

# Twelve Plates

RECIPES & STORIES  
FROM MY KITCHEN  
TO YOURS

*Food is memory.  
made intentional.  
Sit, savor,  
be here.*



# Mediterranean Plates — Twelve Recipes

*Vegetarian & Gluten-Free Mediterranean Recipes*

*For those who know that less, done well, is everything.*

# Charred Peppers with Preserved Lemon & Capers

**T**he smell of blistering pepper skin over flame is one of the Mediterranean's great gifts—sweet flesh meeting bitter char, soft and collapsing. This dish borrows the North African trick of cutting through smoky sweetness with preserved lemon's clean, fermented edge. Capers add the salt-pop you need. It wants nothing more than good bread, but since we're keeping gluten away, let it sit alongside white beans or simply eat it from the bowl with a fork. Serve it warm, at room temperature, even cold from the fridge the next morning. The peppers hold their own.

## INGREDIENTS

- 4 large red peppers (Romano or bell, about 800g) - 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling - 1 preserved lemon quarter, flesh removed, rind finely sliced - 2 tbsp salted capers, rinsed and roughly chopped - 1 garlic clove, crushed - Small handful flat-leaf parsley, leaves only, roughly torn - Flaky sea salt - Cracked black pepper

## METHOD

1. Set peppers directly over a gas flame or under a screaming-hot grill, turning with tongs every few minutes until the skin blackens and blisters all over—about 12 minutes. Don't rush it. The char is the point.

2. Drop the peppers into a bowl and cover tightly with a plate or cling film. Let them steam for 10 minutes. The skins will peel away easily now.

3. Working over the bowl to catch any juices, peel away the blackened skin. Don't rinse the peppers—a few dark flecks add flavour. Tear the flesh into wide strips, discarding stems and seeds.

4. Arrange the pepper strips on a flat plate. Scatter over the preserved lemon rind, capers, and crushed garlic.

5. Drizzle generously with olive oil. Season with a pinch of flaky salt and a few grinds of black pepper. Toss gently with your hands so everything mingles.

6. Let it sit for at least 15 minutes before serving. Finish with torn parsley leaves and one more gloss of olive oil at the table.



# Gigantes Plaki

**T**here's something quietly miraculous about giant butter beans that soften and swell in tomato sauce until they're almost creamy inside. This is Greek taverna food at its most honest—beans, good olive oil, a tin of tomatoes, dried oregano from the hillside. The clay pot matters here; it holds heat gently and lets the beans collapse without falling apart. You want them tender enough to crush against the roof of your mouth. Serve this warm or at room temperature with bread for wiping, though it needs nothing else. Make it in the morning; it tastes better by evening.

## Ingredients

- 400 g dried gigantes beans (or large butter beans), soaked overnight - 100 ml extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling - 1 large onion, finely chopped - 4 garlic cloves, sliced - 1 × 400 g tin chopped tomatoes - 2 tbsp tomato purée - 1 tsp dried oregano - 1 bay leaf - 1 tsp caster sugar - 200 ml warm water - Sea salt and black pepper - Small handful flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped

## Method

1. Drain the soaked beans and tip them into a large saucepan. Cover with fresh cold water, bring to the boil, then simmer for thirty minutes until just tender but still holding their shape. Drain and set aside.

2. Heat your oven to 160°C fan. Warm the olive oil in a clay or cast-iron baking dish over medium heat. Add the onion and cook gently for eight minutes until soft and golden at the edges.

3. Stir in the garlic and cook for one minute until fragrant. Add the tinned tomatoes, tomato purée, oregano, bay leaf, and sugar. Season generously with salt and pepper.

4. Fold the drained beans into the tomato mixture. Pour in the warm water—it should almost cover the beans. Bring to a gentle simmer.

5. Cover the dish with a lid or foil and transfer to the oven. Bake for one hour, then uncover and bake for another thirty to forty minutes. The sauce should be thick and clinging, the beans completely tender.

6. Let the dish rest for at least twenty minutes before serving. Scatter with parsley and drizzle with your best olive oil. Serve warm or at room temperature.



# Baked Aubergine with Yogurt & Walnuts

**T**his recipe sits where Sicily meets the eastern Mediterranean —aubergine charred until the flesh turns creamy, then dressed while warm so it drinks in every flavour. The yogurt cools, the walnuts add crunch, and a trickle of olive oil pulls it all together. It works because contrast works: soft and crisp, smoky and fresh, hot and cold. Serve it as a side or pile it onto good bread for lunch. Either way, the aubergine does the talking.

