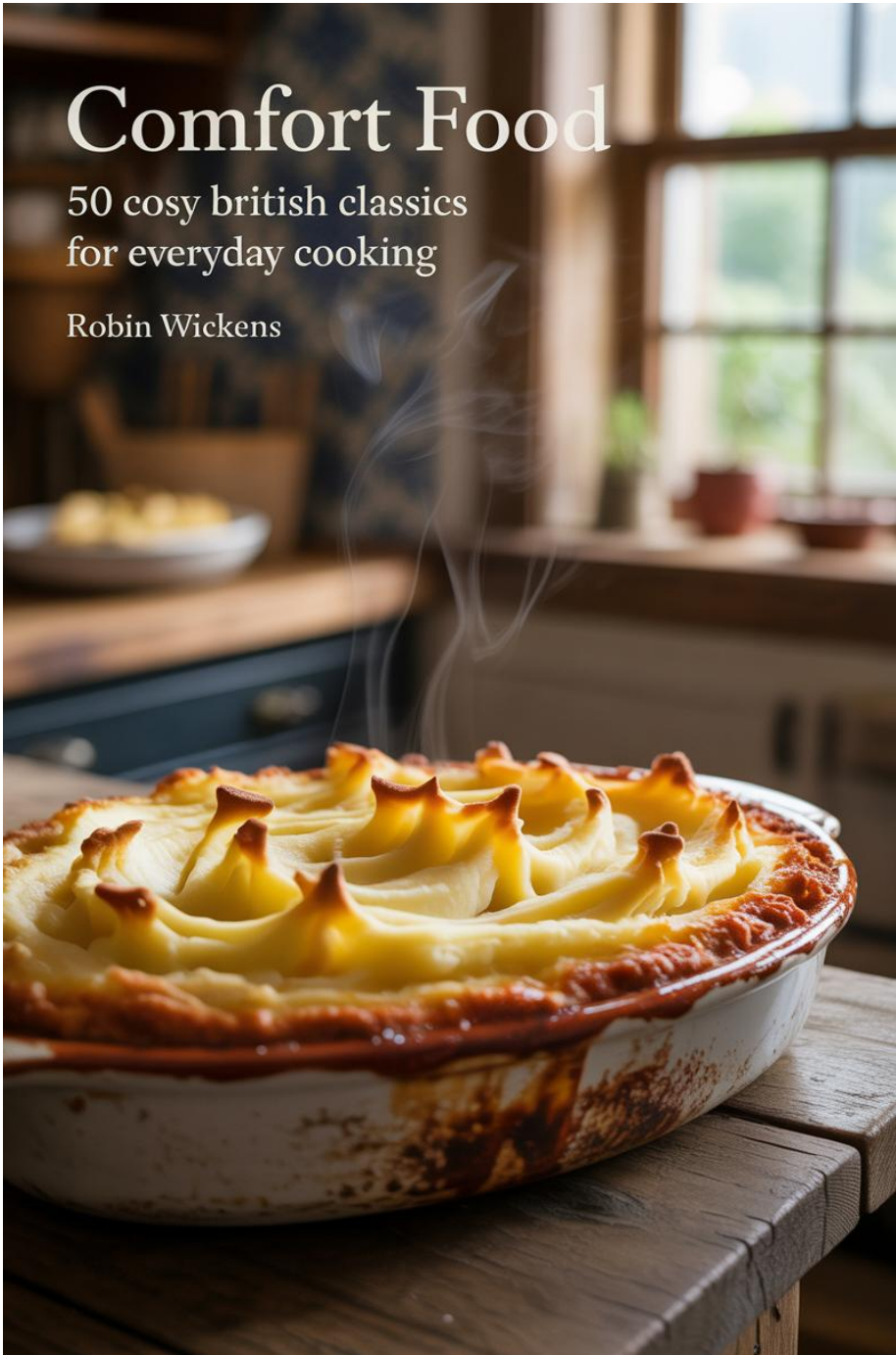




Comfort Food

50 cosy british classics
for everyday cooking

Robin Wickens

Comfort Food: Big Bowls, Golden Tops, and the Kind of Suppers That Forgive You

By Robin Wickens



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Introduction

Comfort food is not a cuisine. It is a mood with gravy.

It is the quiet authority of a baked potato that knows exactly what it is doing. It is the confidence of a pie that arrives wearing its golden lid like a medal. It is the soft, forgiving warmth of soup that makes you feel as if someone has put a cardigan around your insides.

This book is built for real life: British supermarket ingredients, sensible timings, and recipes that taste like you've tried harder than you did. There are weeknight heroes, slow Sunday wins, and the sort of puddings that stop a bad day from finishing its sentence.

You'll find 50 full-method recipes written in British English with metric measures and fan-oven temperatures. Each recipe includes an image prompt for production use, plus nutrition guidance, allergens, and easy UK swaps. Between chapters you'll find short, witty filler pages—because you deserve a moment to breathe (and possibly butter something) before the next round of comfort arrives.

Prologue:

The Science of Feeling Better in a Bowl

Comfort food works because it is predictable. In a world of surprise emails and unpredictable weather, a shepherd's pie does not suddenly decide to be "experimental". It turns up. It does what it promised. It tastes like safety.

There is also texture, which matters more than people admit. Crisp edges. Fluffy middles. Thick sauces that cling like gossip. The gentle crackle of cheese. The hush of mashed potato smoothing over anything sharp.

If you take only one lesson from this book, take this: comfort is built in layers. Build flavour the way you build a duvet—base notes first, richness second, and a proper finishing touch on top. A squeeze of lemon. A knob of butter. A fistful of herbs. A scatter of crisp crumbs. Tiny things, big relief.

Right then. Let's cook something that makes the day behave.

Chapter One: Bowls of Warmth

Filling soups, stews, and spoonable things that make the kitchen smell like you've got your life together.

Recipe 1: Classic Chicken and Vegetable Soup



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
2 carrots, diced

Header

2 celery sticks, diced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tsp dried thyme
1 bay leaf
1.2 litres chicken stock (from a cube is fine)
250 g cooked roast chicken, shredded (or cooked chicken pieces)
120 g frozen peas
80 g small pasta shapes (optional)
Salt and black pepper
1 tbsp chopped parsley (optional)

Long-Form Method

Warm the olive oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the onion, carrots, and celery with a pinch of salt and cook for 8–10 minutes, stirring, until softened and gently sweet. Add the garlic, thyme, and bay leaf, and cook for 30 seconds so everything smells properly alive.

Pour in the stock and bring to a simmer. Cook for 10 minutes, then add the chicken and peas. If you're adding pasta, tip it in now and simmer for 8–10 minutes, until tender. Taste and season with black pepper and a touch more salt if needed. Fish out the bay leaf, stir through parsley, and serve with bread that you will absolutely butter.

Allergens

Header

Celery. May contain gluten if using pasta.

UK Swaps and Notes

Rotisserie chicken works brilliantly. For extra richness, stir in 1 tbsp double cream at the end.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without pasta)

Calories 260; Protein 26 g; Carbs 14 g; Fat 10 g; Fibre 4 g;
Salt varies by stock.

Freezer Suitability

Yes. Freeze without pasta for best texture; add fresh pasta when reheating.

Recipe 2: Creamy Tomato Soup with Cheddar Soldiers



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tsp smoked paprika (optional)
2 x 400 g tins chopped tomatoes
1 tbsp tomato purée
600 ml vegetable stock
1 tsp caster sugar (optional)
80 ml double cream (or crème fraîche)

Header

Salt and black pepper

Cheddar Soldiers:

4 slices bread

80 g mature cheddar, grated

Butter, for spreading

Long-Form Method

Heat the oil in a saucepan and soften the onion with a pinch of salt for 8 minutes. Add garlic and paprika, stir for 30 seconds, then add chopped tomatoes, purée, stock, and sugar. Simmer for 15 minutes. Blend until smooth, then return to the pan and stir in cream. Season properly—tomato soup wants confidence.

