



BENTO FOR BUSY BARRISTERS



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INDEX

WHY BENTO?	3
BREAKFASTS	4
WALNUT SCONES	4
BLUEBERRY AND LEMON MUFFINS	4
PEANUT BUTTER PECAN FAT BOMBS	5
COCONUT BERRY BOMBS	5
FRESH FRUIT AND NUTS	5
RASPBERRY SOUR CREAM MUFFINS	6
PICKLES	7
JAPANESE PICKLES	7
KACHUMBER	7
PAPRIKA ONION RELISH	8
ONION RELISH TOO	8
JOHN'S CUCUMBER PICKLE	8
MANGO & PINEAPPLE RELISH	9
EGGS	10
TOMATO SCRAMBLED EGGS	10
EGG MAYONNAISE	10
DEVILLED EGGS	11
EGG & HAM SALAD	11
MINI-QUICHES	12
CHICKEN	13
CHICKEN PAPRIKA STEW	13
BUTTER CHICKEN	13
POPCORN CHICKEN	14
SAUCE	14
CHICKEN	14
MARMALADE CHICKEN	15
TANDOORI CHICKEN	15
CURRY CHICKEN SALAD	16
HERBED CHICKEN SALAD	16
MEAT	17
PEPPER STEAK BITES	17
MUSHROOM AND SAUSAGE HASH	17
BEEF TATAKI	18

MEATBALLS WITH BACON	18
KOREAN STYLE SIMMERED BEEF	18
<u>FISH & SEAFOOD.....</u>	19
BACON WRAPPED PRAWNS	19
TOMATO & CORIANDER SAUTEED PRAWNS.....	19
CRAB SALAD STUFFED TOMATOES.....	19
PETER’S PRAWN COCKTAIL	20
MARIE ROSE SAUCE	20
CORIANDER PRAWNS [PRAWN BHARTA].....	20
POTTED SHRIMPS.....	21
<u>VEGETARIAN.....</u>	22
SPICY BROCCOLI FLORETS.....	22
BROCCOLI WITH SESAME SEEDS	22
BROCCOLI SALAD WITH ALMONDS	22
COURGETTE FRITTERS.....	23
MISO CARROTS	23
GUJERATI CARROT SALAD	23
CRUNCHY INDIAN SLAW.....	24
TOMATO SALAD.....	24
TOMATO AND CHICKPEA SALAD	24
ROASTED PEPPERS WITH SPICES	25
GUJARATI GREEN BEANS.....	25
SPICED CHICKPEAS.....	26
EDGY PEAS	27
MANGO SALAD	27
<u>SAMOSAS, BHAJIS ETC.....</u>	28
RICE RAPPER SAMOSA.....	28
VEGETABLE FILLING	28
BAKED BHAJIS	28
CHICKPEA PANCAKES WITH PANEER + LIME DRESSING	29
<u>FRUIT & NUTS</u>	30
MIXED NUTS.....	30
TEA-INFUSED APRICOTS	30
ORANGE & NUT SALAD	30
FRIED CASHEW	30
<u>NOT NECESSARILY BENTO!</u>	31
GOAN PRAWN CURRY	31
CHICKEN IN THE PICKLING STYLE	32

WHY BENTO?

A few years ago I got tired of trying to find food when out at work. This was partially driven by what has been described as my deranged metabolic system and partially because I was tired of spending a small fortune for food which could, and often did, make me ill.

Having lived half my life outside the United Kingdom, I have a fairly eclectic palate and over the years have developed quite a number of recipes, or swiped them from various books, which have been adapted to my dietary difficulties together with the dietary difficulties and preferences of my family. Practically everything in this book is gluten-free, most of it is dairy free, a lot of it is vegetarian and some of it is vegan or can easily be made so.

As for “Why Bento?”, well I lived in Japan for seven years and a Japanese Bento Box is absolutely the best way to carry your lunch around with you. You can find wonderful selections on line. I have two cylindrical Bento Boxes, so that I can have one in the dishwasher and one to use. Each holds up to four different dishes in three separate containers and keeps them well chilled [they will keep things hot as well, but that would require me to heat things up in the morning. Not going to happen!]. They come in a handy bag with either chopsticks or a “spork” and the bag will also fit a small thermos or soft drink can.

A good Bento will have a mixture of textures and tastes, so I make up to seven different dishes for the coming week in advance (some of them literally take five minutes), usually on Sunday watching rubbish TV, and then just fill the available Bento Box the night before. I hasten to add that I have neither the time nor the ability to make the beautiful Bento produced by many Japanese housewives and mothers but even so I am definitely quite proud of myself.

The interesting thing has been that not only have I saved quite a lot of money, and prevented myself from the frequent mysterious poisonings caused by purchasing food from random outlets, but I have also lost quite a lot of weight without even trying. And provided the Bento Box is filled with something, it always seems to be enough to keep me going.

BREAKFASTS

WALNUT SCONES

“A slightly stodgy, filling and low-carb breakfast which you can make dairy free as well, just substitute a plant-based milk”

- 250g almond flour
- 100g chopped walnuts
- 50g butter or veggie marge
- 100 ml milk
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp baking powder

Mix everything except walnuts to a dough. Fold in the nuts.

Line baking sheet with parchment and spread dough evenly into it. Bake at 200° F for 20 mins.

