

What an incredible mix of cooking styles, unusual ingredients and delicious surprises are found in this vast continent. Having travelled in the north and south of Africa, I have a keen interest in African food and have been lucky enough to have taken part in preparing it many times. Yet I was still blown away by the discoveries I've recently made closer to home. The marvellous spice mixes, deeply satisfying dishes, unusual serving arrangements and the sheer warmth and generosity of the African people I've met have been overwhelming – where one dish was enough, a whole feast would appear just because I showed an interest. Such generosity from people who come from a continent so often beset with natural and man-made disasters ... It says something about the human spirit that dishes that have evolved in Africa are not just sustaining but truly magnificent.

#### THE WEST

West Africans love chilli and spices and will use these to add a little heat and extra flavour to many of their dishes. Ghanaians have developed a hot chilli and smoked fish accompaniment called *shitto* (yes, really!). It is an intensely smelly, wonderfully hot and salty paste that they use readily, even enjoying it simply with plain rice.

Red palm-fruit oil is the oil of choice in West Africa, and when it's heated, magic happens. The oil melts to the most wonderful, deep-ruby colour and it adds a golden crispiness to anything cooked in it. One of my great finds has been disks of plantain (green banana) fried in palm-fruit oil, like chunky potato chips – divine! This oil is often confused with its infamous, trans-fatty cousin made from the kernels of the palm oil tree. Palm-fruit oil comes from the fruit, which is pressed with the same technique used to make virgin olive oil, without any heat or solvents. As a result, the palm-fruit oil is high in betacarotene and antioxidants and is actually good for you.

#### THE HORN

Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia are home to *injera*, a wonderfully spongy, fermented bread that is a cross between a crumpet and a pancake and the size of a wide circular tray. It's baked on a large, flat griddle and almost every meal is served on it, the round flatbread working as an edible plate – the diner breaks off pieces of the bread to scoop up meat or vegetable stews.

One of the dishes I love is an Ethiopian slow-cooked stew called a *wat*. It starts with many kilograms of diced onions (chopping these is a tearjerker!) that are slowly cooked in a heavy-based pot for more than an hour.

No oil or fat is used to start the cooking process and what you end up with is a sweet, dark base of onion to which lots of the popular *berbere* spice is added, as well as other spices and meat or vegetables. The resulting stew is spicy and delicious, especially served with *injera*.

Another great Ethiopian tradition is the coffee ceremony, which is a crucial part of social and cultural life there – this is fitting, perhaps, as coffee was first discovered growing wild in Ethiopia centuries ago. Surprisingly, the green coffee beans are only roasted just before they're used. Enough beans for each pot are poured into a small



## ESSENTIAL FLAVOURS

#### AFRICAN BASIL

A herb with a warm, sweet, camphorlike scent and a gentle taste with a hint of clove. This is used in many recipes from the Horn of Africa. The dried leaves and seeds are ground for use in spice mixes.

#### AFRICAN MINT (EFIRI)

Found in some plant nurseries and easy to cultivate, this has a distinctive fresh flavour.

#### BERBERE

A hot chilli and spice mix used widely in stews and sprinkled on top of many dishes for garnish and extra kick. Brick-red in colour, the mix usually includes red chillies, *timiz* (long peppers), cardamom, cumin, fenugreek, ginger, cloves, nutmeg, coriander (cilantro), allspice, rue berries and ajowan (a spice known as bishop's weed). Freshly ground then sun dried, *berbere* is best stored in an airtight container and used within six weeks. For Ethiopians and Eritreans, this is red gold! It is sold in African grocery stores and specialty spice shops.

#### BROWN CARDAMOM

Larger and more fibrous than green cardamom, these pods have a camphor-like aroma and smoky flavour. They are used in stews and spice mixes in the Horn of Africa.

#### NIGELLA SEEDS

When crushed these little black seeds smell a little like oregano. Their slight bitterness and fragrant aroma is useful in stews.

