuisine, and featured brand names such as Carnation, Gravox and Tang", and she loved frozen cheesecakes topped with spray-on cream.

The McGrath Foundation has compiled *Recipes My Mother Cooked* in time for Mother's Day, a collection of 100 home-cooked recipes from "the country's favourite foodies", with sales helping to raise funds for breast-cancer care nurses. Contributors include the likes of Gabriel Gate,

whose mother Pascaline Gate, at 86, still lives in the Loire Valley village where he grew up. He offers a rabbit and prune stew; and an egg and celeriac salad from his childhood. Cheong Liew shares steamed Chinese dumplings from his childhood in Kuala Lumpur, upstairs from the family's shop which sold live chicks and chickens.

Cherry Ripe remembers being fed her pet lamb – the lamb she had pulled carefully from its dying mother and hand-reared with an eyedropper and baby bottle – for Sunday lunch.

Ian Hewitson remembers one of his mother Sybil Hewitson's all-time favourites, a tuna casserole that she spent hours slaving over – mornay sauce with top cheese and thick country cream, a fresh tomato sauce that any Italian mama would be proud of, sauteed onion, fresh herbs, and canned tuna. "Herein lay the problem," Hewitson writes.

The return to comfort food also signals a backlash against expensive and bewildering restaurant fads like molecular gastronomy



“Canned tuna. And while I love my mother dearly, this was not one of her greatest culinary creations because the canned stuff overshadowed everything.”

Maggie Beer offers an updated version (adding roasted pumpkin, Persian feta and verjuice) of her mother’s macaroni cheese.

“My mother often made this rich and luscious dish when we had relatives coming to dinner. Now when I think about the small oven she had to work with, it make sense that she chose to bake a dish that took maximum advantage of the limited space available,” she writes, offering a practical insight into the realities that often shape home cooking.

Melbourne comedian and *Masterchef* competitor Josh Thomas says he loved his mum’s custard as a kid “because it was lumpy”. But tastes change when we leave home and buy our own saucepans. Thomas is now a

self-confessed custard pedant and “can think of few things worse than a lumpy custard”.

When he recently pointed out to his mum that her custard had curdled, “I don’t think anything has ever broken her heart harder,” he wrote.

He has offered a recipe for stewed rhubarb and custard, warning those who attempt it not to “look at or think of anything other than the custard while you are cooking it. The second you do, it will curdle.” If it does, “you can put it through a strainer, which will make it better but it will still be a bit of shit”.

Not all food writers and trend spotters believe the triumphant return of comfort food has been sparked by the global financial crisis or a consumer revolt against restaurant food turning into a cheffy version of a CSIRO chem-lab experiment.

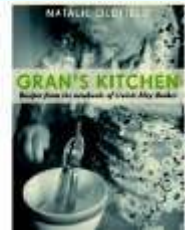
Foodweek Online’s consumer trends expert and “supermarket guru”

Phil Lempert offers a more quirky explanation. He blames the huge popularity of the American cult television series, *Mad Men* for a resurgence of interest in the ’60s. The TV show taps into the memories of millions of ageing baby boomers, so look out for products cashing in on peace, love and Woodstock in the food aisles. All together now, “We are stardust, we are golden.”

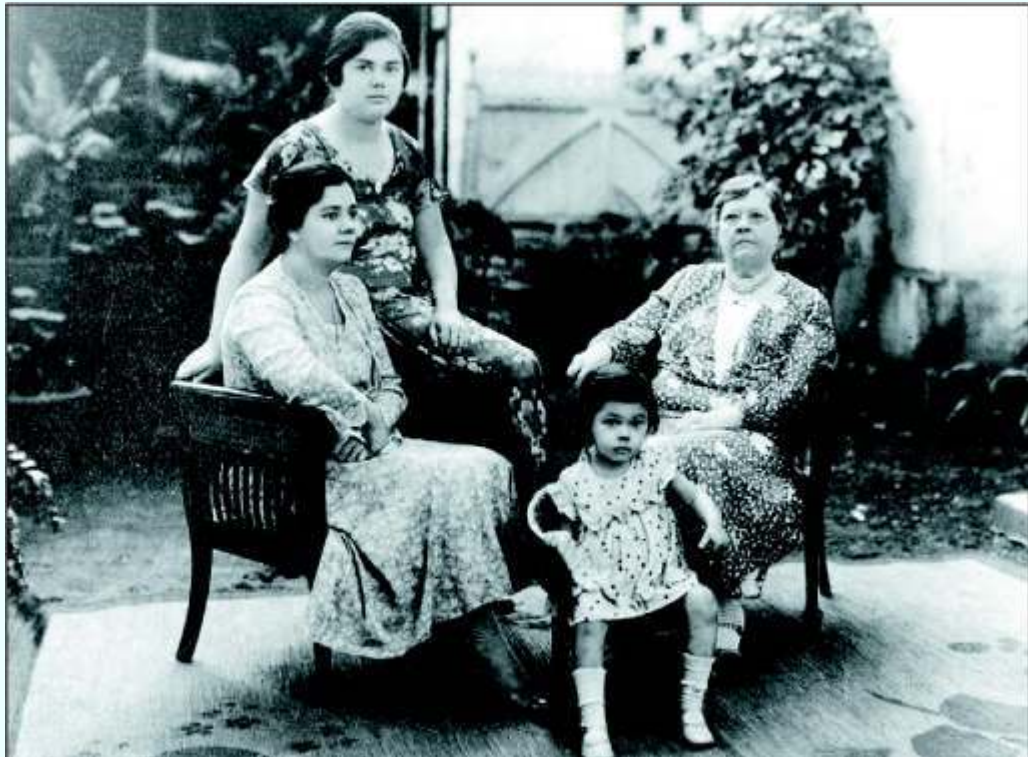
■ *Recipes My Mother Cooked*. Allen and Unwin, April 2010, \$29.99.