Cut into squares.

BLUEBERRY AND LEMON MUFFINS

“My absolutely go-to breakfast. Two of these with a handful of berries keeps you going all morning. Gluten-free, low-carb and delicious ..”

- 1 cup double cream
- 2 eggs
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon lemon zest
- ¼ cup Splenda (or touch of honey)
- 2 cups almond flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- Pinch salt
- ½ cup fresh or frozen blueberries (or raspberries, which work just as well. Or both).

Combine eggs, cream, vanilla, lemon zest, and Splenda/honey in bowl and mix well. Stir in almond flour and baking soda. Mix very well again. Stir in blueberries. Spoon batter into 12 muffin cups. Bake at 350° F for 20-30 minutes until well risen and brown.

PEANUT BUTTER PECAN FAT BOMBS

“Absolutely delicious but be careful how many of these you eat. They can have a very interesting effect on your digestive system.”

- ½ cup peanut butter
- ½ cup coconut oil
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tbsp vanilla syrup (or honey)
- 1 cup pecans

Put peanut butter and coconut oil into bowl and microwave in 30 second bursts, stirring between, until mixture is smooth. Add vanilla, syrup/honey and pecans and stir. Refrigerate in square tin or smaller moulds. Keep in fridge as they become soft very quickly at room temperature.

COCONUT BERRY BOMBS

“See comment above re ingestion! Less sweet and a bit like coconut ice.”

- 1 cup coconut butter
- 1 cup coconut oil
- ½ cup fresh or frozen fruit (raspberries, blackberries, blue berries);
- ½ teaspoon sweetener
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Put coconut oil and butter and frozen fruit (if used) in a pan and heat until soft and blended. Put in blender with remaining ingredients (including fresh fruit) and whizz. Spread into a greaseproof-paper lined tin and chill for an hour or more. Cut into squares.

FRESH FRUIT AND NUTS

Any combination really, but try banana and pecans or orange and walnut, each with a squeeze of lemon or lime juice.

RASPBERRY SOUR CREAM MUFFINS

“A slightly more sophisticated take on the muffin front and not too sweet”

- 2 cups almond flour
- ¼ cup Splenda (or touch of honey)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 pinch salt
- 1 cup sour cream
- 3 eggs
- ¼ cup melted butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup fresh raspberries

Combine almond flour, Splenda (if used), baking soda and salt together. Then stir in all the other ingredients (including honey) but not raspberries and mix well. Fold in raspberries and place in 12 paper cups. Bake @ 350F for 20-30 until well risen and golden brown.

PICKLES

JAPANESE PICKLES

“a reminder of my years in Japan. Easy to make, lasts for at least a week in the fridge and really delicious!”

- 2 cups shredded cabbage
- Dried red chillies (3 whole or 1 tablespoon flakes)
- 1 cup shredded carrot
- 1 cup shredded cucumber
- 1 or 2 finely chopped spring onions
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- Small piece ginger, shredded finely
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ cup rice vinegar
- Dashi stock granules (if you can find them. It works without).

Combine all veggies in a large bowl and add salt. Massage until they wilt. Add all remaining ingredients then place a small plate and weight on top, pressing down, and leave overnight. Drain and keep in fridge.

KACHUMBER

“ .. wonderfully fresh and zingy”

- 2 large ripe tomatoes, chopped
- 200g cucumber, chopped
- 4 small radishes, trimmed and finely chopped
- ⅓ - ½ small red onion, finally chopped
- Large handful chopped coriander
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon roasted ground cumin seeds
- 1 tbsp dried mint (I have used fresh as well. Works fine).
- Salt, pepper.

Dry fry the cumin seeds in a pan until they start to smell delicious and go slightly brown.

Mix everything together, adjust seasoning. Store in the fridge for up to five days (drain if the tomatoes/cucumbers are very juicy)

PAPRIKA ONION RELISH

“Very sparky! Great with cold meat or chopped finely and added to salad”

- 110g peeled onion
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 4 teaspoons lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon fragrant red paprika
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Slice onions crosswise very finely. Put in dish and stir in all other ingredients. Allow to marinate for at least 30 mins. Keeps in fridge for at least a week.

ONION RELISH TOO

“Less spicy but adds a lovely touch to almost any salad, particularly the tomato and chickpea, or good on its own to add crunch”.

- Small red or white onion
- Lime or lemon juice
- Salt and pepper
- Sugar

Cut onion into half and slice crosswise very finely. Add sufficient lemon or lime juice to coat the onion (around 1-2 tablespoons) and stir well. Add salt and pepper and a large pinch of sugar. Stir again. Leave to stand for at least 15 minutes before using. Keeps well in fridge for at least a week.

JOHN’S CUCUMBER PICKLE

“A slightly cheeky take on a German cucumber salad. Lovely on its own or with cold meat or fish.”

- 1 small cucumber
- ½ small onion
- About 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- Salt to taste
- 1 tablespoons sugar

Peel cucumber and slice across very finely. Put in a colander and add a teaspoon of salt. Mix and leave to drain for at least an hour. Squeeze gently to get rid of more liquid. Cut the onion in quarters and slice very finely across. Add other ingredients, taste for salt and add if needed (be careful) and chill for at least 3 hours, preferably overnight, in a sealed container.