#### NITER KIBBEH

Spiced clarified butter that is usually made in large quantities and kept for daily use. Ingredients include cardamom, fenugreek and nigella seeds. Some recipes also add garlic, ginger, finely chopped onion, turmeric, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon sticks, fennel seeds and *korseret* (a herb native to Ethiopia with a minty thyme flavour). While often homemade, *niter kibbeh* can be purchased from African grocery stores.

#### RED PALM-FRUIT OIL

Oil extracted from the fruit of the African oil palm. Not to be confused with palm-kernel oil. Native to Africa, red palm-fruit oil has long been appreciated as an excellent base for cooking.







Pearl meat has long been prized in Broome – both because it can fetch a good price in Asia and southern Australia, and also because of its eating. It’s the adductor muscle of the large *pinctada maxima* pearl oyster that works hard to open and close. After tenderising, it works beautifully sashimi-style mixed with soy or lime dressing (Neville gives two recipes here, so you can choose which one you like best). Abalone or scallops can be used in place of pearl meat.

# PEARL-MEAT APPETISERS

from Neville Poelina

Tenderise the pearl meat by placing each piece on a chopping board and whacking with a mallet or rolling pin about 10 times. Cut the pearl meat into thin strips.

Combine the chosen dressing ingredients in a bowl. Add the pearl meat and toss to coat, then serve. Or if preferred, you can chill the mixture in the refrigerator for a few hours before serving.

## SERVES 6 AS AN ENTREE

meat from 4-5 pearl oysters

### SOY DRESSING

- 80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) dark soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon raw (demerara) sugar
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped ginger
- 1 long red chilli, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 long green chilli, seeded and finely chopped

### LIME DRESSING

- juice of 2 limes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped ginger
- 1 long red chilli, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 long green chilli, seeded and finely chopped

This dish of the freshest fish, thinly sliced and quickly marinated, is best with a Broome sunset. The word ‘susame’ is the Broome version of ‘sashimi’ – a style of eating raw fish that came to Broome with the Japanese pearl divers. Alan likes to use Broome’s very own variety of chilli in the marinade – the ‘Broome chilli’, which is medium-sized with a characteristically snubbed nose and good heat, but other chillies will do.

# SUSAME

from Alan Pigram

Place all the ingredients in a bowl and toss to coat the fish. Stand for 10 minutes or until the fish begins to turn opaque, then serve.

## SERVES 8-10

- 800 g (1 lb 12 oz) very fresh fish fillets (kingfish, queenfish or threadfin salmon work well), skin and bones removed, finely sliced
- ½ lemon, finely sliced
- ½ onion, finely sliced
- 1 Broome chilli or any long green chilli, seeded and finely sliced

- 1 long red chilli, seeded and finely sliced
- 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) brown vinegar
- 1 tablespoon light soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon dark soy sauce





Just-caught mud crab in the skilled hands of legendary Darwin chef Jimmy Shu – what could be better! This is a clever and delicious way of serving one of the Top End’s great delicacies and it opened my eyes to young ginger as a beautiful fresh ingredient. Egg whites add a silken texture and restaurant-like finish.

# STEAMED MUD CRAB WITH EGG WHITE, YOUNG GINGER AND RICE WINE

from Jimmy Shu

Put the crabs to sleep by freezing them for 1–2 hours. Pull off their top shells and remove the grey gills. Use a sharp knife to cut the crabs in half through the middle. Clean the halves. Cut each half in two. Crack the claws in a few places with the back of a knife.

Place the crab pieces in a bowl that will fit inside your steamer. Sprinkle the crab with the ginger and drizzle with the rice wine and soy sauce. Place the bowl inside the steamer, cover with the lid and steam for 10 minutes.

Drizzle the egg whites over the crabs and continue to steam for another 5 minutes. By this time, the crabs should be cooked through with their flesh opaque, but if not, you can steam for a few more minutes.

While the crab is steaming, mix some black vinegar in a bowl with extra ginger as a dipping sauce.

To serve, add another splash of rice wine and soy sauce to the crab and garnish with coriander and whole chillies. Serve with the vinegar and ginger.