For the soldiers, butter the bread, sprinkle with cheddar, and grill until bubbling. Cut into thick strips. Serve soup hot, with soldiers for dipping like you're five years old in the best possible way.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, sulphites may be present in tinned tomatoes.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, incl. soldiers)

Calories 520; Protein 18 g; Carbs 50 g; Fat 28 g; Fibre 7 g.

Freezer Suitability

Soup freezes well; add cream after reheating if preferred.

Recipe 3: Beef and Ale Stew with Puff Pastry Lid



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp plain flour
700 g stewing beef, cut into chunks
Salt and black pepper
2 tbsp vegetable oil
1 onion, sliced
2 carrots, thickly sliced
200 g mushrooms, halved
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tbsp tomato purée

Header

330 ml brown ale
500 ml beef stock
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp dried thyme
1 bay leaf
1 tsp cornflour mixed with 1 tbsp cold water (optional)

Pastry Lid:

1 sheet ready-rolled puff pastry (approx. 320 g)
1 egg, beaten (or milk)

Long-Form Method

Toss the beef with flour, salt, and pepper. Brown in batches in hot oil and set aside. In the same pan, soften onion and carrots for 8 minutes, then add mushrooms and garlic for 2 minutes. Stir in purée, then pour in ale, scraping up all the flavour. Add stock, Worcestershire sauce, thyme, bay, and return beef. Simmer gently, covered, for 1 hour 30 minutes until tender. Thicken with cornflour if you want it clinging rather than pooling.

Heat oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Tip stew into an ovenproof dish. Lay puff pastry over the top, trim edges, crimp, and cut a small steam hole. Brush with egg. Bake 20–25 minutes until risen and golden.

Allergens

Gluten, egg, sulphites (ale), may contain celery (stock).

Header

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 740; Protein 42 g; Carbs 48 g; Fat 40 g.

Freezer Suitability

Stew freezes well. Add pastry fresh when baking.

Recipe 4: Lentil and Bacon Soup (or Smoky Veg Version)



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, chopped
2 carrots, diced
2 celery sticks, diced
150 g smoked bacon lardons (or omit)
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tsp ground cumin
250 g red lentils, rinsed
1.2 litres chicken or veg stock

Header

1 tbsp tomato purée
Salt and black pepper
Lemon wedge, to serve (optional)

Long-Form Method

Heat oil and cook onion, carrots, and celery for 10 minutes until softened. Add bacon and fry until lightly golden (skip if veg). Add garlic and cumin for 30 seconds. Stir in lentils, stock, and purée. Simmer 20 minutes until lentils collapse into thick comfort. Blend briefly if you want it smoother, then season. A squeeze of lemon makes it taste brighter without losing its blanket-like charm.

Allergens

Celery.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, with bacon)

Calories 420; Protein 24 g; Carbs 45 g; Fat 14 g; Fibre 9 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes.

Recipe 5: Sausage and Butterbean Cassoulet (Weeknight Style)



Ingredients (Serves 4)

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 8 pork sausages (approx. 400–450 g)
- 1 onion, sliced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 x 400 g tin chopped tomatoes
- 150 ml chicken stock

Header

2 x 400 g tins butterbeans, drained and rinsed
1 tsp sugar (optional)
Salt and black pepper
Chopped parsley, to finish

Long-Form Method

Brown the sausages in a large pan with oil, then lift out. In the same pan, cook onion and carrots for 8 minutes. Add garlic, oregano, and purée, cook 30 seconds, then add tomatoes and stock. Tip in beans and sugar, season, and nestle sausages back in. Simmer 20 minutes until thick and glossy. Finish with parsley and serve with bread that is legally required for sauce-mopping.

Allergens

May contain gluten and sulphites (sausages), check labels.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 690; Protein 32 g; Carbs 52 g; Fat 40 g; Fibre 12 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes, though sausages may soften slightly on reheating.

Recipe 6: Creamy Leek and Potato Soup



Ingredients (Serves 4)

30 g butter
1 tbsp olive oil
2 leeks, sliced (washed well)
600 g potatoes, peeled and diced
1 litre vegetable or chicken stock
120 ml double cream (or milk)
Salt and black pepper
Chives, to serve (optional)

Long-Form Method

Melt butter with oil, add leeks and a pinch of salt, and cook gently for 10 minutes until soft but not browned. Add potatoes and stock, simmer 15–18 minutes until tender. Blend smooth, return to the heat, and stir in cream. Season generously. This soup is quiet, steady comfort—like a sensible friend who always brings biscuits.

Allergens

Milk.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 390; Protein 6 g; Carbs 38 g; Fat 24 g; Fibre 4 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes, though cream-based soups may slightly change texture; whisk on reheating.

Recipe 7: Fish Pie Soup (Yes, Really)



Ingredients (Serves 4)

- 1 tbsp butter
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 tbsp plain flour
- 600 ml milk
- 300 ml fish or veg stock
- 400 g mixed fish pieces (smoked haddock and white fish work well)
- 120 g frozen peas
- 150 g sweetcorn (tinned, drained)

Header

1 tsp Dijon mustard
Black pepper
Chopped dill or parsley

Long-Form Method

Melt butter, soften onion 6–8 minutes, then stir in flour to make a paste. Gradually whisk in milk, then stock, and simmer until thickened. Add fish, peas, and sweetcorn; simmer 5–7 minutes until fish flakes. Stir in mustard and pepper (salt carefully if using smoked fish). Finish with herbs. It tastes like fish pie with fewer dishes and slightly more self-respect.

Allergens

Fish, milk, gluten, mustard.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 520; Protein 36 g; Carbs 35 g; Fat 26 g.

Freezer Suitability

Not ideal (milk sauce can split). Best eaten fresh or chilled for 2 days.

Recipe 8: Chilli Con Carne (Cosy, Not Competitive)



Ingredients (Serves 4)

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 500 g beef mince (10–15% fat)
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp chilli powder (adjust to taste)
- 1 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 x 400 g tin chopped tomatoes

Header

1 x 400 g tin kidney beans, drained and rinsed
200 ml beef stock
1 tsp sugar (optional)
Salt and black pepper

To serve: rice, sour cream, grated cheese, coriander

Long-Form Method

Cook onion in oil for 8 minutes. Add garlic, then mince and brown well—this is where flavour is born. Add spices and purée, cook 1 minute, then add tomatoes, stock, and sugar. Simmer 25 minutes until thick. Stir in kidney beans for the last 10 minutes. Serve with rice and whatever comforting extras you can justify.

Allergens

May contain celery (stock). Dairy if serving with sour cream/cheese.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without rice)

Calories 560; Protein 38 g; Carbs 28 g; Fat 32 g; Fibre 8 g.

Freezer Suitability

Excellent.

Recipe 9: Mushroom and Barley Stew



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
30 g butter (or extra oil)
1 onion, chopped
2 carrots, diced
250 g mushrooms, sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tsp dried thyme
150 g pearl barley
1 litre vegetable stock

Header

1 tbsp soy sauce

Black pepper

1 tbsp chopped parsley

Long-Form Method

Heat oil and butter and soften onion and carrots for 8 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook until they release their juices and start to deepen. Add garlic and thyme, then barley, stock, and soy sauce. Simmer 35–40 minutes until barley is tender and the stew is thick and glossy. Pepper generously and finish with parsley.

Allergens

Soy. May contain celery (stock).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 430; Protein 12 g; Carbs 62 g; Fat 14 g; Fibre 10 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes.

Recipe 10: Quick Beef Mince and Dumpling Stew



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, chopped
2 carrots, diced
500 g beef mince
2 tbsp plain flour
1 tbsp tomato purée
500 ml beef stock
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp dried mixed herbs

Header

Salt and black pepper

Dumplings:

150 g self-raising flour

75 g suet (beef or veggie)

Pinch of salt

120 ml cold water

Long-Form Method

Heat oil and soften onion and carrots for 8 minutes. Add mince and brown well. Stir in flour and cook 1 minute, then add purée, stock, Worcestershire sauce, and herbs. Simmer 15 minutes.