MANGO & PINEAPPLE RELISH

“Adapted from an old Kenyan recipe and reminds me of home.”

- Fresh mango
- Tinned or fresh pineapple chunks
- Optional: avocado
- Red and/or green fresh chilli
- Spring onion
- Garlic
- Fresh coriander
- Vegetable oil
- Lemon juice
- Salt & Black Pepper

Chop mango into small chunks. Slice or cut pineapple into small chunks. Peel and cut avocado into small chunks. Slice and finely chop chillies, spring onions, garlic and coriander. Mix everything together. Beat oil and lemon juice with salt and pepper and add. Toss and chill. Keeps well for up to 3 days.

EGGS

TOMATO SCRAMBLED EGGS

“Very simple and easy. Good cold in a lunchbox or hot for breakfast.”

- 6 beaten eggs
- 1 tablespoon chopped chives
- 1 ripe tomato, diced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper

Heat oil in frying pan and cook tomatoes for 2 mins. Mix eggs with chives, season and pour over the tomatoes. Cook for ten minutes, stirring. Chill.

EGG MAYONNAISE

“Classic but delicious, and very low in carbs!”

- Six Hard Boiled eggs, peeled
- Six tablespoons of Hellman’s mayonnaise
- 1-3 teaspoons of Dijon mustard (do NOT replace with English which is much too hot [and contains gluten in its ready-made state], but you can use a grain mustard if you don’t mind the texture)
- About a tablespoon of lemon juice
- Drops of Tabasco to taste
- Salt and pepper

Mix the mayonnaise, mustard to taste and lemon juice thoroughly. Add drops of Tabasco depending on how spicy you like it (be careful, Tabasco does have a habit of becoming suddenly overwhelming). Add salt and black pepper carefully (you should not need much, if any).

Chop the eggs roughly (use an egg mandolin if you have one handy). Add them to the mixture very carefully. Do not over mix. Chill. Keeps for at least five days in an airtight container.

DEVILLED EGGS.

“You can devil these as much as you like. Low calorie, low carb and delicious!”

- Six hard boiled eggs, peeled.
- Hellman’s mayonnaise
- 1-3 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1-3 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1-3 teaspoons Worcester Sauce (most Worcester sauce is not gluten-free so be careful if you have gluten issues)
- Tabasco (if liked)
- Paprika

Slice eggs in half lengthways and carefully scrape yolks into a bowl. Mash them and add enough mayonnaise to bind (start with 1 tablespoon and add more at the end if needed). Add the mustard and lemon juice to taste and then carefully add Worcester sauce and drops of Tabasco, tasting carefully. Add more mayonnaise if needed to get to the right texture to fill the eggs. It should not be quite firm and not sloppy. Fill eggs using a teaspoon (or a squeezy bag thing if you can make it work). Sprinkle with paprika. Will keep easily for five days in an air-tight container in the fridge.

EGG & HAM SALAD

“A nice easy and tasty salad...”

- 6oz ham, cubed
- 4 sliced hard boiled eggs
- Shredded lettuce
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, sliced,
- ½ ripe avocado
- Dressing:
 - 2 tablespoons olive oil
 - 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
 - 2 tablespoons lemon juice
 - 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
 - 2 minced garlic cloves

Mix the dressing well. Combine everything else. Add the dressing. Store in the fridge but will only keep for about 2 days.

MINI-QUICHES

“Incredibly low carb and a good way of using up bits and pieces of veggies!”

- 12 large eggs
- ½ cup double cream
- ¼ cup milk
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped parsley
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped basil/coriander
- Vegetables (suggested selection but can replace):
 - 1 cup broccoli in tiny florets
 - 1 cup green pepper chopped small
 - 1 cup fresh spinach chopped
 - ¼- ½ cup finely diced onion or spring onions (fried until soft if preferred)
 - 1 jalapeno pepper or 1 green chilli finely chopped.
- Meat (optional):
 - Fully cooked bacon, ham etc cut very small

Heat oven to 375F [190C or bottom of the Aga on a rack with a cold shelf above] and oil a muffin or small Yorkshire puddings tin.

Whisk eggs, cream, milk, parsley and herbs with some salt and pepper.

Add the veggies and meat (if used) and stir.

Fill muffin tin to about ¼ from top.

Bake 20-25 minutes. Let cool in tin for 5 mins then remove and cool on wire rack. They will last for four or five days in an airtight container.

CHICKEN

CHICKEN PAPRIKA STEW

“Really lovely hot, but also works well cold as long as you skim it.”

- 6 chicken thighs
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon dried sage
- 4 ripe tomatoes, diced
- 4 basil leaves, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- Salt, pepper,
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil

Mix tomatoes, sage, basil, garlic, salt and pepper and put in deep baking dish. Place chicken over the top and season. Sprinkle with smoked paprika and coconut oil. Cook for 60 minutes or so until cooked through. Skim before serving or storing. Lasts 2-3 days in the fridge in an air-tight container.

BUTTER CHICKEN

“Very low carb, but watch the cholesterol if you have an issue. Tastes good though”

- 6 chicken thighs or drumsticks
- ½ cup softened butter
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- 1 tablespoon chopped dill
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 1 teaspoon salt

Mix butter with chopped herbs and salt. Lift skin partly off chicken and put butter under the skin. Cook at 350°F for 50-60 minutes. Eat hot or cold.