## ## Ingredients

- 2 large aubergines (approximately 600 g total) - 3 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for drizzling - Sea salt - 200 g Greek yogurt (full-fat) - 1 garlic clove, crushed - 60 g walnuts, roughly chopped - 1 teaspoon Aleppo pepper or mild chilli flakes - Small handful of mint leaves, torn - Juice of half a lemon

## ## Method

1. Heat your oven to 220°C (200°C fan). Halve the aubergines lengthways and score the flesh in a diamond pattern, cutting deep but not through the skin.
2. Brush the cut sides generously with olive oil and season well with salt. Place cut-side up on a baking tray lined with parchment.
3. Roast for 35–40 minutes until the flesh is golden, collapsed, and completely soft when pressed with a spoon.
4. While the aubergines bake, stir the yogurt with the crushed garlic and a pinch of salt. Leave it at room temperature so it loses its fridge chill.
5. Toast the walnuts in a dry frying pan over medium heat for 3–4 minutes, shaking often, until they smell sweet and nutty. Tip them onto a plate to cool.

6. When the aubergines are done, transfer them to a serving plate. Spoon the garlicky yogurt over the hot flesh, letting it melt into the crevices.

7. Scatter the toasted walnuts on top, then sprinkle with Aleppo pepper and torn mint. Finish with a squeeze of lemon juice and a slow drizzle of your best olive oil.

8. Serve warm or at room temperature—the flavours deepen as everything settles.



# Braised Leeks with White Wine & Thyme

**L**eeks get a bad reputation—the forgotten member of the allium family, too often boiled to grey submission. But in France, they understand something we're only just remembering: leeks are sweet, mild, and built for butter. This dish is proof. White wine softens their fibres, thyme weaves through every layer, and the braising liquid becomes a glossy sauce you'll want to mop up with good bread. It works beside roasted chicken, yes, but also alone with grains or lentils. Sometimes the side dish is the main event.

## INGREDIENTS

6 medium leeks (about 900g / 2 lb), white and pale green parts only  
40g / 3 tbsp unsalted butter  
150ml / ⅔ cup dry white wine  
150ml / ⅔ cup vegetable stock  
4 sprigs fresh thyme  
2 garlic cloves, lightly crushed  
Sea salt and black pepper  
1 tbsp lemon juice  
Extra virgin olive oil, for finishing

## METHOD

Halve the leeks lengthways, keeping the root end intact so they hold together. Rinse under cold water, fanning the layers to remove any grit. Pat dry.

Melt the butter in a large, heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Lay the leeks cut-side down in a single layer. Season with salt and pepper. Let them sit undisturbed for 4 minutes until golden.

Flip the leeks carefully. Pour in the wine and stock. Tuck the thyme sprigs and garlic among the leeks. Bring to a gentle simmer.

Reduce heat to low, cover with a lid or foil, and braise for 20–25 minutes. The leeks should be completely tender when pierced with a knife.

Remove the lid. Increase heat to medium-high and let the liquid reduce by half, basting the leeks occasionally, about 5 minutes. The sauce will turn glossy and coat the back of a spoon.

Discard the thyme stems and garlic. Stir in the lemon juice. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Transfer to a serving plate, spoon over the pan juices, and finish with a thin drizzle of olive oil.



# Chickpea & Spinach Stew with Saffron

**T**his is the kind of stew grandmothers in Andalusia have been making for centuries, because it asks very little and gives everything back. Saffron is the only extravagance—those rust-red threads that turn the broth sunset-gold and fill your kitchen with something half-floral, half-earth. Chickpeas drink up that colour. Spinach wilts down in seconds. Smoked paprika adds a whisper of fire. You need one pot, twenty minutes of actual work, and a good loaf for mopping. This is Spanish soul food that happens to be vegetarian and gluten-free, though no one at the table will notice the labels. They'll just ask for more.

## Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil - 1 large onion, finely diced (about 200 g)  
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced thin - 1 teaspoon smoked paprika (pimentón)  
- ½ teaspoon saffron threads - 2 × 400 g tins chickpeas, drained (800 g / 28 oz drained weight) - 500 ml vegetable stock (2 cups) - 200 g fresh spinach (7 oz), tough stems removed - 1 bay leaf - Sea salt and black pepper - Juice of ½ lemon - Extra olive oil, for serving

## Method

1. Crush the saffron threads between your fingers into a small cup. Pour over 2 tablespoons of just-boiled water and let it steep while you start the stew.