Mix dumpling ingredients to a soft dough, then shape into 8 balls. Drop onto the simmering stew, cover tightly, and cook 15 minutes without peeking. Lifting the lid early is how dumplings learn fear.

Allergens

Gluten. May contain celery (stock). Suet may contain milk depending on brand.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 720; Protein 34 g; Carbs 55 g; Fat 40 g; Fibre 6 g.

Freezer Suitability

Stew freezes well; dumplings best made fresh.

The Bread Rule

There is a rule in comfort cooking that is never written down because it is too obvious, like “do not put your hand on the hob”.

If the dish is saucy, you need something for mopping. If it is soupy, you need something for dipping. If it is stew-like, you need something for dramatic scooping. Bread does not merely accompany comfort food. Bread completes the sentence.

Keep a loaf in the freezer. Keep a pack of wraps for emergencies. Keep a couple of rolls for the days when you cannot face a full plan but you can face a full buttering. Your future self will thank you, mouth full, nodding solemnly.

Next: baked tops, bubbling cheese, and the kind of oven food that makes the windows mist up.

Chapter Two: Bakes, Crisps, and Golden-Topped Comfort

Oven dishes with bubbling edges, proper structure, and that moment when you pull something out and immediately feel like a capable adult.



Recipe 11: Proper Cottage Pie with Cheddar Mash



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
2 carrots, diced small
2 celery sticks, diced small (optional)
2 garlic cloves, crushed
500 g beef mince (10–15% fat)
2 tbsp tomato purée
1 tbsp plain flour
300 ml beef stock

Header

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 tsp dried thyme

Salt and black pepper

Mash Topping:

900 g potatoes, peeled and chopped

40 g butter

100 ml milk (or more as needed)

100 g mature cheddar, grated

Long-Form Method

Heat the oil in a large pan and soften the onion, carrots, and celery with a pinch of salt for 10 minutes, until sweet and softened. Add the garlic, cook for 30 seconds, then add the mince and brown thoroughly. Stir in the tomato purée and flour and cook for a minute to lose the raw flour taste.

Pour in the stock, add Worcestershire sauce and thyme, and simmer for 20 minutes until thick and savoury. Taste and season—this is where the pie earns its authority.

Meanwhile, boil the potatoes in salted water for 15 minutes until tender. Drain well and steam-dry for a minute, then mash with butter and milk until fluffy. Stir in most of the cheddar.

Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Tip the mince into an ovenproof dish, spoon mash over the top, and rough it up with a fork to make peaks. Sprinkle remaining

Header

cheddar and bake for 25 minutes until golden and bubbling at the edges.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, may contain celery (stock).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 780; Protein 38 g; Carbs 62 g; Fat 42 g; Fibre 7 g.

Freezer Suitability

Excellent. Cool fully, freeze, then bake from thawed until piping hot.

Recipe 12: Sausage, Leek and Mustard Bake



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
8 pork sausages (approx. 400–450 g)
2 leeks, sliced and washed
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tbsp plain flour
250 ml chicken stock
150 ml double cream
1 tbsp Dijon mustard
1 tsp dried thyme

Black pepper

Long-Form Method

Heat the oil in a large pan and brown the sausages all over, then lift onto a plate. Add the leeks to the same pan with a pinch of salt and cook gently for 8–10 minutes until soft. Add garlic, stir for 30 seconds, then sprinkle in flour and stir to coat.

Gradually pour in stock, stirring until thickened. Stir in cream, mustard, thyme, and plenty of black pepper. Nestle sausages into the sauce, tip into an ovenproof dish, and bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for 25 minutes until bubbling and lightly bronzed. Serve with mash or crusty bread, depending on whether you want comfort in a bowl or comfort on a plate.

Allergens

Milk, mustard, gluten, may contain sulphites (sausages).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 760; Protein 30 g; Carbs 16 g; Fat 62 g.

Freezer Suitability

Better chilled than frozen (cream sauce can change).
Chill up to 2 days; reheat thoroughly.

Recipe 13: Creamy Tuna Pasta Bake (Supermarket Hero)



Ingredients (Serves 4)

- 300 g pasta (penne or fusilli)
- 30 g butter
- 30 g plain flour
- 600 ml milk
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard (optional)
- 1 x 160 g tin tuna in spring water, drained
- 150 g frozen sweetcorn
- 120 g frozen peas (optional)
- 150 g mature cheddar, grated

Header

Salt and black pepper

Long-Form Method

Cook pasta in salted water until just underdone (1–2 minutes less than the packet says). Drain.

Make a white sauce: melt butter in a saucepan, stir in flour to make a paste, then gradually whisk in milk. Simmer until thick, then add mustard, tuna, sweetcorn, peas, and half the cheese. Season with pepper and a little salt.

Mix sauce with pasta, tip into an ovenproof dish, and top with remaining cheese. Bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for 20–25 minutes until bubbling and golden. It is the kind of dinner that tastes like school nights, in a comforting way, not a traumatic one.

Allergens

Fish, milk, gluten, mustard (if used).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 720; Protein 38 g; Carbs 78 g; Fat 28 g; Fibre 6 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes. Freeze in portions and reheat until piping hot.

Recipe 14: Macaroni Cheese with Crispy Crumb Top



Ingredients (Serves 4)

300 g macaroni
40 g butter
40 g plain flour
700 ml milk
1 tsp English mustard (or Dijon)
250 g mature cheddar, grated
50 g parmesan (optional)

Crumb Top:

Header

60 g breadcrumbs
20 g butter, melted

Long-Form Method

Cook macaroni until just underdone, drain. Make a thick cheese sauce: melt butter, stir in flour, whisk in milk gradually, then simmer until thick. Stir in mustard and most of the cheese until melted and glossy. Season with pepper and a pinch of salt.

Mix with macaroni and tip into a dish. Combine breadcrumbs with melted butter and scatter over the top, along with the remaining cheese. Bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for 20 minutes until bubbling and golden. Eat carefully, because molten cheese has no loyalty.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, mustard.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 890; Protein 34 g; Carbs 82 g; Fat 48 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes, though crumb topping is best freshly baked. Re-crisp in the oven.

Recipe 15: Shepherd's Pie (Lamb, Mint, and Proper Gravy)



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, chopped
2 carrots, diced
500 g lamb mince
2 tbsp tomato purée
1 tbsp plain flour
350 ml lamb or beef stock
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp dried rosemary

Header

1 tbsp mint sauce (optional but excellent)
Salt and black pepper

Topping:

900 g potatoes
40 g butter
100 ml milk

Long-Form Method

Soften onion and carrots in oil for 10 minutes. Add lamb mince and brown well. Stir in purée and flour, cook 1 minute, then add stock, Worcestershire, rosemary, and mint sauce. Simmer 20 minutes until thick and rich.

Make mash as in Recipe 11. Tip lamb filling into a dish, top with mash, rough up, and bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for 25 minutes until golden. This is the kind of meal that makes you sit down properly.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, may contain celery (stock).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 820; Protein 36 g; Carbs 60 g; Fat 48 g.

Freezer Suitability

Excellent.

Recipe 16: Cauliflower Cheese (Main Dish Version)



Ingredients (Serves 4 as a main, 6 as a side)

1 large cauliflower, cut into florets
40 g butter
40 g plain flour
650 ml milk
1 tsp Dijon mustard
200 g mature cheddar, grated
50 g parmesan (optional)
Black pepper

Header

Long-Form Method

Boil or steam cauliflower for 6–8 minutes until just tender; drain well. Make a cheese sauce: melt butter, stir in flour, whisk in milk, simmer until thick, then stir in mustard and most of the cheese. Season with pepper (salt lightly).

Tip cauliflower into a dish, pour over sauce, top with remaining cheese and parmesan. Bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for 20–25 minutes until bubbling and golden. Serve with baked potatoes, ham, or nothing at all—this can hold its own.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, mustard.