POPCORN CHICKEN

“Absolutely fab hot or cold. A bit of a faff to make but seriously worth it. Doubles up easily.”

Sauce

- 350 ml mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons roughly chopped fresh chilli
- 3 teaspoons dijon mustard
- Juice and zest of 1 lime
- 2 large spring onions
- 4 teaspoons chopped gherkins
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon (I have replaced this with fresh coriander or even a couple of teaspoons of dried tarragon).
- 100g finely chopped roasted red peppers from a jar [or tablespoon tomato paste]
- 4 tablespoons roughly chopped fresh parsley (don't panic if you don't have this. Still tastes great with dried parsley, or fresh or dried coriander or even basil. It is very forgiving).
- 4 teaspoons sugar
- Salt and Pepper

Chicken

- 2 skinned medium chicken breasts
- 3 tablespoons Coconut milk
- 2 medium eggs, lightly beaten
- Pinch dried chilli powder
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- 2 tablespoons + cornflour
- 6-8 tablespoons fine cornmeal/polenta
- Oil for deep frying

Mix all ingredients for sauce and chill.

Cut chicken into cubes no larger than 2 inches (I tend to do them smaller for lunchboxes).

Beat up coconut milk with eggs. Season with chilli powder, cumin and plenty of black pepper.

Place cornflour on plate and cornmeal on separate plate.

Coat chicken in cornflour. Roll in egg mixture. Drop into cornmeal and coat thoroughly (I find long chopsticks work best but otherwise try small tongs).

I use a wok, but a frying pan or deep fat fryer is fine. You will need at least 2 inches of oil. Heat until a piece of chicken dropped in sizzles a bit. Fry chicken in small batches until golden brown. Drain and sprinkle with salt. Keep warm if serving hot immediately. Serve with dipping sauce (which also goes well with chips). Keeps in fridge for four or five days.

MARMALADE CHICKEN

“So simple. So delicious. Hot or Cold.”

- 2 chicken breasts, diced into 1-2 inch cubes
- Salt, pepper
- 1 tablespoon of sake (or water with lemon juice and ½ teaspoon sugar)
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 2 tablespoons marmalade mixed with 1 ½ tablespoon light soy sauce (or 1 tablespoon tamari if you are gluten-free)

Dust chicken with salt & pepper. Heat oil and fry chicken until brown on all sides. Pour in sake/water mix, turn heat to low, cover and steam for 5-10 mins. Stir in marmalade mix and heat through. Cool and store.

TANDOORI CHICKEN

“Long time span to prepare, but really easy. Works well hot or cold. Miss out the colouring, use chicken breasts and call it chicken tikka!”

- 1 kg skinned chicken
- 1tspoon salt
- 1 lemon
- 425 ml yoghurt
- ½ medium onion peeled and quartered
- 1 peeled clove garlic
- ¾ in peeled ginger
- ½ hot green chilli
- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- Food colouring (yellow and red) if wanted.

Cut each leg into 2 and each breast into 4. Cut long slits in legs and into each breast. Sprinkle half salt and ¾ lemon juice on chicken and rub in. Combine yog, onion, garlic, ginger, chilli and garam masala and blend in liquidizer. Put through sieve, then marinate chicken over-night (at least). Remove chicken from marinade and brush with colour. Arrange in single layer and cook for 20-25 minutes at around 375F/190C. Good hot or cold. I have made this with coconut yoghurt to go dairy free.

CURRY CHICKEN SALAD

“works with all sorts of other things too – beef, lamb, cooked potatoes ..”

- 1.5 lb cooked shredded chicken
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- 1 lime, juiced
- 2 teaspoons chopped coriander
- Salt & pepper
- Lettuce leaves (optional).

Combine all ingredients in a bowl, season with salt and pepper. Serve plain or wrapped in lettuce leaves.

HERBED CHICKEN SALAD

“Also really easy and is lovely with cooked salmon too”

- 1lb cooked chicken
- 1 diced celery stalk
- 2 minced garlic cloves
- 2 tablespoons coriander
- 1 tablespoon parsley
- 2 chopped basil leaves
- 1 red pepper seeded and diced
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons sour cream/crème fraiche

Combine all ingredients and season. Keeps for up to 3 days in airtight container.

MEAT

PEPPER STEAK BITES

“A nice touch of Japan with a sweet and savoury flavor. It works quite well with large meaty mushrooms if you want to do the vegan thing”

- 3 Watercress Leaves
- 2 ²/₃ tablespoons Soy Sauce
- 4 tablespoons mirin (if available and if you like it. You can substitute sake and add extra sugar or miss it out and substitute lemon juice with a touch of honey)
- 1 ¹/₂ tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2-4 beef steaks (around 1lb in total)
- 1 clove garlic (minced)
- 2 tablespoons ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

Coat meat in pepper and pat in. Heat oil and fry garlic. Add meat and cook on both sides until brown. Add soy, mirin or substitute, and sugar. Cook until sauce is thick and coats meat. Slice and store in fridge.

MUSHROOM AND SAUSAGE HASH

“Unsophisticated, but satisfying!”

