

Spring



Easy-as Bacon (Green Bacon)

MAKES 2–3 KG (4 LB 6 OZ–6 LB 10 OZ)

What you need

2–3 kg (4 lb 6 oz–6 lb 10 oz)
side of pork loin

260 g (9 oz/2 cups) salt

100–200 g (3½–7 oz/½–1 cup)
brown sugar

Who doesn't love bacon? Well, as amazing as it may seem, there are actually a lot of non-bacon-lovers out there – studies show that four out of five people love bacon (study consisted of five of my mates). Whether it's cooked over the morning campfire or in the kitchen at home, the smell of frying bacon gets me going. I used to buy the dodgy stuff from the supermarket, then my inquisitive mind totally ruined that when I researched the conditions of factory-farmed pigs, so I had a spell without bacon. It didn't last long. I had to find a way to get back on the porky bandwagon, so I decided to start making my own. Having an entire pig's carcass in your freezer is also good motivation to make bacon.

The pig butchered this year was massive, weighing in at well over 120 kilograms (265 pounds)! Not ideal for standard butchery cuts, the oversized sow was better suited to making salami. But I wasn't to be put off: I had bacon brain and nothing was going to stand in my way. Seriously, it didn't take much research to find out how easy it is to make bacon at home. And there are so many variations, which tells me there's plenty of room for mistakes. Let's keep everyone happy here and remind the reader about the importance of hygiene and safety when curing any meat. This recipe is but one approach to curing bacon. There are plenty more ways to do it, but this is what works for me.

How to make it

Keep the skin on the loin but trim off any loose bits.

Mix the salt and sugar in a bowl and then rub the mixture all over the meat, ensuring an even spread.

Place the loin in an airtight plastic container and refrigerate for 7–9 days. Each day, flip the bacon over so the liquid drains from the meat.

Once the meat has hardened (because the salt has drawn out the moisture) wash the salt and sugar off. (I then slice off the skin because it's annoyingly hard to cut through without an electric slicer.)

Slice some up and fry it! I love it with an egg and sliced chilli.



Hipster’s Kale Pizza

SERVES 2

<i>What you need</i>
1–2 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
50 g (1¾ oz) butter
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2–3 cups chopped, stalks-removed, just-picked kale
1 Pizza base (page 295)
plain (all-purpose) flour, for dusting
90–125 g (3–4½ oz/⅓–½ cup) rich tomato paste (concentrated purée)
250 g (9 oz/1⅔ cups) grated mozzarella
8–10 rashers (slices) smoky bacon (page 189; or use non-smoked bacon if you want it to be lame)
semolina, for dusting
100 g (3½ oz) blue cheese, sliced

How to make it

Preheat the oven to its highest temperature (around 250°C/480°F).

Heat a generous glug of olive oil with the butter in a large frying pan over low heat, then gently cook the garlic. Add the kale and cook until wilted, then continue to cook, adding a splash of water (or white wine) if it starts to dry out a bit. It will take 5–10 minutes to soften the kale, so test it as you cook it.

Kale is, like, so hot right now! I’ve never tried a kale smoothie, but they appear to be all the rage this season. So much so that there’s a kale shortage! I’m not really about to eat a grassy smoothie, but I do like to come up with creative ways to eat this vegetable, as it’s one of a handful dumb enough to grow in our freezing winter conditions. One of my go-to kale (or silverbeet/Swiss chard) meals is a breakfast with smoky chorizo and egg, smothered in plenty of hot chilli sauce and maybe some cheese. It’s a brilliant start to the day, but my kids turn up their noses at the vey thought. So I make them a kale pizza instead. Not so much for breakfast, more a lunch or dinner arrangement. And because I’m eating it too, I add two of humanity’s greatest culinary inventions: blue cheese and bacon.

The key with kale is to cook it down well enough to soften it. Some people like it crunchy and woody, I do not. I like it soft and delicate, like my women. I love women. I love kale. A kale woman?

Roll out the pizza base on a floured bench. Smother it with the tomato paste, spoon over as much of the kale as seems reasonable (see note), then scatter over the mozzarella.

Lay out the bacon strips on top then drizzle the pizza with olive oil.

Dust a pizza stone or baking tray with semolina and heat in the hot oven. Add the pizza and cook for 10–15 minutes, or until the pizza is golden brown and the bacon is crispy.

Throw the blue cheese in top as soon as the pizza comes out of the oven. It will get all melty and delicious.

Note: *There should be enough kale for two pizzas, but none left for a smoothie.*



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Smoky Bacon
Pea Broth

SERVES 6

<i>What you need</i>
1–2 tablespoons olive oil
3 onions, chopped
3 carrots, chopped
3 celery stalks, chopped, leaves reserved and chopped
250 g (9 oz) smoky bacon (page 189), finely chopped
1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) Home-made veg stock (page 294)
3 tablespoons Old Bay Seasoning (or extra Home-made veg stock)
310 g (11 oz/2 cups) green peas (podded, you idiot)
handful of parsley, finely chopped
salt and pepper, to taste (optional)
sesame seeds, to garnish

How to make it

Heat a generous glug of olive oil in a large stockpot over low heat and sweat the onion, carrot and celery stalks for at least 20 minutes. If it gets dry, stir through a splash of water. Gently cooking the veg this way will add to the flavour of the stock.

Stir through the bacon and cook for a few minutes. Now add the stock, Old Bay Seasoning, peas, reserved celery leaves and 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water, and gently simmer for 1–2 hours.

A few minutes before serving, stir through the parsley (reserving a little to garnish), and season to taste if desired.

Serve garnished with the reserved parsley and a sprinkle of sesame seeds.

It's such a treat when the green peas arrive in spring. It offers a much-needed break from the leafy winter greens and dried beans! I used to hate peas; I'd never eat them. When I started growing them it was a revelation of sorts. And now every year in they go, making slow progress over winter then when springtime really hits, boom! Green bombs of pea-ness.

If you're intimidated by any cooking process but want to learn to cook, this recipe is a no-brainer. It's so easy to make, but it's ugly as sin. Best to eat it with a blindfold. There's a reason why this meal will never be on 'master chuff' – it's as pretty as a dropped pie. But the upside is that it's loaded with stuff from the backyard and just happens to be relatively healthy. Yes, bacon is healthy. It's written in the practiculture law.