Nutrition (Approx. per main serving)

Calories 620; Protein 28 g; Carbs 22 g; Fat 46 g; Fibre 7 g.

Freezer Suitability

Not ideal (sauce can split). Best chilled 2 days and reheated.

Recipe 17: Lasagne, the Weeknight Way



Ingredients (Serves 6)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, chopped
2 carrots, finely diced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
750 g beef mince
2 tbsp tomato purée
1 tsp dried oregano
1 x 400 g tin chopped tomatoes
200 ml beef stock

Header

Salt and black pepper

9–12 lasagne sheets (no pre-cooking needed)

White Sauce:

50 g butter

50 g plain flour

700 ml milk

100 g cheddar, grated

Nutmeg (pinch, optional)

Long-Form Method

Cook onion and carrots in oil for 10 minutes. Add garlic, then mince and brown well. Stir in purée and oregano, add tomatoes and stock, and simmer 20 minutes until thick.

Make white sauce: melt butter, stir in flour, whisk in milk, simmer until thick, then stir in cheese and a pinch of nutmeg. Season.

Heat oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Layer meat sauce, lasagne sheets, and white sauce in a dish, finishing with white sauce on top. Bake 35–40 minutes until bubbling and golden. Rest 10 minutes before slicing, unless you enjoy lava.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, may contain celery (stock).

Header

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, 1/6)

Calories 780; Protein 42 g; Carbs 58 g; Fat 42 g.

Freezer Suitability

Excellent.

Recipe 18: Chicken, Bacon and Leek Pie (Cheat's Puff Pastry)



Ingredients (Serves 4–6)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, chopped
2 leeks, sliced
150 g smoked bacon lardons
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tbsp plain flour
300 ml chicken stock
150 ml double cream
350 g cooked chicken, shredded

Header

1 tsp Dijon mustard (optional)

Black pepper

1 sheet ready-rolled puff pastry (approx. 320 g)

1 egg, beaten (or milk)

Long-Form Method

Cook onion and leeks in oil for 10 minutes until soft. Add bacon and fry until lightly crisp. Add garlic, then stir in flour. Gradually add stock and simmer until thick. Stir in cream, chicken, mustard, and pepper.

Tip into a pie dish. Lay pastry over, crimp edges, cut a steam hole, brush with egg, and bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for 25–30 minutes until gloriously golden. Serve with peas or simply with the smugness of a person who made pie.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, egg, mustard (if used).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, 1/5)

Calories 760; Protein 34 g; Carbs 40 g; Fat 50 g.

Freezer Suitability

Filling freezes well. Assemble with fresh pastry for best results.

Recipe 19: Baked Jacket Potatoes with Beans and Cheesy Crust



Ingredients (Serves 4)

4 large baking potatoes
1 tbsp olive oil
Salt
1 x 415 g tin baked beans
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce (optional)
120 g mature cheddar, grated
Butter, for serving (optional)
Black pepper

Header

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 220°C (200°C fan). Prick potatoes, rub with oil and salt, and bake for 60–75 minutes until crisp outside and fluffy inside.

Warm beans with Worcestershire sauce. Split potatoes, fluff insides with a fork, add a little butter if you mean business, then pile on beans and top with cheddar. Return to oven for 8–10 minutes until bubbling and slightly crisp on top. Comfort food in its simplest, loudest form.

Allergens

Milk (cheddar), may contain sulphites (Worcestershire).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 610; Protein 22 g; Carbs 88 g; Fat 18 g; Fibre 10 g.

Freezer Suitability

Not ideal. Best fresh.

Recipe 20: Crispy Topped Sausage and Mash Bake

Recipe Image Prompt

45-degree angle, sausage and mash bake in a dish with browned mash peaks and visible sausages; gravy spooned over; warm light; no people; no logos; ultra-realistic.

Ingredients (Serves 4)

8 pork sausages
1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, sliced
2 tbsp plain flour
450 ml beef or onion gravy (from granules is fine)
1 tsp wholegrain mustard (optional)
Salt and black pepper

Mash:

900 g potatoes
40 g butter
100 ml milk

Long-Form Method

Brown sausages in oil, then lift out. In the same pan, soften onion for 10 minutes until sweet. Stir in flour, then

Header

gradually whisk in gravy. Simmer 3–4 minutes, stir in mustard, and season.

Make mash as before. Heat oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Tip onion gravy into a dish, add sausages, then top with mash and rough it up for crispy peaks. Bake 25 minutes until golden and bubbling. Serve with peas and the certainty that you have made the correct life choices.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, mustard (if used), may contain sulphites (sausages/gravy).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 860; Protein 30 g; Carbs 70 g; Fat 50 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes. Freeze fully cooled; reheat until piping hot.

**A golden top is not decoration. It is
reassurance.**

It tells you the oven did its job. It tells you there will be texture. It tells you that underneath the browned peaks and bubbling edges, something soft and generous is waiting. A golden top is the culinary equivalent of a warm light left on in the hallway.

If you want more gold: use the grill for the last minute, but stand there and watch like a person supervising a toddler with markers. If you want deeper flavour: rough up mash with a fork, add a little extra cheese, or dot the top with tiny knobs of butter. Comfort food is not about restraint. It is about arriving.

Next: the midweek classics—quick pans, proper gravies, and suppers that feel like a reward.

Chapter Three: Midweek Classics That Feel Like a Treat

Quick pans, proper gravies, and dinners that don't require a motivational speech to begin.



Recipe 21: Proper Sausage and Onion Gravy



Ingredients (Serves 4)

8 pork sausages (approx. 400–450 g)
1 tbsp olive oil
2 onions, thinly sliced
1 tbsp plain flour
500 ml beef stock (or onion gravy from granules)
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce (optional)
1 tsp wholegrain mustard (optional)
Black pepper

Header

Long-Form Method

Brown the sausages in a large frying pan with oil, turning until coloured all over. Lift onto a plate. In the same pan, add onions with a pinch of salt and cook gently for 12–15 minutes until soft, sweet, and lightly golden. Sprinkle in flour and stir for a minute so it coats the onions properly.

Pour in the stock gradually, stirring as it thickens into gravy. Add Worcestershire and mustard if using, then return sausages to the pan. Simmer for 12–15 minutes until sausages are cooked through and the gravy is glossy. Pepper generously. Serve with mash, because that is the point.

Allergens

Gluten, mustard (if used), may contain sulphites (sausages, Worcestershire).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without mash)

Calories 520; Protein 24 g; Carbs 18 g; Fat 38 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes. Cool fully, freeze, and reheat gently.

Recipe 22: Creamy Mushroom Stroganoff (15-Minute Comfort)



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
30 g butter
1 onion, finely sliced
400 g mushrooms, sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tbsp plain flour
250 ml vegetable stock
1 tbsp Dijon mustard
150 ml crème fraîche (or sour cream)

Header

1 tsp paprika (smoked or sweet)

Salt and black pepper

Chopped parsley, to finish

To serve: rice, pasta, or mashed potatoes

Long-Form Method

Heat oil and butter in a large pan. Cook onion for 5 minutes until softened, then add mushrooms and cook 6–8 minutes until they release their water and start to brown. Add garlic and paprika for 30 seconds. Stir in flour, then pour in stock, stirring until smooth and thickened.

Take the pan off the heat and stir in Dijon mustard and crème fraîche. Return to a gentle heat for a minute—do not boil hard or it may split. Season well and finish with parsley. It is creamy, savoury, and polite enough for company, but secretly built for Tuesday night survival.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, mustard.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without rice)

Calories 460; Protein 10 g; Carbs 20 g; Fat 36 g; Fibre 4 g.

Freezer Suitability

Not ideal (dairy can split). Best chilled 2 days.