- 2 sliced sausages
- 1 lb mushrooms
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- Salt & pepper

Heat oil in frying pan and fry sausage slices for 2 minutes. Add mushrooms, season with salt and pepper. Cook over medium heat for 15 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from heat and add parsley. Serve hot or cold.

BEEF TATAKI

“Absolutely fabulous!”

- 1 Sirloin or fillet steak (about 6ozs)
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice or ponzu
- 1 teaspoon dark soy sauce or tamari
- 2 Radishes
- 2 Spring onions

Heat a frying pan or skillet with a small amount of vegetable oil until smoking. Fry the steak quickly on each side until brown. Remove and place steak under a weighted plate until cold. Slice very thinly across. Place in container and add lemon/ponzu and shoyu. Grate radishes and finely chop spring onion. Add to meat and mix. Serve chilled.

MEATBALLS WITH BACON

“Very popular with the meat eaters in the house. They keep very well. Be careful with adding salt.”

- 250 grams minced beef
- 3-5 rashers of streaky bacon finely chopped
- 1-2 Finely chopped onion
- 2 Eggs
- Salt, pepper and chilli flakes.

Mix everything together well, form into balls and bake in a muffin tray in a medium oven until cooked. Go easy on the chilli flakes or leave them out if you do not like things spicy.

KOREAN STYLE SIMMERED BEEF

“Slightly spicy for some, but delicious.”

- 300g thin shaved beef (or very finely sliced across the grain)
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 inch ginger
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- Mixture A
 - 1 red chilli
 - 2 Tablespoons gluten-free soy
 - 1 Tablespoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons ground white sesame seeds

Finely chop beef. Slice garlic and ginger into julienne strips.

Add oil, garlic and ginger to frying pan and heat. When fragrant, add beef and stir-fry until brown. Add Mixture A and simmer until most liquid is absorbed. Add ground sesame seeds. Cool and refrigerate.

FISH & SEAFOOD

BACON WRAPPED PRAWNS

- 1 lb prawns
- 5-10 bacon slices
- 1 tsp dried basil

Wrap each Prawn in bacon. Place on baking tray, sprinkle with basil and bake in 350° oven for 15-20 minutes. Will keep for a couple of days.

TOMATO & CORIANDER SAUTEED PRAWNS

“Another simple but effective dish.”

- 1 lb fresh prawns
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- ½ red pepper, sliced
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- ½ cup water
- 2 tablespoons chopped coriander
- Salt & pepper

Heat oil, stir in garlic and red pepper. Saute 30 secs then add tomatoes and water. Bring to boil then stir in prawns. Add salt and pepper, cook for 15 minutes. Remove and sprinkle with coriander. Good hot or cold

CRAB SALAD STUFFED TOMATOES

“A bit 1970s retro, but easy and tastes pretty good ..”

- 1 can crab meat, drained
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 1 spring onion, chopped
- Salt & pepper
- 2 medium tomatoes or 6-8 small tomatoes (fiddly but good for bento!)

Mix crab meat, mayonnaise, lemon juice, parsley and onion. Season. Cut the tops off the tomatoes, scoop out middle and fill with crab mayonnaise. Chill.

PETER'S PRAWN COCKTAIL

“Definitely 1970s retro but equally definitely worth bringing back”

- Cooked prawns
- Marie-rose sauce
- Lettuce
- Paprika

Marie Rose Sauce

- 5 tablespoons Mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon Tomato puree
- 1 teaspoon (g/f) Worcester Sauce (more if required)
- Few drops Tabasco (if liked)
- Couple of teaspoons lemon juice

Mix Marie Rose sauce and taste. Be careful with Worcester and Tabasco which can overpower the dish. Add prawns. Serve over shredded lettuce and sprinkled with paprika.

CORIANDER PRAWNS [PRAWN BHARTA]

“Just awesome. I make these practically every other week as they are so good and they last well in the fridge”

- 250g prawns, cooked
- 2 finely sliced shallots [or small red or white onion]
- 15g chopped coriander leaves
- 1-2 hot green chillies, finely sliced
- 3 spring onions, sliced
- 1 ½ - 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 tablespoons mustard oil (or extra-virgin olive oil).
- ½-¾ teaspoon salt

Roughly chop the prawns and put them in container. Add everything else, mixing well. Check seasoning and leave at least 10 minutes. Chill if not using – they will keep for around 5 days.

POTTED SHRIMPS

“An English classic which we do not see nearly often enough”

- 1.5-2lb fresh prawns
- 4 oz melted butter (more if required!)
- Grated nutmeg
- Black pepper

Cook prawns. Melt **half** butter in pan. Add Prawns, nutmeg and pepper. Turn into small pots and cool. Melt remainder of butter and pour over shrimps. Cool and keep in fridge. I chill mine in egg cups so that I can include a portion in a bento box with (usually) courgette fritters or onion bhajir to eat it with.

VEGETARIAN

SPICY BROCCOLI FLORETS

“A different take for broccoli and makes a nice crunchy addition to a bento.”

- 2 heads broccoli
- 4 tablespoons melted coconut oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon chili powder

Place florets on baking tray on greaseproof, sprinkle with salt, cumin and chilli, drizzle with coconut oil. Bake at 350° F for 20 mins. Cool and store in fridge.

