



VEAL CHOPS WITH FRESH HERBS AND SALMORIGLIO

Try this most delicious of meats, as thanks to the rise of British rose veal, from calves now reared humanely, the barbecue can be lit without guilt. The idea here is to be generous with the herbs – comparable to a chop lying in a rosemary hedge.

Serves 4

4 x thick-cut rose veal loin chops
4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons fennel seeds
a big bunch of sage
6–7 sprigs of fresh thyme

4 large, long stalks of rosemary
2 bulbs of garlic
2 unwaxed or well-scrubbed lemons
ground black pepper
flaked sea salt
salmoriglio (*see page 111*)
lemon wedges, to serve

Put the veal chops in a large, shallow dish, rub them over with the olive oil and sprinkle with the fennel seeds. Throw in the sage leaves, roughly torn, thyme sprigs and rosemary, broken into smaller lengths. Cut the garlic bulbs in half across the middle and break them up over the herbs and meat.

Peel the rind of the lemons in long, wide strips and strew them across the chops. Add plenty of ground black pepper. Cover and leave in the fridge for a few hours to allow the flavours to develop, turning the chops after 3 hours. Light a barbecue 30 minutes before you want to start cooking.

Season the chops well with salt before moving the meat to the hot coals. While the meat cooks, scatter over the herbs, allowing them to smoke and burn where they lie. Cook for 5–6 minutes on each side, until gloriously charred but tender, pink and juicy within. Allow the chops to rest for 5 minutes or so. Serve with salmoriglio (*see page 111*), lemon wedges for squeezing over and sautéed potatoes.

BREAM

BLACK BREAM VERACRUZ

Toes in sand, I first ate this on the Pacific side of Mexico. After endless glasses of cold beer mixed with lime juice and salt, and under scant protection from the sun, I had lost most of my pocket dollars at backgammon to a German tourist. Tipsy and secretly annoyed, this dish cheered me up no end. It is easy to prepare and also a good treatment for bass, huss and conger eel.

Serves 4

750g sea bream, scaled, gutted and degilled

SAUCE

1 large Spanish onion, peeled
a bunch of coriander, not too large
2 fat garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
3 large, ripe vine tomatoes

3 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for the fish and to finish
1 fresh jalapeño chile or 2 tablespoons jarred jalapeños
10 green olives, pitted
juice of ½ lime
1 teaspoon capers, drained
flaked sea salt
20g flaked almonds

Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas 6. Halve the onion lengthways and slice it into thin slivers. Cut the obvious stalk parts from the coriander and chop them very finely; put aside a good handful of the leaves to finish the dish. In a large saucepan sweat the onion with the garlic, chopped coriander stalks and olive oil over a low heat for 10 minutes. The onion should not colour.

While all this is going on, cut the stalks out of the tomatoes and criss-cross their bums. Put in a deep bowl and submerge in just-boiled water for 30 seconds. Skin and roughly chop them. Add them – flesh, seeds, juice and all – to the cooking onions. Without deseeding, thinly slice the jalapeño from nose to stalk and add to the pot. Slice the olives into little rounds and in they go. Squeeze in the lime juice and stir in the capers. Simmer with the lid off for 15 minutes. Season well with salt. Tip the almonds on to a baking tray and toast in the oven for 4–5 minutes until golden. Transfer to a plate and allow to cool.

Rinse the fish and pat it dry. Lay it on a board and give it 3 shallow slashes from head to tail on both sides, using a sharp knife angled away from its head. Rub all over with a bit of olive oil and salt both sides lightly. Transfer to a shallow ovenproof dish that accommodates head and tail. Spoon the sauce around it and cover the top tightly with foil. Bake in the preheated oven for 30–40 minutes. To check it is cooked, push the blade of a knife into the flesh just behind the top of the head. It should slide in easily with only the faintest resistance from the meat near the bone. Unwrap the foil. Dribble over a little olive oil, scatter with almonds and coriander leaves, and serve.