■ *Gran’s Kitchen*, by Natalie Oldfield. Hardie Grant Books, April 2010, \$45.

■ Rosslyn Beeby is a staff writer.



Charmaine Solomon, the little girl in front, with, from left, her grandmother Alice Gray, mother Kathleen Poulter, and great-grandmother Lady Mary Marcks.





Maggie Beer's golden-syrup dumplings

Serves 4-6

1 cup self-raising flour
 pinch salt
 1 tbsp butter
 1 egg, whisked
 50ml milk
 runny cream, to serve

Sauce

1½ cups golden syrup
 ½ cup water
 60g butter

To make the dumplings, sift the self-raising flour with a pinch of salt into a bowl. Rub in the butter then add the whisked egg and stir to combine. Add the milk slowly till the dough resembles a scone mix. Set aside and make the sauce.

Combine all sauce ingredients in a large frypan with a fitted lid. Bring to the boil to amalgamate and turn down to a simmer.

Meanwhile, cover a dish with a large piece of baking paper. Flour your hands and roll the dough into balls the size of 20-cent pieces, putting all the dough balls on the Maggie Beer with her mother, Doreen Pearl Ackerman.

paper as you make them. Slip the balls off the baking paper all together into the syrup. Cover the pan with the lid and cook for about 10 minutes, then turn the dumplings over to cook on the other side for another 10

minutes.

Remove the dumplings with a slotted spoon and serve with the sauce and a jug of runny cream.

■ Recipe from *Recipes My Mother Cooked*.



Caramel hazelnut pudding

1 cup flour
 1 tsp baking powder
 ¼ cup hazelnuts, finely chopped
 1 tin (400ml) sweetened condensed milk
 1 tbsp butter
 1 tsp vanilla essence
 ½ cup milk
 1 cup brown sugar
 1¾ cup boiling water

Sift the flour and baking powder into a bowl and stir in hazelnuts. Set aside.

Place the condensed milk in a pan and stir over medium heat for approximately 10 minutes or until golden brown.

Stir the butter, vanilla essence and milk into the condensed milk.

Leave mixture to cool

slightly. Pour into the dry ingredients and mix well.

Pour mixture into greased dish. Sprinkle the brown sugar on top of mixture and then carefully pour the boiling water over it all.

Bake at 180C for 45 minutes.

■ Recipe from *Gran's Kitchen*.



Solomon's rose lychee ice cream

Rose and lychee infusion
1 cup canned or fresh lychees

250ml lychee juice or syrup from the can

½ cup sugar

2 large, fragrant, unsprayed Mr Lincoln roses

Custard

300ml cream

6 egg yolks

¼ cup sugar

3 drops red food colour

1 tbsp rose water, if necessary

To make the infusion, chop the lychees into small pieces and set aside.

Heat the lychee juice or syrup and when boiling add the sugar, stirring to dissolve. Remove from heat and add the petals of both the roses. When cool, strain and finely chop a tablespoon of the petals to stir through the custard.

While heating the cream to scalding point to make the custard, whisk the yolks and the sugar

until light in colour. Add the hot cream gradually to the yolks then pour the mixture back into the pan and cook over low heat, stirring constantly until the custard thickens.

Remove from the heat and add the strained lychee syrup.

Refrigerate until cold then stir through the chopped lychees and rose petals. Taste and add extra rose essence as necessary and only enough red colouring to turn the mix-

ture a pretty pale pink.

Churn according to instructions of your ice-cream churn if you have one, or pour into a bowl and freeze until slushy. Remove from freezer, beat and return to freeze again. Repeat and then let freeze fully. Put the ice cream in the refrigerator to soften slightly just before serving.

■ Recipe from *Recipes My Mother Cooked*.



Cherry Ripe's orange flummery

Serves 4

- 2 oranges
- 1 lemon
- 2 tsp sugar (or Splenda powder)
- 10g gelatine
- 150g low-fat sour cream
- 2 egg whites

Zest or score the skin of one of the oranges to very fine juliennes (strips). Juice both

oranges and the lemon, for 250ml juice. Warm the juice. Take off the heat, add the sugar and gelatine and whisk to dissolve, warming if necessary without boiling to remove any lumps.

Cool to room temperature, and whisk to aerate, and then stir in the cream until smooth.

Separately whisk the egg whites to stiff peaks and slowly incorporate the juice,

gelatine and cream mixture. Pour into a glass serving bowl and refrigerate, covered. In winter, bring back to room temperature before serving.

To make it more contemporary, garnish with fresh berries, and serve with almond biscotti.

■ Recipe from *Recipes My Mother Cooked*.

Raspberry fluff

- 1 packet raspberry jelly crystals
- 1 cup boiling water
- 2 egg whites
- 2 tbsp sugar
- ¼ tsp cream of tartar

Soak jelly crystals in a cup of

boiling water. Stir and leave to cool. Whip the egg whites with sugar and cream of tartar. Add to jelly and whip until fluffy. Set in mould.

■ Recipe from *Gran's Kitchen*.