BROCCOLI WITH SESAME SEEDS

“Softer textured with a hint of Japan”

- 1 head broccoli
- Dash salt
- 2 tablespoons ground white sesame seeds
- 1 Tablespoon gluten-free soy sauce.
- 2 teaspoons sugar

Cut Broccoli florets, blanch in salted water. Drain. Combine sesame, soy and sugar and mix well. Add broccoli and stir to coat. (Freezable).

BROCCOLI SALAD WITH ALMONDS

“Plainer and definitely one for broccoli fans. Useful if you have a spicy main dish”

- 1 head broccoli
- Dash salt
- Flaked almonds
- Lemon juice

Cut broccoli florets small, blanch for about 5 minutes. Drain. Add lemon juice whilst still warm. Stir in almonds. Store in fridge for up to four days.

COURGETTE FRITTERS

“Really useful lunchbox staple, particularly if you have something mayonnaisish and want to scoop up leftovers!”

- 2 grated courgettes
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup almond flour
- 1 sliced spring onion
- 1 Tablespoon chopped coriander
- 4 tablespoons coconut oil

Squeeze liquid from courgettes and put in bowl. Stir in eggs, almond flour, onion and coriander. Season. Heat oil in frying pan and drop spoonfuls of batter into oil. Fry until brown turning once. Store and served chilled.

MISO CARROTS

“Slightly sweet and nicely crunchy, adds colour and texture to the bento.”

- 1 large carrot
- Mix:
 - 3 tbsp miso (make sure it is gluten free if you have issues)
 - 2tbsp mirin (or replacement with ½ lemon juice and ½ water)
 - 2 tsps sugar

Combine mixture. Slice carrot into 2” narrow lengths. Mix and marinade at least one day.

GUJERATI CARROT SALAD

“Seriously good and quite addictive!”

- ¾ lb carrots, grated
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon whole black mustard seeds (I have used white as well or a mixture with Nigella seeds)
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice

Toss carrots with salt in a bowl. Heat oil in very small pan, add mustard seeds. When they start to pop pour oil and seeds over the carrots. Add lemon juice and mix. Store in airtight container in fridge. It lasts at least five days.

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CRUNCHY INDIAN SLAW

“Even more addictive. It is worth buying chaat masala just to be able to make this. I use double mayonnaise and no yoghurt to make it dairy free. Vegan mayonnaise works as well.”

- 100g grated carrot
- 100g thinly sliced red cabbage 100g
- 100g thinly sliced white cabbage
- ½ small red onion finely sliced
- Large handful coriander chopped
- 70g mayonnaise
- 70g Greek yoghurt
- 1 ½ -2 tsp lemon juice
- 1 ½ tsp chaat masala
- Salt and pepper

Squeeze carrot to get rid of water, mix in bowl with everything else. Taste and adjust. Store.

TOMATO SALAD

“Plain, simple, delicious!”

- Tomatoes
- Spring Onions
- Salt, pepper
- Olive Oil

Cut tomatoes into small pieces. Chop Spring onions fine. Mix with tomatoes and season. Add small amount of olive oil. Store in fridge but bring to room temperature to eat. Keeps in fridge for about five days, but you need to drain it occasionally, particularly if the tomatoes are very ripe.

TOMATO AND CHICKPEA SALAD

“A wonderful taste of summer, perfect for a picnic or just to eat outside with some fresh bread and cheese ..”

- Two large ripe tomatoes
- Garlic clove (optional)
- Salt and pepper
- Quantity Onion Relish Too (see above)
- 15 oz can chickpeas drained (or 2 cups cooked chickpeas)
- Large handful fresh green herbs (any or all of basil, mint, coriander, parsley)
- Chilli flakes
- Olive oil

Cut tomatoes into bite sized pieces. Add salt, pepper and (if wanted) the grated or finely chopped garlic clove. Leave at room temperature for at least 15 minutes. If you are using the Onion Relish Too you can make this whilst you wait.

Taste the tomatoes. If too sweet add a little lemon/lime juice, if too acid then add pinch or two of sugar. Add the chickpeas, the fresh herbs (torn or chopped), pinch of chilli flakes and a teaspoon of olive oil to the tomatoes. Mix well and add some of the Onion Relish Too. If you are not using the Onion Relish Too then add some lemon or lime juice. Taste and add salt and pepper if necessary.

ROASTED PEPPERS WITH SPICES

“Lovely hot or cold, adds a crunch and spice to any meal.”

- Red and/or Green and/or Yellow Peppers
- Whole spices: Cumin, Mustard, Nigella, Onion, Fennel
- Olive Oil

Slice peppers and remove seeds. Coat with olive oil. Place in roasting tray with a tablespoon of mixed whole spices (whatever you have!). Roast in an oven at 220C until the peppers start to char slightly (about 40 mins usually). Serve hot or cold.

GUJARATI GREEN BEANS

“A seriously versatile dish, hot or cold and good with Indian, Western and even Japanese meals!”

- 450g French beans
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon whole black mustard seeds
- 4 cloves garlic finely chopped
- ½ - 1 hot dried chilli, crushed
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- Freshly ground black pepper

Trim beans and cut into 1inch lengths. Blanch in boiling water for 3-4 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold water. Heat oil in pan, add mustard seeds. When they pop put in the garlic. Stir until light brown. Add chilli. Stir. Add green beans, salt and sugar. Stir to mix. Turn to medium low and stir occasionally for 7-8 minutes until absorbed. Add pepper. Serve hot or cold.