Recipe 23: Chicken and Chorizo Traybake with Peppers



Ingredients (Serves 4)

8 chicken thighs (bone-in, skin-on for best flavour)
150 g cooking chorizo, sliced
2 peppers, sliced
1 red onion, cut into wedges
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tsp smoked paprika
1 tsp dried oregano
2 tbsp olive oil
Salt and black pepper

1 lemon, cut into wedges

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 220°C (200°C fan). Tip chicken, chorizo, peppers, onion, garlic, spices, and oil into a large roasting tray. Season well and toss so everything is coated.

Roast for 35–40 minutes, turning the peppers once, until chicken is cooked through and the tray juices are glossy and smoky. Serve with rice, crusty bread, or new potatoes. Squeeze lemon over at the end to make the flavour sit up straight.

Allergens

May contain sulphites (chorizo).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 720; Protein 42 g; Carbs 14 g; Fat 56 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes. Cool fully and freeze. Reheat until piping hot.

Recipe 24: Proper Fish Finger Butty with Tartare Crunch



Ingredients (Serves 2)

6–8 fish fingers

4 slices thick white bread

Butter, for spreading

2 tbsp tartare sauce

Shredded lettuce (optional)

Salt and vinegar crisps (optional but correct)

Lemon wedge (optional)

Long-Form Method

Cook fish fingers according to packet instructions—oven gives best crunch, air fryer is fast, grill is acceptable in emergencies. Butter the bread generously. Spread tartare sauce on one side, add lettuce if using, then stack fish fingers like you're building a respectable tower. Add crisps inside the sandwich for crunch, or keep them on the side if you prefer a calmer existence. Eat immediately. This is comfort food with a grin.

Allergens

Fish, gluten, milk (butter), egg (tartare).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, 1 sandwich with 4 fish fingers)

Calories 680; Protein 24 g; Carbs 72 g; Fat 32 g.

Freezer Suitability

No (but fish fingers live in the freezer anyway, ready for duty).

Recipe 25: Beef Mince and Onion Hash with Fried Eggs



Ingredients (Serves 4)

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 500 g beef mince
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 700 g potatoes, diced small (leave skin on if you like)
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil (for crisping)
- Salt and black pepper
- 4 eggs (optional, to top)

Long-Form Method

Cook onion in olive oil for 5 minutes. Add mince and brown well, then stir in paprika and Worcestershire. Season and scrape into a bowl.

Heat vegetable oil in the same pan and add potatoes with salt. Cook over a medium-high heat for 15–18 minutes, turning often, until crisp and golden. Return the mince to the pan and toss through until hot. Top with fried eggs if you're aiming for peak comfort. A runny yolk turns everything into a sauce, which is always a win.

Allergens

Egg (if used), may contain sulphites (Worcestershire).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without egg)

Calories 640; Protein 32 g; Carbs 48 g; Fat 36 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes, though potatoes are best fresh for crispness.

Recipe 26: Creamy Garlic Chicken with Spinach



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 tbsp olive oil
30 g butter
600 g chicken breast, sliced into strips
Salt and black pepper
3 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tbsp plain flour
250 ml chicken stock
200 ml double cream
120 g baby spinach

Header

1 tsp Dijon mustard (optional)
Lemon wedge, to serve (optional)

Long-Form Method

Heat oil and butter in a large frying pan. Season chicken and fry for 6–8 minutes until golden and cooked through. Add garlic for 30 seconds, then stir in flour. Pour in stock gradually, stirring to thicken, then add cream and mustard if using. Simmer 2 minutes, then stir in spinach until wilted. Finish with lemon if you want it brighter. Serve with rice, pasta, or chips. Yes, chips. Live a little.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, mustard (if used).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 720; Protein 44 g; Carbs 10 g; Fat 56 g.

Freezer Suitability

Not ideal (cream sauce can split). Best chilled 2 days.

Recipe 27: Proper Beans on Toast, Upgraded



Ingredients (Serves 2)

1 x 415 g tin baked beans
20 g butter
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce (optional)
1 tsp wholegrain mustard (optional)
4 slices bread, toasted
80 g mature cheddar, grated
Black pepper

Long-Form Method

Header

Warm beans gently with butter until glossy. Add Worcestershire and mustard if using, then simmer 2 minutes. Toast bread properly—comfort food hates pale toast. Spoon beans over, top with cheddar, and grind over black pepper. If you want the cheese properly melted, pop under the grill for 1 minute. This is not fancy. It is effective.

Allergens

Gluten, milk, mustard (if used), may contain sulphites (Worcestershire).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 640; Protein 28 g; Carbs 78 g; Fat 24 g; Fibre 10 g.

Freezer Suitability

No.

Recipe 28: Sticky Honey-Soy Chicken with Rice



Ingredients (Serves 4)

600 g chicken thighs, boneless and skinless, cut into chunks

1 tbsp cornflour

1 tbsp vegetable oil

3 tbsp soy sauce

2 tbsp honey

1 tbsp ketchup

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 tsp grated ginger (or 1/2 tsp ground ginger)

Header

1 tbsp rice vinegar (or cider vinegar)

Spring onions and sesame seeds (optional)

Long-Form Method

Toss chicken with cornflour and a pinch of pepper. Fry in oil for 8–10 minutes until golden and cooked through.

Stir together soy, honey, ketchup, garlic, ginger, and vinegar. Pour into the pan and simmer 2–3 minutes until thick and sticky, clinging to the chicken like it means it.

Serve with rice and scatter spring onions and sesame if you're feeling tidy. It tastes like takeaway comfort without the small fortune.

Allergens

Soy, may contain sesame (if used).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without rice)

Calories 520; Protein 36 g; Carbs 28 g; Fat 28 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes.

Recipe 29: Proper Omelette and Chips (Café Comfort)



Ingredients (Serves 2)

4 large eggs
2 tbsp milk (optional)
30 g cheddar, grated (optional)
Salt and black pepper
1 tbsp butter
Chips (oven chips or homemade)
Ketchup, to serve

Long-Form Method

Cook chips first so they arrive at the table hot and confident. Beat eggs with milk, salt, and pepper. Melt butter in a non-stick pan over medium heat. Pour in eggs and stir gently for 20 seconds, then let it set. When mostly set but still slightly glossy on top, sprinkle cheese if using, fold, and cook 30 seconds more. Slide onto a plate next to chips and a blob of ketchup. This is café food at home, which always tastes like winning.

Allergens

Egg, milk (if used).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without chips)

Calories 320; Protein 20 g; Carbs 2 g; Fat 26 g.

Freezer Suitability

No.

Recipe 30: Gravy-Glazed Meatballs with Mash



Ingredients (Serves 4)

Meatballs:

- 500 g beef mince
- 1 small onion, grated
- 1 egg
- 60 g breadcrumbs
- 1 tsp dried mixed herbs
- Salt and black pepper
- 1 tbsp olive oil

Header

Gravy:

1 onion, sliced

1 tbsp plain flour

500 ml beef stock (or gravy from granules)

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce (optional)

Long-Form Method

Mix mince, grated onion, egg, breadcrumbs, herbs, salt, and pepper. Roll into 16 meatballs. Brown in oil in a large pan, then lift out.

Add sliced onion to the same pan and cook 8–10 minutes until softened. Stir in flour, then gradually add stock, stirring to thicken. Add Worcestershire if using, return meatballs, and simmer 12–15 minutes until cooked through and coated in glossy gravy. Serve with mash. It is not subtle. It is not meant to be.

Allergens

Egg, gluten, may contain sulphites (Worcestershire), may contain celery (stock).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without mash)

Calories 560; Protein 34 g; Carbs 18 g; Fat 38 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes. Freeze in gravy; reheat gently.

Gravy is not simply a sauce. Gravy is a plan.

It rescues slightly dry sausages. It forgives overcooked meat. It makes mash feel like a destination rather than a side dish. If you are tired, low on patience, or faced with a fridge that offers nothing but “ingredients”, gravy is how you turn that into dinner.

