

CONTEMPLATES

CULINARY TOOLKITS BY HELEN RUSSELL BROWN

COOK

CONNECT

CONTEMPLATE

MOTHER

CONTEMPLATES

Welcome to a special Mother's Day 2021 edition of CONTEMPLATES.

Differing from the usual three course mood themed dinner party, this toolkit honours the favourite woman in our lives. Across these pages you will find a celebration of some of the virtues and attributes associated with the superhuman feat that is motherhood.

As it's fairly unlikely most of us will be able to sit down with our mums this year, this special edition focuses on a conversation menu with questions to spark gratitude and happy childhood memories. You can enjoy this one on one, with siblings, face to face, via zoom or phone call. The accompanying edible offerings are a tempting bonus, food for thought, or if you are lucky enough to be with the main lady herself, a chance to win some extra brownie points.

Mothers, like food, are a crucial source of reassurance, comfort, affection and optimism. Exploring how we might use specific ingredients to trigger such warm and fuzzy feelings, this Mother's Day kit offers an afternoon tea menu heralding 6 maternal attributes, as inspired by Aristotle's 12 virtues for the 'Good Person'.

The daily practice of eating is one that unites us all. Growing up, it's likely that your mama was central in this. In hectic lives where coordinating after school activities, turning curtains into costumes, and trips to the vet with the hamster took up any spare hours, mealtimes were reliable rhythms that provided opportunities for togetherness. Even the simplest meal put on the table at the end of a draining day was an act of love and kindness. This is your opportunity to give some of that back.

Many of the prompts in the conversation menu spark the recollection of happy memories. We spend so much time worrying about the future, looking for new experiences, the next thrill.

What if we designated time to appreciating past adventures and childhood jaunts in order to lift our spirits? Using memory as a therapeutic tool, we can recall and recapture fond feelings that we already lived through. By honouring and celebrating our past triumphs in all their glory we can remind ourselves of the possibilities of life that still lay ahead. Not to mention providing an abundance of free entertainment and chortles.

Our childhood experiences and those of our mothers are so personal and nuanced, hopefully this kit will provide you with the tools for fond reflection and a slightly different way to connect with and cherish your mum this year.

We could spend a lifetime trying to return the unconditional love our mothers have given us. Afternoon tea is a great place to start.

Love to you and yours

HRB

KEY INGREDIENTS

REASSURANCE. MISO.

The opposite of panic is not blind hope and positivity. It is taking a deep breath, grounding ourselves, and possibly calling our mum. It is calmly carrying on knowing that we have the resources to handle whatever life throws at us; something we likely learnt from our mother. An infinite source of reassurance during our youth, countless there for us in moments of panic and distress; a scraped knee, a fudged audition, our first heartbreak.

Miso brings with it a similar sense of reassurance and calm. The poetic antithesis of stress, with its slow fermentation process steeped in generations of tradition, yet offering a nourishing broth that can be ready to restore you in a matter of moments. There is a certain nod of maternal wisdom in the complexity of the umami flavour, a grounding stillness through the satiating salty broth. Supporting gut health and the assimilation of nutrients, miso, like our mums, is the perfect companion to soothe and reassure.

COMPASSION. TOFU

Compassion is the sense that love and understanding must be offered even when we don't fully agree with, or relate to, the emotions displayed by another. As adults we find it nearly impossible to act sympathetically towards people who make a lot of noise, scupper our plans, tell us we're idiots when we're trying to help them, or expect us to pay for everything. This, of course, is exactly what we demanded from our mothers as children. Acting out of exhaustion, confusion, and hunger, or derailed by fear or anxiety, our mothers compassion disarmed behaviours that would likely make others abandon ship.

Tofu, like small children, requires a lot of nurture and care. Displaying qualities of texture and flavour that many people sneer at, with a little compassion and the right recipe this soggy substance can be transformed into a delicious endeavour to tempt the fussiest of eaters.

MOTHER

PATIENCE. PISTACHIO.

We will never truly know the patience practiced by our mothers during our childhood. Biting her tongue, holding back tears, endlessly enduring little hands tugging with ceaseless demands. Inconsolably screaming toddlers, grumpy pubescent, and grown up children who never call. Working steadily with an ineffable patience, progressively rewarded by watching us grow into functioning adults able to find our own happiness.

Nothing could be a more fitting edible metaphor for patience than the finicky little pistachio. Encased in a tough shell that often risks the loss of the edge of a fingernail, the green jewel within offers a small dose of happiness for such effort and risk. The repetitive endurance makes the eventual reward ever more appreciated; surely a fitting simile for the colossal task of motherhood.

NOSTALGIA. CINNAMON.