SPICED CHICKPEAS

“This is an unusual and delicious dish. It is also very good without the yoghurt if you are dairy free or vegan.”

- 50ml olive oil
- 1 tablespoon cumin seeds
- ½ teaspoon nigella seeds
- Good pinch dried chilli flakes
- 1 tablespoon turmeric
- 2 cloves garlic, finely sliced plus 1 further clove, crushed
- 1 finely chopped white onion
- 700g cooked chickpeas (2 x 400g tins)
- 600g runner beans
- 2 lemons cut into quarters
- 150g Greek Yoghourt

Warm olive oil in large pan over medium heat. Add cumin, nigella and chilli and cook for 2 mins until fragrant. Add turmeric, sliced garlic and onion with salt & pepper to taste. Cook for ten minutes. Add chickpeas along with their liquid and cook for 30 mins until liquid evaporates.

Prepare the beans. Put a griddle on high heat until smoking then add runner beans and char for about 4 mins each side until blistered and blackened. Squeeze a little juice from one lemon then place the quarters on the griddle cut sides down, until well charred.

Mix yoghurt, crushed garlic, 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper with the lemon juice. Put one tablespoon of mixture in separate bowl and whisk with 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Cut the runner beans in small pieces and mix with the smaller amount of yoghurt. Makes an almost complete vegetarian meal. Everything keeps well for 4-5 days.

EDGY PEAS

“Awesome hot. Also awesome cold!”

- 2 tablespoons veg oil
- 1 rounded teaspoon cumin seeds
- 20g root ginger peeled and finely shredded
- 2 teaspoons ground coriander
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon garam masala
- Salt and lots of fresh ground pepper
- 400g frozen peas, thawed
- 2 teaspoons dried fenugreek leaves (if you have them. I frequently don't and it still tastes great!)
- 120 mls whole milk (or use soy or unsweetened almond)
- 1-1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons mango powder or to taste (or a tablespoon of lemon juice).

Heat oil in saucepan. Add cumin seeds, fry until darkened then add ginger and fry until coloured. Stir in coriander, garam masala and some salt.

Add peas and fenugreek leaves and cook for a couple of minutes. Add milk and cook over moderate heat, stirring often until milk evaporates. Stir in mango powder, taste and adjust seasoning, add lots of black pepper.

MANGO SALAD

“This is seriously addictive and seems to go with practically everything. Making the “ribbons” can be a bit tiresome but it is so worth it!”

- 2 large semi-ripe still green and firm mangoes
- 1 small red onion
- 3-4 red birds eye chillies, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Ground pepper
- 3 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 tablespoon sugar

Peel the mangoes then shave with vegetable peeler to create “ribbons”.

Slice red onions thinly in half moons. Add mangoes, onions, chillies, lime juice, salt and pepper and add sugar slowly to taste. Mix well and chill.

SAMOSAS, BHAJIS ETC

RICE RAPPER SAMOSA

Vegetable filling

- 2 small potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1 small carrot, cubed
- ½ cup frozen peas
- 1 small thin slice red onion
- 1.5 tablespoon cumin seeds
- 1 tsp salt
- Vegetable oil
- ¼ cup water
- Rice wrappers

Pour 2 tablespoons oil, heat and add 1.5 tablespoons cumin. Fry until fragrant. Add onions and fry until golden brown. Add potatoes and carrots. Add half cup water. Stir, cover and steam for ten minutes. Add peas and salt. Cover for another 5-10 minutes. Cool. Use to fill rice wrappings. Wet the rice wrappers to soften (don't overdo it!) and cut in half. Place filling in the left hand third of the semi circle then fold over twice to make a triangle. Seal the top, place on oiled baking tray and brush with oil.

Cook in very hot oven with a small amount of oil for 25 minutes, turning every 5 minutes.

BAKED BHAJIS

“A slightly healthier version of Onion Bhaji. Vegan, gluten-free and delicious!”

- 3cm ginger, peeled and chopped
- 1 green finger chilli, chopped
- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds
- Salt
- 1kg brown onions
- 4 tablespoons rapeseed oil
- 180 gram (chickpea) flour
- 40g fresh coriander, roughly chopped
- ½ teaspoon red chilli powder
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Preheat oven to 180C. Line 2 baking trays.

Grind ginger, green chilli and cumin seeds with small pinch salt into a coarse paste.

Peel, half and slice the onions. Heat oil in large frying pan over medium heat and then add onions. Fry 15 mins, stirring occasionally until translucent and soft. Scrap into bowl and add paste, chickpea flour, both corianders, chilli powder, turmeric, lemon juice and up to 1.5 teaspoons salt (to taste). Mix then add (very slowly) **up to** 30 ml water to produce a very thick batter.

Drop tablespoons onto the tray, leaving around ¾ inch between each. Bake for 25-30 mins until crisping and browning. Remove from tray and eat hot or cool and store in fridge. Serve with coriander chutney or similar.