2. Warm the olive oil in a wide, heavy pot over medium heat. Add the onion with a pinch of salt and cook gently for 8–10 minutes, stirring now and then, until soft and turning gold at the edges.

3. Add the garlic and paprika. Stir for 30 seconds—just until the garlic smells sweet and the paprika deepens a shade. Don't let it burn.

4. Tip in the chickpeas, stock, bay leaf, and the saffron with its soaking water. Bring to a simmer, then reduce the heat and let it

bubble gently for 10 minutes so the chickpeas can drink in the saffron.

5. Add the spinach in handfuls, stirring each batch in until it collapses into the broth. This takes about 2 minutes total. Season generously with salt and pepper—chickpeas need more salt than you think.

6. Squeeze in the lemon juice and taste. Adjust the salt. Fish out the bay leaf.

7. Ladle into wide bowls. Drizzle each one with your best olive oil and serve with crusty bread.

**Photo brief:** Frame from above, shallow bowl on rough linen. Saffron-stained broth catches the light. One spoon resting on the rim. Window light from the left, golden hour warmth. Crumb of torn bread at the edge.



# Roasted Carrots with Cumin & Honey

**T**here's a Moroccan trick that turns plain carrots into something you'll crave: roast them hot until their edges char and their sugars pool, then toss them with toasted cumin and a drizzle of honey while they're still sizzling. The heat blooms the spice and melts the honey into a glaze that clings to every ridge. It's the logic of sweet meeting savoury, earthy meeting warm. You can serve this beside couscous or lentils, or eat it straight from the tray with yogurt and torn mint. It keeps well, tastes good at room temperature, and needs nothing more than what you already have.

## Ingredients

- 800 g carrots (about 1¾ lb), scrubbed and halved lengthways - 3 tablespoons olive oil - 1½ teaspoons cumin seeds - 2 tablespoons honey - ½ teaspoon sea salt - Juice of ½ lemon - Small handful of coriander or mint leaves (optional) - Greek yogurt, to serve

## Method

1. Heat your oven to 220°C (200°C fan / 425°F / gas mark 7). Toss the carrots with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and the salt on a large baking tray, cut side down. Roast for 25–30 minutes until the undersides are deeply caramelised and the carrots are tender when pierced with a knife.

2. While the carrots roast, toast the cumin seeds in a small dry pan over medium heat for 1–2 minutes until they smell nutty and begin to pop. Tip them into a pestle and mortar and crush lightly—you want texture, not powder.

3. When the carrots come out of the oven, immediately scatter over the crushed cumin, drizzle with the honey and remaining tablespoon of olive oil, and squeeze over the lemon juice. Toss everything together on the hot tray so the honey melts into a glaze.

4. Pile onto a serving plate, scatter with herbs if using, and serve with a bowl of thick yogurt on the side for spooning over.



# Grilled Halloumi with Fig & Mint

**H**alloumi was born to be grilled. The Cypriot cheese holds its shape in fierce heat, turning gold at the edges while staying soft inside. Fresh figs—split and warmed—release their jammy sweetness against the salty squeak of the cheese. Mint cuts through with green brightness, and a drizzle of honey ties everything together. This is contrast cooking: hot and cool, sweet and saline, soft and crisp. It works because each ingredient does exactly one job, and does it perfectly. Serve it as a starter with good bread, or pile it onto a salad for lunch. Either way, eat it the moment it leaves the pan—halloumi waits for no one.

## INGREDIENTS

- 250g halloumi (8¾ oz), sliced 1cm thick - 4 ripe figs, halved lengthways - Small handful of mint leaves, roughly torn - 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil - 1 tablespoon runny honey

## METHOD

1. Heat a ridged griddle pan or heavy frying pan over medium-high heat until properly hot—you should feel the warmth rising when you hold your hand above it.
2. Pat the halloumi slices dry with kitchen paper. Brush both sides lightly with half the olive oil.
3. Lay the halloumi in the hot pan without crowding. Cook for 2 minutes on each side until deep golden stripes appear and the edges start to soften. Transfer to a serving plate.
4. Add the figs to the same pan, cut-side down. Cook for 1-2 minutes until caramelised and warmed through but still holding their shape.
5. Arrange the figs around the halloumi. Scatter over the torn mint leaves and drizzle with the remaining olive oil and honey. Serve immediately while the cheese is still warm and yielding.



