



A TASTE OF UTOPIA

ROBIN VAN CREVELD SHARES HIS VISION OF LOCAL FOOD THAT HEALS AND BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

I was asked recently if I have a vision of Utopia – a very loaded question to tackle in front of a large audience. My considered initial reply was simply that Utopia is actually a state of mind that is contingent upon our ability to be with what is while working towards what could be.

I've said before in this column that I'm an unashamed optimist, a seemingly rare thing in this day and age, but I fully believe that whatever happens is okay so long as we as individuals or a species take responsibility for the choices we make and the things we do. If we are well informed and emotionally honest, then coming to a place of peace with the enormity of the issues facing our planet is that much easier. Feminist activist Gloria Steinem once said: "The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off."

Perhaps I'm an angry optimist who knows too much, but having seen the scale of the situation we face, I'm fully in favour of making our present situation better, and when it comes to food in my utopian world,

- There is more than enough food for everyone
- The bulk of our food is produced locally by people we trust
- Community-supported enterprises are a real alternative to multinational monoliths
- Our food heals rather than harms us
- We regularly share food with people outside our nuclear units
- Fruit trees line the streets, and our children cook the curriculum

This issue's recipes carry a flavour of this vision. Superfoods that are seasonal, affordable and easy to source, catch or forage. >

recipes

> Harvest gazpacho

Gazpacho is a traditional cold summer soup from Andalusia. Often described as a liquid salad, gazpacho descends from an ancient Roman concoction based on a combination of stale bread, garlic, olive oil, salt and vinegar. People often think of it as a summer dish, but I love it in the autumn when there is an abundance of fresh vital produce to choose from. As with most simple dishes, there is no definitive recipe, so improvise around what you have in your garden or fridge.

Serves 4–6

500ml tomato juice (chilled or even slightly frozen)
3 ripe tomatoes, finely chopped (if you have the time and inclination you can de-skin these)
1 red onion, finely chopped
1 small courgette or cucumber, finely chopped
1 sweet red or green pepper, seeded and chopped
2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
4 tbsp red wine or sherry vinegar
4 tbsp olive oil
1 tsp caster sugar (optional)
salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
6 slices of white or wholemeal bread
fresh basil for garnishing

1. Place all the ingredients except the bread, basil and seasoning in a blender.
2. Blend to the consistency you like. I prefer this soup still reasonably chunky.
3. Add salt and pepper to taste and chill for a minimum of 15 minutes before serving.
4. If you find the soup is very acidic, add a teaspoon of caster sugar to take the edge off.
5. To serve, tear the bread into small pieces and place in the bottom of individual bowls, spoon the gazpacho over the bread, and garnish with basil leaves.

Devilled mackerel with apple and beetroot salad

The term 'devilled' has drifted out of fashion but our love of hot, spicy, sour flavours has flourished and this treatment works really well with rich, oily mackerel. This is a simple, easy and very tasty dish; an even quicker version could be made with smoked mackerel with spices added to the dressing. Fresh mackerel are cheap and abundant from early summer through to late October. They are very easy to catch and are one of the best and most sustainable sources of omega oils and protein.

Serves 4–6

4 fresh mackerel, cleaned and gutted (ensure they are fresh and firm before buying them)
juice of 1 lime



1 tsp ground cayenne pepper
1 tsp ground black pepper
½ tsp smoked paprika
½ tsp salt
4 medium beetroot, ready cooked
3 sharp dessert apples such as Cox or Granny Smith
2 tsp Dijon mustard
1 tbsp cider vinegar
3 tbsp olive oil
a few handfuls of salad herbs like rocket, watercress or flat-leaf parsley



1. Fillet the mackerel by scoring down each side of the backbone with a very sharp knife then laying the fish on its side and carefully cutting from behind the gills to the tail, keeping the knife flat against the spine. Remove any remaining bones from the fillets. If this all seems daunting just ask your fishmonger to do it for you.
2. Score the skin of the mackerel with shallow cuts 1–2cm apart.
3. Brush with the lime juice, then mix the spices and salt together and gently rub in.
4. While the fish marinates, prepare the salad. Slice the beetroots into fine segments, then core and halve the apples and cut them into fine slices.
5. Drizzle the mackerel with a little of the oil and grill skin-side up for 4–5 minutes until crispy; turn and grill for another couple of minutes.
6. Whisk the mustard, vinegar and olive oil together in a salad bowl, add all the salad ingredients and toss together, seasoning to taste.
7. Serve with bread.

Roasted cauliflower with parsley pesto

People often associate cauliflower with winter, heavy cheesy sauces and bad school dinners. This dish shows a more delicate side of cauliflower and is delicious hot or as a salad. My favourite cauliflowers are Purple Graffiti or Violet Queen, both of which have a vivid purple colour, a subtle flavour and firm flesh. The roasted cauliflower is uplifted by the fresh and earthy flavour of the parsley, with the pungency of the garlic and the nutty sweetness of the seeds coming through to harmonise the flavours.

Serves 4–6

- 1 large cauliflower of your choice, broken into florets
- 2 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1 large bunch of parsley (about 100g)
- 25g sunflower seeds
- 2–4 tbsp water
- 2 cloves garlic
- 25g grated strong cheese like mature cheddar or Parmesan (optional)
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- salt and pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C.
2. Prepare the cauliflower, place in a large baking tray and season with salt and pepper.
3. In a small saucepan heat the sunflower oil until it starts to shimmer and smoke a little.
4. Pour the oil over the cauliflower, give the tray a shake to coat it evenly in the hot oil and roast in the oven for 20–25 minutes until just soft and slightly charred on the edges.
5. For the pesto, wash and dry the parsley. Remove any very woody stems and rough chop it to make it easier to blend.
6. Toast the sunflower seeds in a dry pan or under a grill until they are a shade or two darker. Allow them to cool.
7. Place the parsley and sunflower seeds with the rest of the ingredients apart from the olive oil in a food processor and start to blend. Pour the oil in, a little at a time, until the pesto has emulsified. You can leave the water out, but I find that it helps to make a smooth paste. Add salt and pepper to taste.
8. Mix most of the pesto with the roasted cauliflower and serve with the remaining pesto on top as a garnish.

Hazelnut granola

I grew up eating my mum's homemade granola – a roasted, toasted muesli-like concoction that always makes me feel happy. It's full of complex carbohydrates, tryptophan, vitamin B and folic acid, all of which help us to produce neurotransmitters like serotonin, which do indeed promote a feeling of wellbeing and happiness.

- 2 tbsp sunflower oil
- 2 tbsp honey
- 2 tbsp apple juice concentrate
- 250g jumbo oats
- 125g barley flakes
- 125g wheat or spelt flakes
- 100g chopped hazelnuts
- 100g pumpkin seeds
- 100g sunflower seeds
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- a pinch of salt

1. Preheat the oven to about 125°C. Warm the oil, honey and apple juice concentrate in a large saucepan over a gentle heat, just long enough to get them evenly mixed, but without boiling.
2. Turn off the heat, add the oats and other flakes, hazelnuts, seeds, cinnamon and a pinch of salt and stir well.
3. Line a baking tray with baking parchment, spread with the granola and bake for 1 hour.
4. Give the mixture a good stir after 20 minutes and again after a further 20 minutes.
5. The granola should be golden brown. Cool on the tray, stirring occasionally to break up big clumps.
6. Add dried fruit if you like and store the granola in an airtight container to keep it fresh and crunchy. ●

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. www.facebook.com/pages/Lewes-Community-Kitchen/156796231086328