Keep a tub of granules for emergencies. Make stock cubes feel useful. Add onions for sweetness, a spoon of mustard for backbone, a dash of Worcestershire for depth. And if the gravy is a bit thin, don't panic—cornflour exists for a reason and it is not ashamed of itself.

Next: Sunday comforts—roasts, slow bakes, and the big, cosy dishes that make Monday slightly less rude.

Chapter Four: Sunday Comforts and Slow Wins

Roasts, rich bakes, and dishes that make the house smell like it's looking after you.



Recipe 31: Roast Chicken, Lemon, and Garlic (With Proper Gravy)



Ingredients (Serves 4)

- 1 whole chicken (about 1.6–1.8 kg)
- 1 lemon, halved
- 1 whole garlic bulb, cut in half crossways
- 2 tbsp olive oil (or softened butter)
- 1 tsp dried thyme (or a few fresh sprigs)
- Salt and black pepper

Gravy:

- 1 tbsp plain flour

Header

500 ml chicken stock

1 tsp marmite (optional)

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Pat the chicken dry (this is how you get crisp skin). Rub with oil or butter, then season generously with salt, pepper, and thyme. Stuff the cavity with lemon halves and garlic. Place in a roasting tin and roast for 1 hour 20 minutes, basting once if you feel like it. It's done when juices run clear and the legs move easily.

Lift chicken onto a board and rest 15 minutes. Pour off most of the fat from the tin, leaving the sticky browned bits. Stir flour into the tin over a low heat, then gradually whisk in stock, scraping up everything. Add marmite for depth if using, simmer 5 minutes, season, and serve with the chicken like you meant it.

Allergens

Gluten (gravy), may contain celery (stock).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, with gravy, no sides)

Calories 620; Protein 48 g; Carbs 6 g; Fat 44 g.

Freezer Suitability

Cooked chicken freezes well. Gravy freezes well.

**Recipe 32: Creamy Chicken and Mushroom Pie
(Shortcrust Base, Puff Top)**



Ingredients (Serves 4–6)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, chopped
250 g mushrooms, sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tbsp plain flour
350 ml chicken stock
150 ml double cream
400 g cooked chicken, shredded
1 tsp Dijon mustard (optional)

Header

Black pepper

Pastry:

1 pack ready-rolled shortcrust pastry (approx. 320 g)

1 sheet ready-rolled puff pastry (approx. 320 g)

1 egg, beaten (or milk)

Long-Form Method

Cook onion in oil for 8 minutes until soft. Add mushrooms and cook until browned. Add garlic, stir 30 seconds, then flour. Gradually add stock, simmer until thick, then stir in cream, chicken, mustard, and pepper.

Line a pie dish with shortcrust, prick base, and bake blind at 200°C (180°C fan) for 12 minutes (use baking paper and dried pulses or rice). Tip in filling. Top with puff pastry, crimp, cut a steam hole, brush with egg, and bake 25–30 minutes until deeply golden and puffed.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, egg, mustard (if used), may contain celery (stock).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, 1/5 pie)

Calories 820; Protein 34 g; Carbs 52 g; Fat 52 g.

Freezer Suitability

Filling freezes well; assemble with fresh pastry for best results.

**Recipe 33: Slow-Cooker (or Low-Oven) Beef
Brisket in Onion Gravy**



Ingredients (Serves 6)

1.2–1.5 kg beef brisket (or rolled brisket)
2 onions, thickly sliced
2 carrots, thickly sliced
2 tbsp plain flour
500 ml beef stock
2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
1 tbsp tomato purée
1 tsp dried thyme
Salt and black pepper

Header

1 tbsp oil

Long-Form Method

Season brisket well. Brown in a hot pan with oil, then place in slow cooker with onions and carrots. Sprinkle flour over the veg, then whisk stock with Worcestershire, purée, and thyme and pour in.

Cook on LOW for 8 hours (or HIGH for 5–6). For low-oven: cover tightly and cook at 160°C (140°C fan) for 4 hours. Remove brisket, slice, and return to gravy to warm through. Serve with mash and something green for appearances.

Allergens

Gluten, may contain celery (stock), sulphites (Worcestershire).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without mash)

Calories 540; Protein 46 g; Carbs 12 g; Fat 34 g.

Freezer Suitability

Excellent.

**Recipe 34: Dauphinoise Potatoes (Cheesy,
Proper, and Worth It)**



Ingredients (Serves 6 as a side)

1 kg potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, halved
20 g butter
400 ml double cream
200 ml milk
120 g gruyère or mature cheddar, grated
Salt, black pepper, pinch of nutmeg (optional)

Long-Form Method

Header

Heat oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Rub a baking dish with the cut garlic, then butter it. Arrange potatoes in layers, seasoning each layer lightly with salt and pepper. Heat cream and milk until steaming, then pour over potatoes. Press down gently so liquid settles.

Cover with foil and bake 50 minutes. Remove foil, scatter cheese, and bake 20–25 minutes more until golden and tender. Rest 10 minutes before serving. It will thicken into a proper spoonable dream.

Allergens

Milk.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, as a side)

Calories 420; Protein 8 g; Carbs 32 g; Fat 30 g.

Freezer Suitability

Not ideal (cream can split). Best chilled 2 days and reheated.

Recipe 35: Pork and Apple Traybake with Roast Potatoes



Ingredients (Serves 4)

800 g potatoes, cut into chunks
2 tbsp oil
4 pork chops (or thick pork steaks)
2 apples, cut into wedges
1 onion, cut into wedges
1 tsp dried sage
Salt and black pepper
1 tbsp honey (optional)

Header

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 220°C (200°C fan). Toss potatoes with 1 tbsp oil and salt, roast 25 minutes.

Season pork, toss apples and onion with remaining oil, sage, and pepper. Add everything to the tray with the potatoes and roast 20–25 minutes until pork is cooked through and apples are softened. Drizzle honey for a glossy finish if you like. Serve with gravy or just with the tray juices, which are quietly brilliant.

Allergens

None major, check pork seasoning if pre-marinated.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 780; Protein 40 g; Carbs 70 g; Fat 36 g.

Freezer Suitability

Not ideal (apples soften). Best fresh or chilled 2 days.

**Recipe 36: Proper Beef Roast with Yorkshires
(Shortcut Friendly)**



Ingredients (Serves 4)

1 kg beef roasting joint (topside or silverside)
1 tbsp oil
Salt and black pepper

Yorkshire Puddings (makes 8):

140 g plain flour
4 eggs
200 ml milk
Sunflower oil, for the tin

Gravy:

500 ml beef stock

1 tbsp cornflour mixed with 1 tbsp cold water (optional)

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 220°C (200°C fan). Season beef, rub with oil, and roast 20 minutes, then reduce to 190°C (170°C fan) and roast 45–55 minutes for medium (adjust to preference). Rest at least 20 minutes, loosely covered.

For Yorkshires, whisk flour, eggs, and milk to a smooth batter; rest 20 minutes if you can. Heat a Yorkshire tin with a little oil in each hole until smoking hot. Pour in batter and bake at 220°C (200°C fan) for 20–25 minutes without opening the door.

Warm stock for gravy; thicken with cornflour if desired. Slice beef and serve with Yorkshires that look far more impressive than the effort involved.

Allergens

Gluten, egg, milk, may contain celery (stock).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, with 2 Yorkshires, no potatoes)

Calories 640; Protein 48 g; Carbs 28 g; Fat 36 g.

Freezer Suitability

Roast beef freezes well. Yorkshires freeze well and re-crisp in the oven.

Recipe 37: Proper Carrot and Swede Mash (The Unsung Hero)



Ingredients (Serves 6 as a side)

500 g carrots, peeled and chopped

700 g swede, peeled and chopped

40 g butter

Salt and black pepper

Pinch of nutmeg (optional)

Long-Form Method

Header

Boil carrots and swede in salted water for 20 minutes until tender. Drain well and mash with butter. Season generously with pepper and a little nutmeg if you like. It is sweet, buttery, and makes gravy behave itself.

Allergens

Milk.

