



# FEEDING BODY AND SOUL

Robin Van Creveld  
believes there is powerful  
nourishment in shared food

**This summer I've been focusing on a new project: Lewes Community Kitchen.** With the help of a few friends and a lot of faith and hard work, we've transformed a grotty, semi-industrial space into a multi-purpose food, enterprise, family and community hub. The kitchen hosts a cookery school, a caterer, an artisan bakery, and community bread and lunch clubs. This plan's been on the back burner for many years and the inspiration for it comes from a story I'd like to share:

On the winding path of self-discovery, meandering down a busy street in Delhi, I met an old friend who knew a place he said transformed lives. He was leaving on the evening train and invited me to join him. Putting my faith in the serendipity of the road, and with no other information but the name of a town in a far-off Western state, I went directly to the station to procure a ticket. We travelled for two days through dusty villages, scrubby deserts and industrial wastelands and arrived with the sunrise on the shores of the Arabian Gulf. We hitched a lift on the back of a truck, which deposited us at the gates of very large compound surrounded by high whitewashed walls festooned with bougainvillea. The scent of chilli and sandalwood perfumed the air as the day shed its dawn cloak.

The gatekeeper ushered us inside, plied us with strong buffalo-milk chai sweetened with jaggery, and scooted off to find Mataji, the mother of this ashram. The compound, roughly the size of a football pitch, was orientated around a huge Bodhi tree, entwined with creepers and harbouring in its buttresses an ancient statue of the ape god Hanuman. In its shadow, a cobbled terrace led to an open-sided hall and a large outdoor kitchen bustling with activity as a brigade of six young women cooked and sang with equal fervour. A powerfully built woman, covered in ash, clothed in homespun cotton, sporting a crown of dreadlocks piled high upon her head, strode down to the kitchen, delegating tasks in three languages to a small entourage of men who followed in her

wake. Mataji welcomed us briskly and immediately set me to work chopping vegetables under the Bodhi tree.

Mataji came to India from France in the 1960s and never left. She founded the ashram on the site of an ancient temple in the 1980s and has looked after the spiritual and material needs of the local community since then. Every morning hundreds of people turned up at the ashram seeking help. She would listen to them, offer counsel, treat minor wounds and administer Ayurvedic and Western medicines. At midday, ashram residents and day visitors would sit in the hall and share lunch served on leaf plates. Twice a week hundreds of low-caste families came from miles around to a feast that was laid out all around the compound. Feeding people was the bedrock of the ashram. Mataji would say: "It is hard to believe in god when your stomach is empty." The food was, without exception, the most exquisite I've ever eaten. Cooked with love and devotion, it fed both body and soul.

The time I spent in this incredible sanctuary inexorably shaped my life's course. I saw the potential one person has to help others transform their lives. I experienced the profound effects good food has on individuals and the way it seamlessly binds communities. I came to the realisation that food prepared and shared with loving energy and offered for spiritual or social benefits rather than commercial aims creates a synergy that provides deep and lasting nourishment. I feel safe, content and valued when I'm fed in this way. When I share food with others with this intention, I feel aligned with my true self. Feeding others actively affirms and celebrates the lives we share. It also helps make friends and influence people.

Lewes Community Kitchen is another step in the actualisation of dreams that set seed while I was living in Mataji's ashram. Jai Hanuman. The recipes that follow are easy to produce in bulk, perfect for feeding the masses who take refuge with you this summer. >



# recipes

## Quinoa tabbouleh

> This delicious salad is based on Lebanese tabbouleh, which is often made with bulgur or cracked wheat. I like to make mine with quinoa as it is gluten-free and high in protein. The fruit, vegetables and fresh herbs I've used are interchangeable with whatever you have to hand, but aim for a fresh and sweet salad with lots of crunchy texture.

*Serves 8*

250g/8 oz quinoa  
500ml/1 pt boiling vegetable stock  
1 big bunch of flat or curly leaf parsley  
1 small bunch of fresh mint  
½ cucumber, peeled and cut into small cubes  
1 red pepper, finely diced  
100g/4 oz dried apricots, thinly sliced  
juice of 1 lemon and 1 orange  
2 tbsp olive oil  
2 tbsp toasted sesame seeds  
4 spring onions, finely sliced  
salt and pepper to taste

1. Dry roast the quinoa in a pot until it is a shade darker.
2. Pour over the boiling vegetable stock and bring to a boil. Cover with a tightly fitting lid and simmer for 15 minutes. Remove the lid, fluff up the grain with a fork and allow it to cool slightly.
3. Wash and drain the fresh herbs. Dry them in a salad spinner or press them dry with a clean tea towel.
4. Chop all of the herbs as finely as you can and mix together with the quinoa.
5. Add the cucumber, red pepper, apricots, lemon and orange juice and olive oil. Mix well and season to taste with salt and pepper.
6. Allow the salad to rest for a few minutes before serving garnished with toasted sesame seeds and sliced spring onions.