SERVES 4

- 2 mud crabs

4 cm (1½ in) piece of young ginger, finely julienned, plus extra to serve

1 tablespoon rice wine, plus extra to serve
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce, plus extra to serve

2 egg whites

Chinese black vinegar

coriander (cilantro) leaves

red chillies

Drongo - someone who ‘has roos in the top paddock’.  
Munjung - a bit of a drongo, but a nice sort of a drongo.







Darwin-based Danny Yeum is one of the fastest wok chefs I've ever seen, a true professional capturing the power of the roaring gas to create magic in minutes. Here he gives us his recipe for toffee bananas, which look so good they could be a magic trick.

# TOFFEE BANANAS

from Danny Yeum

Combine the flours in a bowl and add the water and oil, whisking to a smooth batter.

Peel the bananas and cut each diagonally into 4 pieces. Dust the pieces in cornflour.

Put the sugar in a small saucepan and set aside without turning on the heat.

Heat the oil in a wok or saucepan until very hot. Roll the banana pieces in the batter and carefully add to the hot oil, frying until golden brown. Drain on paper towel.

Quickly place the sugar over medium heat. Cook without stirring, but shaking the saucepan if necessary, until the sugar melts and forms a caramel. While the sugar is cooking, get a small bowl of water ready with ice cubes in it.

Roll a piece of fried banana in the toffee, then plunge it into the iced water for a few seconds to harden the toffee, then drain. Repeat with the remaining banana pieces.

Sprinkle the bananas with sesame seeds. Garnish with mint and serve with ice-cream.

## SERVES 4

50 g (1¾ oz/½ cup) self-raising flour

25 g (1 oz) cornflour (cornstarch), plus extra for dusting

90 ml (3 floz) water

a few drops of vegetable oil, plus extra for deep-frying

2 bananas  
120 g (4 oz) sugar  
sesame seeds

## TO SERVE

mint leaves  
ice-cream



*Gammin* - the opposite to 'fair dinkum', meaning you're playing with a person, teasing them.



This national dish is made from various kinds of beef and pork, which are slow-cooked with black beans then served with crunchy *farofa*. The smoked and cured meats are available from Spanish, Portuguese and South American delis. When the *feijoada* is nearly ready, be careful not to use a fork or spoon (or in fact any metal utensil) in the dish. This is said to spoil the flavour and turn the dish sour.

# FEIJOADA

from Edna Barzel

Place the beans, all the meat, chillies, bay leaves and half the garlic in a medium-sized pot (or pressure cooker) and season with salt. Add enough water to just cover. Bring to the boil then simmer, covered with a lid, for about 2 hours.

Sauté the onion and remaining garlic in olive oil in a separate frying pan. Once softened, add to the *feijoada*. Cook for another 15 minutes.

To make the *farofa*, melt the butter in a large frying pan and add the onion and bacon. Cook until the onion is soft, then add the cassava flour a little at a time until incorporated. Taste and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a serving bowl and garnish with the parsley and spring onion.

Serve the *feijoada* with sliced orange or pineapple and the *farofa* on the side.

## SERVES 4-6

- 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) black turtle beans, rinsed
- 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) *chouriço* sausage, diced
- 750 g (1 lb 11 oz) smoked beef ribs, divided into pieces
- thick piece of bacon or speck (about 250 g/9 oz), diced
- 400 g (14 oz) smoked pork loin, diced
- 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) *carne seca* (dried beef), diced and soaked in cold water for a few hours
- small red chillies to taste
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- salt

- 1 onion, finely chopped
- olive oil
- sliced orange or pineapple to serve

## FAROFA

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 onion, diced
- 250 g (9 oz) bacon, diced
- 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) toasted cassava (manioc) flour
- salt and pepper
- 3 flat-leaf (Italian) parsley sprigs, chopped
- 3 spring onions (scallions), chopped



FEIJOADA

‘To compliment the chef say  
“*Que comida deliciosa!*”  
(What delicious food!)’