Nutrition (Approx. per side serving)

Calories 140; Protein 2 g; Carbs 18 g; Fat 8 g; Fibre 4 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes.

Recipe 38: Bubble and Squeak (With Crispy Edges)



Ingredients (Serves 4)

500 g leftover mashed potato (or freshly made)
300 g leftover cooked cabbage (or shredded spring greens)
1 onion, finely chopped (optional)
2 tbsp butter or oil
Salt and black pepper
Eggs to serve (optional)

Long-Form Method

Header

Mix mash, cabbage, onion, and seasoning. Shape into patties. Heat butter or oil in a large frying pan and cook patties 6–8 minutes per side until crisp and deeply golden. Serve with eggs if you want the full comfort upgrade. Crisp outside, soft inside, and gloriously practical.

Allergens

Milk (if mash contains), egg (if served).

Nutrition (Approx. per serving, without egg)

Calories 280; Protein 6 g; Carbs 32 g; Fat 14 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes. Freeze patties and reheat in the oven for best crispness.

Recipe 39: Proper Bread and Butter Pudding



Ingredients (Serves 6)

8 slices white bread (slightly stale is ideal)
50 g butter, softened
60 g sultanas or raisins
2 tsp cinnamon (optional)
500 ml milk
200 ml double cream
3 eggs
80 g caster sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract (optional)

Long-Form Method

Butter the bread and cut into triangles. Layer in a buttered dish with raisins and a sprinkle of cinnamon. Whisk milk, cream, eggs, sugar, and vanilla. Pour over bread and press gently so it soaks. Leave 15 minutes.

Bake at 180°C (160°C fan) for 35–40 minutes until golden and set but still a little wobbly in the centre. Serve with custard, cream, or a quiet moment of happiness.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, egg.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 520; Protein 12 g; Carbs 46 g; Fat 32 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes, though best fresh. Reheat covered, then uncover to re-crisp top.

Recipe 40: Sticky Toffee Pudding (Shortcut Date Version)



Ingredients (Serves 8)

200 g dates, chopped
250 ml boiling water
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
80 g butter, softened
150 g light brown sugar
2 eggs
200 g self-raising flour
1 tsp vanilla extract (optional)

Toffee Sauce:

120 g butter

150 g light brown sugar

200 ml double cream

Pinch of salt

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Put dates in a bowl, pour over boiling water, stir in bicarbonate, and leave 10 minutes. Cream butter and sugar until fluffy, beat in eggs, then fold in flour. Stir in the date mixture (liquid and all).

Pour into a greased baking tin and bake 25–30 minutes until risen and springy.

For sauce, melt butter and sugar in a saucepan, then add cream and simmer 3–4 minutes until glossy. Add a pinch of salt. Pour over warm pudding and serve with ice cream, custard, or both, if you are making a point.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, egg.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 610; Protein 6 g; Carbs 62 g; Fat 38 g.

Freezer Suitability

Pudding freezes well. Sauce can be made fresh or frozen separately.

The Sunday Smell

There is a particular smell that only happens on slow-cook days. It starts quietly—onion softening, garlic waking up—and then, at some point, the house smells like it has decided to help.

This is why Sunday cooking matters even when you're not doing a full roast. A traybake counts. A slow stew counts. Even a pudding counts. The smell is part of the comfort. It's the promise you'll get to eat something warm later, and that promise is strangely powerful.

Next: puddings, bakes, and sweet comforts—the sort of desserts that make the kettle feel like an essential tool, not a habit.

Chapter Five: Sweet Comforts and Cosy Finishes

Puddings, traybakes, and the kind of treats that make the day feel less sharp around the edges.



Recipe 41: Apple and Blackberry Crumble (Freezer-Fruit Friendly)



Ingredients (Serves 6)

Filling:

750 g apples, peeled, cored, and sliced
250 g blackberries (fresh or frozen)
60 g light brown sugar
1 tbsp plain flour
1 tsp cinnamon (optional)

Crumble:

180 g plain flour

Header

120 g butter, cold and cubed
100 g light brown sugar
50 g porridge oats (optional but excellent)
Pinch of salt

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 190°C (170°C fan). Toss apples and blackberries with sugar, flour, and cinnamon. Tip into a baking dish.

For the crumble, rub butter into flour until it looks like rough breadcrumbs, then stir in sugar, oats, and a pinch of salt. Scatter over the fruit and bake for 35–40 minutes until the top is golden and the fruit is bubbling at the edges. Serve with custard, because crumble without custard is just fruit wearing a hat.

Allergens

Gluten, milk.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 460; Protein 5 g; Carbs 68 g; Fat 20 g; Fibre 7 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes. Freeze baked crumble in portions.

Recipe 42: Rice Pudding (Creamy Oven-Baked Version)



Ingredients (Serves 6)

150 g pudding rice
1 litre whole milk
100 ml double cream (optional but lovely)
60 g caster sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract (optional)
Knob of butter
Pinch of nutmeg or cinnamon

Long-Form Method

Header

Heat oven to 160°C (140°C fan). Butter a baking dish. Add rice, milk, cream if using, sugar, and vanilla. Stir well and dot with a small knob of butter. Sprinkle nutmeg over the top.

Bake for 2 hours, stirring after the first 30 minutes and again after another 30. After that, leave it to form its proper skin. Serve warm, or cold from the fridge when you need calm. Both are correct.

Allergens

Milk.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 340; Protein 9 g; Carbs 44 g; Fat 14 g.

Freezer Suitability

Not ideal (texture changes). Best chilled up to 3 days.

**Recipe 43: Jam Sponge Pudding (Microwave,
Because Life)**



Ingredients (Serves 4)

80 g butter, softened
80 g caster sugar
2 eggs
80 g self-raising flour
2 tbsp milk
4 tbsp raspberry or strawberry jam

Long-Form Method

Header

Spoon jam into the bottom of a microwave-safe pudding bowl. Beat butter and sugar until creamy, beat in eggs, then fold in flour and milk. Spoon batter over jam and level gently.

Microwave on HIGH for 3 minutes, then check. If needed, microwave in 20-second bursts until springy. Rest 2 minutes, then turn out onto a plate so the jam becomes the top like it always wanted. Serve with custard and a sense of practical triumph.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, egg.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 420; Protein 8 g; Carbs 52 g; Fat 20 g.

Freezer Suitability

Best fresh. You can freeze portions, but texture is softer after reheating.

Recipe 44: Victoria Sponge (Supermarket Classic, Properly Done)



Ingredients (Serves 10)

200 g butter, softened
200 g caster sugar
4 eggs
200 g self-raising flour
1 tsp baking powder (optional)
2 tbsp milk
150 g strawberry jam
200 ml double cream, lightly whipped (or buttercream if preferred)

Icing sugar, to dust

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Grease and line two 20 cm sandwich tins. Beat butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. Beat in eggs one at a time, adding a spoon of flour if it looks like it might curdle. Fold in flour (and baking powder if using) with milk until smooth.

Divide between tins and bake 20–22 minutes until golden and springy. Cool completely. Spread one layer with jam and whipped cream, sandwich with the other, and dust with icing sugar. It is simple, polite, and deeply effective with a mug of tea.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, egg.

Nutrition (Approx. per slice, 1/10)

Calories 420; Protein 5 g; Carbs 38 g; Fat 28 g.

Freezer Suitability

Sponge freezes well (unfilled). Assemble fresh for best results.

Recipe 45: Chocolate Self-Saucing Pudding



Ingredients (Serves 6)

150 g self-raising flour
120 g caster sugar
3 tbsp cocoa powder
1 tsp baking powder
150 ml milk
60 g butter, melted
1 tsp vanilla extract (optional)

Sauce Layer:

Header

160 g light brown sugar
2 tbsp cocoa powder
350 ml boiling water

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Mix flour, caster sugar, cocoa, and baking powder. Stir in milk, melted butter, and vanilla to form a thick batter. Spoon into a baking dish.