# White Bean & Herb Salad with Lemon

**T**here's a particular kind of Italian thrift that turns a tin of beans into something you'd serve with pride. This salad comes from that tradition—the sort of thing you'd find at a trattoria lunch counter, assembled hours before service and all the better for the wait. Cannellini beans drink up lemon and oil; parsley and mint stay bright. It's summer logic: good ingredients, minimal interference, maximum flavour. The salad sits happily at room temperature while you sort the rest of the table. Sometimes the simplest plates teach us the most about balance.

## Ingredients

- 2 × 400 g tins cannellini beans (or 500 g home-cooked), drained and rinsed (14 oz each / 1 lb 2 oz cooked) - 1 small red onion, very thinly sliced (about 100 g / 3½ oz) - 2 large handfuls flat-leaf parsley, leaves picked and roughly chopped (about 30 g / 1 oz) - 1 small handful mint leaves, torn (about 15 g / ½ oz) - 2 garlic cloves, finely grated or crushed - Juice of 1½ lemons (about 60 ml / 4 tbsp) - 90 ml extra-virgin olive oil, your best bottle (6 tbsp) - Sea salt and black pepper

## Method

1. Tip the drained beans into a wide serving bowl. They should look plump and intact—if any are split or mushy, fish them out.
2. Add the sliced onion. If it's particularly sharp, rinse it briefly under cold water and pat dry. You want a gentle bite, not a punch.
3. Scatter over the parsley, mint, and garlic. Use your hands to toss everything together gently, letting the herbs fall between the beans.
4. Pour the lemon juice and olive oil directly over the salad. Season generously with salt—beans need more than you think—and give it several grinds of black pepper.

5. Toss again with a light hand. Taste a spoonful. Adjust the lemon or salt if needed. The dressing should taste bright and coat each bean lightly, not pool at the bottom.

6. Let the salad sit for at least twenty minutes before serving, or up to four hours at room temperature. The flavours will deepen and settle as the beans absorb the dressing. Give it a gentle stir before bringing to the table.



# Baked Feta with Tomatoes & Oregano

**T**his is what you eat on a Greek island when the sun has burned all day and you want something that tastes like the sea and the mountain at once. A slab of feta, good cherry tomatoes, oregano still warm from someone's terrace garden. The tomatoes collapse into sweet, sharp juice. The feta softens but holds its shape—salty, creamy, almost spoonable at the edges. You scoop it with bread if you can, or just a fork if you're keeping things gluten-free. It's the kind of dish that needs only heat and time, nothing fancy, nothing clever. Just ingredients doing what they do best when you leave them alone together.

## Ingredients

- 200 g block of feta, preferably Greek (7 oz) - 400 g cherry tomatoes, mixed colours if you can find them (14 oz) - 3 garlic cloves, peeled and lightly crushed - 2 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for drizzling - 1 tablespoon dried oregano (or 2 tablespoons fresh) - ½ teaspoon chilli flakes - Freshly ground black pepper - Small handful of fresh basil leaves (optional) - Flaky sea salt

## Method

1. Heat your oven to 200°C (400°F/gas mark 6). Choose a small baking dish—something around 20 cm square or a shallow gratin dish that holds everything snugly.

2. Place the feta block in the centre of the dish. Scatter the cherry tomatoes and crushed garlic cloves around it, tucking them in close. Some tomatoes can sit on top of the feta; they'll blister beautifully there.

3. Drizzle everything with olive oil. Sprinkle the oregano and chilli flakes over the tomatoes and feta. Add several good grinds of black pepper. Don't salt yet—the feta will season everything as it bakes.

4. Slide the dish into the oven and bake for 25–30 minutes. You're watching for the tomatoes to burst and blister, their skins splitting, juices pooling. The feta should soften and turn golden at the edges but still hold its shape in the middle.

5. Remove from the oven and let it sit for 2 minutes. The juices will still be bubbling. Tear over the basil leaves if using, add a pinch of flaky salt, and drizzle with a little more olive oil. Serve straight from the dish while everything is molten and fragrant.