## Broad bean, beetroot and feta salad

A quick salad for the summer that marries the deep earthy flavours of beetroot with the succulent freshness of young broad beans and the salty creaminess of feta cheese. This salad looks as beautiful as it tastes and is packed with antioxidants, vitamins B and C, protein, calcium and other minerals. Broad beans also contain levodopa, a chemical the body uses to produce dopamine, which helps our nervous system to function well. So eat broad beans and be happy!

*Serves 8*

500g/8 oz freshly shelled or frozen young broad beans  
500g/8 oz pre-cooked beetroot, cut into small cubes  
1 small red onion, finely sliced  
2 cloves of garlic  
250ml/½ pt yoghurt  
½ tsp salt  
4 tbsp chopped fresh mint or 1 tbsp dried mint  
100g/4 oz low-fat feta cheese  
whole mint leaves

1. Steam the broad beans until just tender.
2. Refresh in cold water, drain and mix together with the beetroot and red onion.
3. For the dressing, chop or mash the garlic and mix with the yoghurt, salt and mint.
4. Mix the dressing with the salad and transfer to a serving dish.
5. Crumble the feta on top of the salad and garnish with some whole mint leaves.

## Roasted vegetable hummus

This is a quirky take on hummus, enriched with roasted vegetables. I like to make three separate batches with distinct characters and colours and then serve them all on one plate like a three-colour flag.

Makes about 1kg/2 lb of hummus

2 handfuls each of butternut squash, beetroot and red onion, peeled and cut into chunks  
2 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for roasting and serving  
2 x 400g/14 oz tins of chickpeas, drained and rinsed  
6 tbsp tahini (sesame paste)  
2 cloves of garlic, chopped  
1 tsp salt  
juice of 3 lemons  
12 tbsp water  
1 tsp smoked paprika, plus a little for serving  
1 tsp cumin  
½ tsp chilli powder

1. Heat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6. Dress the vegetables separately in olive oil and place them on one or two baking sheets, separated by foil. Roast for about 25 minutes or until soft and starting to char at the edges. Take out a few pieces of each roasted vegetable for serving.
2. Set a handful of chickpeas aside, then blend the rest with the tahini, 2 tbsp olive oil, garlic, salt and lemon juice, adding water a little at a time until you have a smooth basic hummus.
3. Divide the hummus into three equal portions and blend the roast squash and paprika into one, the beetroot and cumin into the second, and the onion and chilli into the third.
4. Serve in a style of your choice with the extra vegetables and chickpeas scattered over, dressed with more olive oil and a dusting of paprika.



## Cheese bread

This recipe is inspired by *khachapuri*, traditional yeasted bread from Georgia – an enriched cheese-filled flatbread baked either in rounds or as boat-shaped loaves. I stuff mine with mozzarella and cheddar cheese flavoured with mint and/or garlic.

Makes one very large flatbread or several smaller ones

500g/8 oz plain flour  
2 eggs, beaten  
225ml/½ pt warm milk or water  
1 tsp/5g instant yeast  
1 tsp/5g salt  
100g/4 oz mozzarella cheese, drained and grated  
100g/4 oz cheddar cheese, grated  
1 tsp dried mint  
1 clove chopped garlic  
1 tbsp butter

1. In a good-sized bowl mix together the flour, eggs, milk or water, yeast and salt to form a dough.
2. Knead the dough on a very lightly dusted surface until smooth and glutinous with a glossy look and feel.
3. Place the dough back into a clean, oiled bowl and cover with a damp cloth or plastic. Leave to rise in a warm environment for up to 2 hours or until it has doubled in size.
4. Scoop the dough out onto a floured work surface and knead lightly. Work it into a ball and then roll it out to make disc about 25cm in diameter.
5. Mix the cheeses together with the mint and garlic and squash them into a tight ball. Place this in the middle of the dough. Gather the dough up around the ball of cheese and crimp the edges closed.
6. Turn this over so that the seal is underneath and start to roll or push it into a flat disc of about 25cm again, distributing the cheese evenly.
7. Transfer to a baking sheet and allow to prove for up to an hour, then slash an 'X' in the dough to just expose the cheese.
8. Bake for 15 minutes and take a peek. It may need up to 10 minutes more, depending on how thinly you rolled it out and the quirks of your oven. ●

**Robin Van Creveld** is a chef, educator, social activist and entrepreneur. He lives in Sussex and is married to the artist Riga Forbes. When he is not parenting Anoushka, aged 6, and Orlando, aged 2, he runs [www.communitychef.org.uk](http://www.communitychef.org.uk). [www.facebook.com/pages/Lewes-Community-Kitchen/156796231086328](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Lewes-Community-Kitchen/156796231086328)