

Homemade and hassle-free

Cooking from scratch is best – but we won't say no to a few culinary shortcuts. Cut your kitchen hours and get nutritious meals ready fast

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Let's face it, life is busy, with constant demands on our time, so it's no wonder we get to the end of the day tired and scratching our heads for dinner ideas. Takeaways are tempting but knowing a couple of quick alternatives in the kitchen can save you time and money – and you will know exactly what you are putting into your body.

Chef and author Rosie Reynolds believes in more flexible methods when preparing great-tasting food in less time. In her new book, *The Shortcut Cook* (Hardie Grant, £15), Reynolds shares her time-saving tips for creating appetising dishes that don't compromise on freshness and taste. You'll discover a straightforward and practical approach to preparing meals and permission to use your microwave, shop-bought bits and food from the freezer.

We love her minestrone, without the endless chopping, a ravioli dish using boiled lasagne sheets instead of making your own pasta and a lovely, crunchy parmigiana without the salt, dip, fry faff usually associated with this dish!

MINESTRONE SOUP

An Italian-inspired soup full of comforting goodness that can be made with whichever pasta you fancy. Broken-up spaghetti works a treat, with a generous glug of olive oil, Parmesan and garlic-rubbed toasts.

SERVES 4

- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 100g smoked bacon, lardons or pancetta cubes
- 2 carrots
- 1 onion, peeled
- 1 celery stalk
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 fresh or dried bay leaves
- ½ tsp dried oregano
- 400g tin good-quality chopped tomatoes
- 1 tbsp red or white wine vinegar or cider vinegar
- 100g kale, chopped
- 75g orzo pasta or small soup pasta
- 75g Parmesan or Cheddar, finely grated
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

- 1** Heat the olive oil and the bacon or lardons together in a large saucepan over a medium heat.
- 2** Holding a box grater over the top of the pan, use the coarse side to grate in the carrots, onion and celery, then turn the grater and finely grate in the garlic. Increase the heat to high and cook for 2-3 minutes, stirring frequently until the vegetables are soft.
- 3** Throw in the bay leaves, oregano and tinned tomatoes. Use the tomato tin to measure out 2½ tins of water and add to the soup, along with the vinegar. Stir in the kale and orzo, pushing them down with a spatula to submerge them in the liquid.
- 4** Bring to a simmer, then partially cover and cook for 10 minutes, stirring from time to time.
- 5** Remove the pan from the heat, add a quarter of the grated Parmesan and stir in until melted – the soup should turn a creamy red colour and thicken slightly.
- 6** Season well with salt and pepper and leave to stand for a few minutes. Ladle into bowls and serve drizzled with olive oil and plenty of the remaining Parmesan.

Make ahead: You can cook this up to the point of stirring in the cheese and keep in the fridge for 2-3 days, or freeze for up to 3 months.

The shortcut: Grating instead of dicing will save you time. Stirring in the Parmesan thickens, and adds a slow-cooked taste and feel without the time deficit. >>>





SWEET POTATO RAVIOLI WITH SAGE & BROWN BUTTER

This is a great shortcut for making your own pasta. Boiled lasagne sheets form ravioli with a rich sweet potato filling.

SERVES 2

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2 sweet potatoes, about 500g, cut into 1 cm cubes • 50g Parmesan, finely grated • Fresh nutmeg, for grating • Pinch of ground cinnamon • 6 dried pre-cooked lasagne sheets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olive oil, for cooking and drizzling • 4 tbsp butter • 24 sage leaves • Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper |
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- 1 Put the sweet potato into a bowl with 1 tablespoon of water, cover with cling film and cook in the microwave on high for 3-5 minutes until tender. Drain and mash.
- 2 Add two thirds of the Parmesan to the bowl, along with a generous grating of nutmeg and cinnamon. Season to taste.
- 3 Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Add the pasta and a drizzle of oil to stop the sheets sticking. Cook for 12 minutes, or for 2 minutes longer than the packet instructions. Drain and separate the sheets, then allow to cool.
- 4 Cut each lasagne sheet in half with kitchen scissors, so you have 12 squares. Dollop 1 tablespoon of the potato mix into the middle of each square and top with a sage leaf. Fold the pasta over the filling to form a triangle and press to seal the edges. Leave to cool on a lightly oiled tray.
- 5 Dry the pan and return it to a high heat, adding the butter and a splash of oil. Add the remaining sage and cook until crisp. Remove and set aside.
- 6 Add the cooled ravioli to the pan and cook for 2 minutes on each side until golden. Divide between 2 plates and serve with the Parmesan, sage leaves and a drizzle of olive oil.

Make ahead: The filling can be made 2 days in advance and chilled. The assembled ravioli will sit happily in the fridge on a lightly oiled tray for 2 days.

The shortcut: These ravioli can be whipped up speedily in advance, while the filling is made in minutes in the microwave.

AUBERGINE PARMIGIANA

This easy recipe uses a combination of oil and butter, along with a Parmesan and breadcrumb topping for a quick and delicious meal. Serve with a green salad.

SERVES 4

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 medium aubergines • Olive oil, for brushing and cooking • Large knob of butter, softened • 2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes • 2 garlic cloves, grated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 tsp dried oregano • 2 x 125g balls mozzarella, cubed • 30g Parmesan, finely grated • Large handful fresh breadcrumbs • Handful basil leaves • Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper |
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- 1 Preheat the oven to 200°C, 180°C fan, gas mark 6. Make deep slits, 1 cm apart, across the aubergines. Don't cut all the way through. Use a pastry brush to coat the inside of the cuts with oil. Dot the butter over each of the aubergines and season inside and out.
- 2 Mix together the tomatoes, garlic, oregano and some seasoning – this can be done in the tomato tins. Pour the mixture into a 20 x 30cm baking dish and sit the aubergines on top. Cover with foil and cook in the oven for 50 minutes, or until the aubergines start to get soft.
- 3 Remove the dish from the oven and remove the foil. Use the back of a spoon to open up the aubergine cuts and stuff with cubes of mozzarella and some of the tomato sauce.
- 4 Sprinkle over the Parmesan and breadcrumbs, then return the dish to the oven and cook, uncovered, for a final 10 minutes, or until the breadcrumbs are golden. Leave to stand for 5 minutes, then scatter with basil leaves before serving.

Make ahead: Prepare the whole dish in advance and reheat in a hot oven until piping hot.

The shortcut: This meal has all the textural expectations of a parmigiana, with none of the factory line-style crumbing – no salting, no dipping in egg, no frying in oil. This is one-pan, no-hassle cooking.

Reader offer

'Psychologies' readers can buy a copy of 'The Shortcut Cook' by Rosie Reynolds for the special price of £12 (RRP £15), including free UK P&P (UK mainland only).

To order, call 01256 302 699 and quote offer code 'UK6'. Offer valid until 12 April 2021.