CHICKPEA PANCAKES WITH PANEER + LIME DRESSING

“Another basic which gives great flavor and weight to a bento”

- 150g chickpea flour
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 teaspoon garam masala
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- Salt
- 225 soft paneer (not essential but nice! Can also use hard tofu if careful)
- 1¼ tablespoons lime pickle (not essential but nice!)
- 20g fresh coriander
- 10g fresh dill
- Rapeseed oil

Thoroughly mix chickpea flour, turmeric, garam masala, baking powder and ½ teaspoon salt. Make well in centre and whisk in 240 ml water then leave for 20 minutes.

Crumble/chop paneer if using. Chop lime pickle. Heat 1 tablespoon oil, add paneer and cook for around 4 mins until starting to crisp. Add pickle, stir and season with salt if necessary. Remove from heat.

Chop herbs and add to batter. Put small non-stick pan on medium heat and drizzle with oil. Pour ladleful of batter into pan and cook for 1 min. Flip and cook for 1 min. Repeat. Remove, keep warm, and repeat. Serve hot or cold with the paneer if used.

FRUIT & NUTS

MIXED NUTS

“Simple but useful to have around”

- 100g peanuts
- 100g pumpkin seeds
- 100g walnuts
- 100g almonds

Mix and seal in container.

TEA-INFUSED APRICOTS

“So much more than the sum of its parts. Particularly good chilled from the fridge”

- 100g Dried Apricots
- Teabag [plain, Earl or Lady Grey]
- Cinnamon stick

Brew teabag in 100ml hot water until very strong. Put apricots and cinnamon stick in container. Pour hot tea over. Store in fridge and fish out the apricots as you need them. I add the left-over syrup to the fruit in fruit crumbles or put a spoonful into black tea to add interest. It is easy to double or treble this recipe.

ORANGE & NUT SALAD

- Mikans/satsuma/naartjes
- Walnuts or Pecan nuts
- Lemon/lime juice

Peel and divide fruit into segments. Cut each segment in half. Add roughly chopped nuts and squeeze of lemon/lime juice.

FRIED CASHEW

- 225g cashew nuts
- ½ tsp salt
- Fresh ground black pepper
- Oil for frying

Heat oil, fry nuts for 2mins or so. Drain on kitchen paper. Sprinkle with salt and black pepper (Warning: both addictive and very high in carbs!!).

NOT NECESSARILY BENTO!

These recipes are included by request from Cousin Lorna. The second one is useful in bento if you don't add the yoghurt. They are both utterly delicious.

GOAN PRAWN CURRY

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped garlic
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon chilli powder (more if you like, but it is already quite spicy!)
- 1 ½ tablespoons ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 x 400ml coconut milk
- 2 teaspoons tamarind paste (substitute with zest of 1 lime plus the juice)
- 1-2 tablespoons of Marigold Swiss Bouillon granules or 1-2 small stock cubes crumbled up
- 4 teaspoons castor sugar
- 400-800g raw king prawns
- 2 hot green chillies (or less, depending on taste) finely sliced lengthways.

Heat oil over medium heat in a medium pan or wok. Add onion and brown for five minutes, then add the garlic and fry for 3-4 minutes. Add cumin, chilli powder, coriander and salt, mixed well and cook for one minute. Pour in coconut milk and add tamarind or lime. Add stock granules or cubes and sugar. Bring to boil and then simmer for about ten minutes or so until sauce is quite thick. Add the prawns and chillies and simmer gently for around 2-3 minutes. You can use cooked prawns but, if you do, add the green chillies, simmer gently for 2-3 minutes and then add the cooked prawns at the last minute.

CHICKEN IN THE PICKLING STYLE

“Spicy and tart, also good cold, especially if you do not use yoghurt”

- 4cm Ginger peeled and roughly chopped
- 6 cloves garlic peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 fresh green chilli roughly chopped (I have used red when it is all I have)
- Salt
- 3 tablespoons vegetable or rapeseed oil
- 1 teaspoon nigella seeds
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- ½ teaspoon fenugreek seeds (I have missed these out and it still tastes great)
- 2 large onions finely chopped
- 3 medium ripe tomatoes roughly chopped
- 2 teaspoons tomato puree
- ½ teaspoon chilli powder (optional – the dish is quite spicy without)
- ½ teaspoon turmeric powder
- 800grams skinless boneless chicken breasts or thighs
- 3 tablespoons Greek yoghurt (optional)

Put ginger, garlic and fresh chilli into mortar and grind with a bit of salt to a paste (or use small food processor if you have a spice grinder).

Heat oil over a medium heat in large frying pan which has a lid and then add the nigella, fennel, mustard, cumin and fenugreek. Stir around for about a minute until it smells spicy and add onions. Fry until soft and golden then add the ginger/garlic paste and stir for 2 more minutes. Then add the tomatoes, tomato puree, optional chilli powder, turmeric and a half-teaspoon of salt. Cook for another five minutes. Add chicken pieces to the pan and stir to coat it thoroughly then add a splash (about a tablespoon) of water, stir and turn the heat to low. Put lid on pan and cook for about 20 minutes.

If using yoghurt place it in a bowl and when the 20 minutes is up, take a couple of spoonfuls of the sauce from the chicken and whisk them into the yoghurt. Pour the yoghurt back into the pan and mix thoroughly. Cook, uncovered, for about five minutes.

If not using yoghurt, remove lid and stir chicken. Cook for a further five minutes.

Serve with rice and lemon quarters.