SPAGHETTI ARRABIATA

This is one of my favourite pasta dishes. I think onion has no place in the sauce and, on asking a Roman friend for confirmation, he stamped a fist on the table followed with 'Never!'. I cannot argue the Parmesan, but I like just the tomato sauce, pasta and a little olive oil with no other interference. The growly faint back-of-throat chile burn is the point.

Serves 2

425g ripe tomatoes

1 hot red chile

3 tablespoons olive oil

4 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped

a squirt of lemon juice

½ teaspoon flaked sea salt

½ teaspoon caster sugar

170–200g dried spaghetti

extra virgin olive oil, to serve

Cut a small cross in the bum of each tomato, cut out the stalk bases, then cover with boiling water. Leave for 30 seconds, then pour away the water. Peel the tomatoes, cut them into quarters and scoop out the seeds into a small bowl. Chop the flesh roughly but small (so when cooked it has a puréed texture).

Deseed the chile and chop it finely. Heat the oil in a medium saucepan and throw in the chile. It should sizzle for a minute until it noticeably lightens in colour. Add the garlic and fry for no more than 30 seconds before adding the tomato flesh. They should also spit and sizzle on entry. Add the lemon juice (just enough to give it a faint edge), salt and sugar, then turn down the heat. Chuck the seeds.

Push the juice from the tomato seeds through a sieve into the pan. Simmer the sauce briskly for about 15–20 minutes, or until it starts going 'plup, plup, plup', slightly spattering the surrounding hob. You want the visibly watery element to have left the sauce. Check the seasoning.

Cook the pasta according to the packet instructions and drain it well. Add the pasta to the sauce and mix. Transfer the pasta to 2 plates and splash with excellent olive oil. I like to eat it leaning against the kitchen top.

TOMATO AND ONION SALAD

This is such a great salad, but it is imperative that the tomatoes be excellent or the exercise is pointless. I love large beef tomatoes, but good vine tomatoes are excellent too. I suggest that this is made just before eating.

Serves 2

4 beef tomatoes

flaked sea salt and ground black pepper

1 small red onion

4–5 tablespoons olive oil

red wine vinegar (optional)

fresh basil leaves (optional)

SCONES WITH STRAWBERRY JAM AND CLOTTED CREAM

Ooh! I do love a scone! Accompanied by Darjeeling and the polite tinkling of fine china. Clotted cream or jam first? Well, actually, butter first, then jam – and then cream!

Makes 6 large scones

500g self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting

100g butter (at room temperature), plus extra for greasing and spreading

a good pinch of flaked sea salt

40g caster sugar

300ml whole milk, plus extra for glazing

fresh clotted cream

good-quality strawberry jam

Preheat the oven to 220°C/425°F/Gas 7. Lightly butter a large baking sheet or tray. Sift the flour into a large bowl. Cut the 100g butter into cubes and drop them into the centre of the flour. Rub the flour and butter together until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Pinch the salt over, crushing it to tiny flakes. Sprinkle with the sugar and stir in. Slowly add the milk, stirring all the time, until the mixture comes together. Use your hands to lightly knead the dough until smooth. It should be soft and spongy – just verging on sticky. If it feels dry, add a touch more milk.

Turn out the dough on to a floured surface and gently roll it out to around 2.5cm deep. Don't be tempted to roll it any thinner or the scones won't rise as high and look anywhere near as inviting. Use a sharp knife to cut 4 x 7cm squares from the dough. Place on the baking sheet. Lightly knead and re-roll the trimmings, then cut 2 more squares.

Brush the scones with a little milk and bake in the centre of the oven for about 15 minutes until well risen and golden brown. Cool for a short time on the sheet before eating.

Split in half and spread with butter, then thickly with clotted cream. Top with spoonfuls of strawberry jam and eat whilst warm. Life-affirming.