Many of us are blessed with happy childhood memories of our mother. They flutter back to us when we return to the parental home; flood our minds as we reminisce with relatives; fill our senses as we tuck into a slice of birthday cake. Recalling every giddy detail of your pirate themed 8th birthday, getting stuck in the mud during that now hilariously unsuccessful camping trip to Wales, baking mince pies together with grandma. It feels so good to look back, even if through slightly misty and rose tinted eyes.

Cinnamon is a nostalgic taste of home, it's comforting. Its festive warmth conjures images of cosy afternoons spent in the kitchen stirring batters and boozy mixtures of dried fruit, and the subsequent scoffing of said treats. Cinnamon is a sprinkling of mothers magic touch and soothing winter memories. Imagine if we practised intentionally drawing from this pool of nostalgia to celebrate our mothers and everything she has given to us.

MOTHER

KINDNESS. MAPLE SYRUP.

Mothers are an endless source of kindness. Gentle, tolerant, affectionate, sympathetic, understanding, tender, and entirely selfless; even if our relationship changes and shifts as we grow older, we know that these sentiments were the basis of her instincts towards us as infants. Nothing can ever truly compare to a mother's love and kindness. It is likely the benchmark for our own kindness towards others.

When we are at our wits end it is often the kindness of others that we crave, but all too often we fail to recognise it. Instead, we turn to the biscuit tin or bakery shelves for a sugary mouthful as a way to self-soothe. Like mother's kindness, maple syrup offers a supply of sweetness from a pure and natural source. Sugary but not overly sickly, with a nutty complexity and earthy tones, this luxurious golden liquid deserves a little more time and appreciation than other sources of saccharin. Gifting oneself a quality bottle of this thickly oozing amber elixir is a great act of self generosity and kindness.

APPRECIATION. AQUAFABA

One hopes that as adults we actively appreciate our mothers. But this has not always been the case. The non-reciprocal nature of parental love requires that for much of our younger years the mother operates with little hope of appreciation. The marathon of motherhood is, for the most part, an entirely selfless act. We are comforted, supported, entertained, clothed, and fed, with barely a thank you in return. We may never fully understand the scope of our mothers selfless giving until we ourselves become parents.

A fairly recent culinary discovery, aquafaba is an ingredient that was previously overlooked. The by-product from a can of chickpeas, we gleefully drizzled it down the drain without a second thought. Now, it's the miracle solution for plant-based mayonnaises, macarons, meringues, mousses, and many more foods beginning with letters other than M. If we see appreciation as a memory of neglect enlightened by a new found awareness of value, then aquafaba and appreciation of our mothers are a perfect parallel. Mastering the skill of appreciation is arguably key to modern contentment. It is certainly key to appeasing our mothers.

MOTHER

AFTERNOON TEA. **MOTHER'S DAY 2021**

MISO. Reassurance
FINGER SANDWICHES

+

TOFU. Compassion
SPINACH AND ONION FRITTATA

+

PISTACHIO. Patience
SALTED PISTACHIOS

+

CINNAMON. Nostalgia & **MAPLE SYRUP.** Kindness
BANANA MUFFINS WITH TAHINI MAPLE ICING

+

AQUAFABA. Appreciation
MERINGUE NESTS WITH COCONUT CREAM AND BERRIES

MOTHER

REASSURANCE. **MISO**

MISO 'FETA' AND SUNDRIED TOMATO FINGER SANDWICHES

'Feta' makes one large block

200g block firm tofu

1 tbsp nutritional yeast

1 tbsp ideally white miso paste but whatever you can get

140g refined/deodorized coconut oil, melted

2 tbsp lemon juice

1 tbsp apple cider vinegar

1 tsp salt

TO SERVE

Toasted fingers of sourdough or bread of choice

Small jar of sundried tomatoes

Few leaves of rocket, black pepper, and lemon zest

- + Blend everything in a blender until smooth, scraping down the sides as you go.
- + Wrap in greaseproof paper and chill in the fridge for at least an hour.
- + Slice or crumble onto toasted sourdough and serve open topped with sundried tomatoes, a few leaves of rocket, and a sprinkling of lemon zest and black pepper.

CUCUMBER SANDWICHES WITH MISO BUTTER

125g vegan block

1 tbsp miso (dark is best but white will work if you bought it for the 'feta' recipe above!)

Triangles of soft sliced bread of choice

Thinly sliced cucumber

- + Beat the vegan block and miso paste together using an electric whisk or a fork. Adjust the miso levels to taste as this will vary depending on the kind you have.
- + Spread generously between bread with slices of cucumber.