Mix brown sugar and cocoa for the sauce and scatter evenly over the batter. Pour boiling water carefully over the back of a spoon so you don't disturb the top too much. Bake 30–35 minutes. It will look like cake, but underneath is a molten chocolate lake. Serve immediately, preferably with ice cream and no regrets.

Allergens

Milk, gluten. May contain egg depending on flour brand traces.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 420; Protein 5 g; Carbs 62 g; Fat 18 g.

Freezer Suitability

Best fresh. Reheats well, but sauce is at its best straight from the oven.

Recipe 46: Warm Brownies (Fudgy, Not Dry)



Ingredients (Makes 12)

200 g dark chocolate
200 g butter
250 g caster sugar
3 eggs
120 g plain flour
30 g cocoa powder
Pinch of salt

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 170°C (150°C fan). Line a 20 cm square tin. Melt chocolate and butter together gently, then cool slightly. Whisk sugar and eggs until slightly thickened (not a full ribbon, just enthusiastic). Pour in chocolate mixture and fold. Sift in flour, cocoa, and salt and fold until just combined.

Bake 22–25 minutes. The centre should still be a little soft; it will set as it cools. Serve warm for maximum comfort, ideally with ice cream, or eat standing at the counter like a person with priorities.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, egg.

Nutrition (Approx. per brownie, 1/12)

Calories 360; Protein 4 g; Carbs 38 g; Fat 22 g.

Freezer Suitability

Excellent. Freeze portions; reheat briefly for warm fudginess.

Recipe 47: Banana Bread (Tea-Time Insurance)



Ingredients (Makes 10 slices)

3 very ripe bananas
100 g butter, melted (or 90 ml oil)
150 g light brown sugar
2 eggs
220 g self-raising flour
1 tsp cinnamon (optional)
Pinch of salt
2 tbsp milk (if needed)

Header

Long-Form Method

Heat oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Line a loaf tin. Mash bananas until smooth-ish (a few lumps are charming). Stir in melted butter, sugar, and eggs. Fold in flour, cinnamon, and salt. If the batter seems very thick, add a splash of milk.

Bake 50–55 minutes until a skewer comes out mostly clean (a few moist crumbs are good). Cool before slicing, if you can. This is not just cake. It is preparedness.

Allergens

Milk, gluten, egg.

Nutrition (Approx. per slice, 1/10)

Calories 280; Protein 4 g; Carbs 42 g; Fat 10 g.

Freezer Suitability

Yes. Freeze sliced for easy toasting.

Recipe 48: Hot Chocolate (Thick, Proper, and Not Just Cocoa Powder)



Ingredients (Serves 2)

500 ml whole milk

100 ml double cream (optional but excellent)

120 g dark chocolate, chopped

1 tbsp cocoa powder

1 tbsp caster sugar (optional)

Pinch of salt

Vanilla splash (optional)

Long-Form Method

Header

Warm milk and cream in a saucepan until steaming but not boiling. Add chocolate, cocoa, sugar, and salt. Whisk gently until smooth and glossy. Taste and adjust sweetness. Pour into mugs and serve immediately. This is the kind of hot chocolate that makes you slow down involuntarily.

Allergens

Milk.

Nutrition (Approx. per mug)

Calories 520; Protein 10 g; Carbs 34 g; Fat 38 g.

Freezer Suitability

No.

Recipe 49: Custard (Real, Quick, No Drama)



Ingredients (Serves 6)

500 ml whole milk

4 egg yolks

60 g caster sugar

1 tbsp cornflour

1 tsp vanilla extract (or 1/2 tsp vanilla paste)

Long-Form Method

Header

Warm milk in a saucepan until steaming. In a bowl, whisk yolks, sugar, cornflour, and vanilla until smooth. Pour hot milk onto the yolk mixture slowly, whisking constantly. Return to the saucepan and cook over a low-medium heat, whisking, until thickened. Do not boil hard. Pour into a jug and serve. Custard is not difficult, it simply wants your attention.

Allergens

Milk, egg.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 150; Protein 4 g; Carbs 18 g; Fat 7 g.

Freezer Suitability

No (custard can split). Best chilled 2 days.

Recipe 50: Apple Pie Toasties with Cinnamon Sugar



Ingredients (Serves 2)

2 apples, peeled and diced small

20 g butter

2 tbsp light brown sugar

1/2 tsp cinnamon

1 tsp lemon juice

4 slices bread

Butter, for spreading

1 tbsp caster sugar mixed with 1/2 tsp cinnamon (for dusting)

Long-Form Method

Cook apples with butter, brown sugar, cinnamon, and lemon juice for 8–10 minutes until soft and jammy. Cool slightly.

Butter bread, spoon apple filling onto two slices, top with remaining bread, and toast in a sandwich press until crisp and golden (or fry in a pan, 3–4 minutes per side). Dust with cinnamon sugar while warm. Serve with custard for dipping if you want to take it from “nice” to “life-affirming”.

Allergens

Milk, gluten.

Nutrition (Approx. per serving)

Calories 520; Protein 7 g; Carbs 78 g; Fat 20 g; Fibre 6 g.

Freezer Suitability

Filling freezes well. Toasties best assembled fresh.

Pudding Is a Weather System

A proper pudding changes the atmosphere.

You can feel it happen. The kettle goes on without discussion. People find bowls. Someone remembers where the custard lives. Even the loudest day quietens down to make room for something warm and sweet.

Pudding is not an everyday requirement, but it is an excellent tool. It closes arguments. It improves television. It makes winter evenings feel less long. And it is a very efficient way to tell your household, “I’ve got you.”

Epilogue:

The Comfort You Can Make on Purpose

There will always be days when food is just fuel. That's normal. But there should also be days when food is comfort by design—when you choose something warm, familiar, and generous because you deserve it.

Comfort cooking isn't about perfection. It's about reliability. It's about knowing that a pan of sausages in onion gravy can fix a Tuesday, and that a crumble can make a cold evening feel less personal. It's about building small rituals: the bread for mopping, the gravy that turns leftovers into dinner, the pudding that makes everyone pause.

If you cook your way through this book, you will end up with a handful of recipes you return to again and again. That's the real aim. Not novelty. Not show. Just dependable food that makes life feel softer.

Notes to the Reader

All recipes are written for UK home kitchens using readily available British supermarket ingredients.

Measurements are metric. Oven temperatures are given as fan where appropriate. Always use your judgement for seasoning and cooking times based on your specific equipment and ingredients.

Allergy and Dietary Notes

This book contains recipes that may include: gluten (wheat), milk (dairy), egg, fish, mustard, soy, and celery. Always check packaged ingredient labels for allergens and may-contain warnings, particularly for stock cubes, sausages, gravy granules, and sauces.

Simple patterns for swaps:

Gluten-free: use GF flour blends, GF breadcrumbs, GF pasta, and check sausages and gravy granules.

Dairy-free: use plant butter, oat or soya cream alternatives, and dairy-free cheese (melt varies by brand).

Header

Egg-free: use egg replacers in baking where practical, or choose egg-free puddings such as crumble and rice pudding.

Lower spice: reduce chilli and smoked paprika; keep flavour with herbs and a squeeze of lemon.

Disclaimer

This book is provided for general informational and entertainment purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure recipe accuracy, cooking results can vary due to differences in ingredients, equipment, and personal technique. Always ensure food is cooked thoroughly and safely, especially poultry, minced meats, and reheated dishes. If you have food allergies, intolerances, or medical dietary requirements, consult a qualified professional and always verify ingredient labels and manufacturer guidance. The author and publisher accept no liability for any loss, injury, or adverse reaction arising from the use of these recipes.

About the Author

Robin Wickens writes warm, practical, and cheerfully no-nonsense cookbooks designed for real UK kitchens. The aim is always the same: reliable recipes, supermarket-friendly ingredients, and enough wit to get you through the washing-up. If it's cosy, golden-topped, and benefits from gravy, it's probably in the right place.



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