SPINACH AND ONION FRITTATA

Serves 6-8

2 white onions, thinly sliced

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 tsp dried rosemary

600g frozen spinach, defrosted and liquid thoroughly squeezed out

400g approx silken tofu (packs vary)

2 tbsp cornflour

3 tbsp chickpea flour

60ml plant-based milk

1 1/2 tsp baking powder

1/2 tsp turmeric

A few cherry tomatoes, halved

Salt and pepper

TO SERVE

A few sprigs of fresh dill or parsley

- + Preheat oven 180C.
- + Sautee onions and garlic in a little oil with a pinch of salt until softened. Remove from heat and put to one side.
- + In a large bowl, add all the remaining ingredients except the spinach and blend with a stick blender until you have a smooth mixture.
- + Stir in the onion mixture and spinach until well combined, then spoon into a lined baking tray.
- + Smooth the surface and arrange the tomato halves on top. Bake for 25-35 minutes until firm but springy.
- + Allow to cool completely before slicing, serve in bite sized pieces topped with fresh herbs.

CINNAMON. **NOSTALGIA** MAPLE SYRUP. **KINDNESS**

BANANA CUPCAKES WITH TAHINI MAPLE ICING

Makes 8-10

125g vegan butter

150g golden caster sugar

2tsp vanilla essence

1 flax egg (1tbsp ground flax, 2 tbsp water)

2 very ripe bananas

190g plain flour

1tsp baking powder

60ml oat milk

2tsp cinnamon

ICING

3tbsp tahini

1-2tbsp maple syrup

1/2 tsp vanilla essence

Small pinch salt

water

- + Preheat oven to 180C.
- + Melt the butter and sugar in a pan over a low heat until dissolved.
- + Mash the bananas and beat in the flax egg and vanilla.
- + In a separate bowl, mix the flour and baking powder.
- + Add the wet ingredients into the dry and mix well.
- + Spoon into cupcake cases and bake for 12-15 minutes until risen, soft and springy, and a knife inserted into the middle comes out clean.
- + For the icing, mix a little water into the tahini a spoonful at a time until you have a creamy spreadable mixture. It will get thicker before it gets thinner. Add vanilla, salt, and maple syrup to taste.
- + Smear the icing over cooled cupcakes.

AQUAFABA. **APPRECIATION**

MERINGUE NESTS WITH BERRIES AND COCONUT CREAM

400g can of chickpeas - just the liquid. AKA aquafaba.

1/2 tsp cream of tartar

125g icing sugar

1/2 tsp vanilla extract (optional)

TO SERVE

Whipped coconut cream (a full fat can of coconut milk left in the fridge overnight)

Blackberries or berries of choice and a few mint leaves

- + Preheat the oven to 110C (fan 90C) and line a baking tray with greaseproof paper.
- + Add the aquafaba to a large bowl and use an electric hand-held or stand mixer to whisk until it's more than doubled in size, white and foamy, approx 5 minutes. It will take longer than you think.
- + Add the cream of tartar and whisk again for another minute. Slowly and gently start adding in the sugar, whisking until the mixture forms stiff, glossy peaks. Stir in the vanilla, if using.
- + Transfer the meringue mixture into an icing bag with a large star-shaped nozzle and pipe into nests or cup shapes. Alternatively, use a spoon to create mounds and use the back of the spoon to hollow out the centre
- + Bake for 2 hours. Do not open the oven! After 2 hours, turn the oven off and leave to cool in the oven for at least another hour.
- + To make the whipped cream, open the can of chilled coconut milk upside down and drain off the liquid. Whip the remaining cream until fluffy. Add a little sweetener of choice or vanilla if you like.
- + Serve meringue nests with a dollop of the cream, berries of your choice and a few mints leaves.
- + Leftover meringues will keep for a couple of weeks in an air-tight container.

CONVERSATION MENU

A menu of conversational reflection to be led by the offspring.
Elaborate, waffle and meander to your heart's content.

REASSURANCE. Miso.

- + I remember you doing this for me when I was ill as a child...
- + Who did you turn to when you needed reassurance?

COMPASSION. Tofu.

- + Did becoming a mum change your perspective of others?
- + Some of my memories of you helping others are...

PATIENCE. Pistachio.

- + Tell me about a time when you found it hard being a mum.
- + I remember you being particularly patient with me when...

NOSTALGIA. Cinnamon.

- + One of my childhood favourite memories of being with you...
- + What are your favourite memories of being with me?

KINDNESS. Maple syrup

- + Some ways in which you showed me how to be kind to others...
- + This is my favourite meal you used to make for me...

APPRECIATION. Aquafaba.

- + Something I appreciate about my childhood that I took for granted at the time...
- + What did you appreciate most from me when I was little?