# Shakshuka with Spinach

**S**hakshuka travelled from Tunisia to Israel and became breakfast. The name means "all mixed up"—tomatoes, peppers, and spices simmering into softness, then eggs cracked in to poach. Here, spinach wilts into the sauce just before the eggs go in, adding iron and a gentle bitterness that balances the sweetness of the tomatoes. You can eat this at any hour: serve it straight from the pan with good bread for scooping, or let it sit while you brew coffee. Either way, the yolks should still be runny when you break them.

## Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil - 1 large onion, finely sliced - 1 red pepper, deseeded and sliced into strips - 3 garlic cloves, sliced - 1 teaspoon ground cumin - 1 teaspoon sweet paprika - ½ teaspoon caraway seeds (optional but good) - Pinch of chilli flakes - 800g tinned plum tomatoes - 1 teaspoon sugar - 150g fresh spinach, roughly chopped - 4–6 large eggs - Salt and black pepper - Small handful flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped

## Method

1. Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan or shallow casserole over medium heat. Add the onion and pepper with a pinch of salt and cook gently for 10 minutes until very soft and starting to colour.

2. Add the garlic, cumin, paprika, caraway if using, and chilli flakes. Stir for one minute until fragrant.

3. Tip in the tomatoes, breaking them up with a wooden spoon. Add the sugar and a good pinch of salt. Simmer for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the sauce thickens and the oil starts to separate at the edges.

4. Stir in the spinach—it will look like too much, but it wilts down in under a minute. Taste and adjust the seasoning; it should be bold.

5. Make small wells in the sauce with the back of a spoon and crack an egg into each well. Season the eggs with salt and pepper.

6. Cover the pan with a lid or foil and cook for 6–8 minutes until the whites are set but the yolks still wobble when you shake the pan gently.

7. Scatter with parsley and serve immediately from the pan.



# Slow-Roasted Tomatoes with Garlic & Basil

**S**omewhere between a condiment and a side dish, slow-roasted tomatoes belong in every summer kitchen. The method is almost criminally simple—halve, season, wait—but time does the work heat cannot. At 130°C, sugar concentrates, water evaporates, and what remains tastes more tomato than any fresh fruit ever could. You'll spoon them onto bread, tuck them into grain bowls, fold them through pasta, or eat them straight from the jar at midnight. They keep for a week under olive oil in the fridge, though they rarely last that long. The patience is Italian; the payoff is universal. Make a double batch.

## ## Ingredients

- 1.2 kg ripe plum or cherry tomatoes (2¾ lb) - 6 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced thin - 15 fresh basil leaves, torn - 90 ml extra-virgin olive oil (6 tbsp), plus extra for storing - 1½ tsp sea salt - ½ tsp caster sugar - Freshly ground black pepper

## ## Method

1. Heat your oven to 130°C (250°F / Gas ½). Line a large baking tray with parchment.
2. Halve the tomatoes lengthwise. If using cherry tomatoes, leave small ones whole; halve only the larger ones. Arrange cut-side up on the tray, close but not touching.
3. Tuck garlic slices between and around the tomatoes. Scatter torn basil over everything.
4. Drizzle with olive oil, then sprinkle evenly with salt, sugar, and several grinds of black pepper.
5. Roast for 2½ to 3 hours. The tomatoes should shrink, wrinkle, and caramelize at the edges while holding their shape. They're done

when most of the moisture has gone and the flesh tastes intensely sweet.

6. Cool completely on the tray. Transfer to a clean jar, cover with olive oil, and seal. Refrigerate for up to one week.

7. Bring to room temperature before serving. Use the fragrant oil for dressing grains or leaves.

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**Photo brief:** Overhead shot of an oval ceramic dish, cream or terracotta. Roasted tomatoes still glistening, some basil charred dark at the edges. A wooden spoon rests in the dish. Dappled afternoon light from a side window; one corner in soft shadow. Crumbs of sea salt visible on the rim.



# Almond Cake with Orange Blossom

**T**his cake belongs to the Moorish courts of Andalusia, where ground almonds have always been more precious than wheat. It's the sort of pudding that feels like treasure—dense without being heavy, perfumed without being cloying. Orange blossom water is the ghost in the room; use it sparingly or it turns soapy. The almonds do all the structural work here, which is why this bakes into something miraculous: a cake that holds its crumb yet melts on the tongue. No flour, no butter—just almonds, eggs, and a whisper of citrus. It keeps beautifully for three days under a tea towel, the flavour deepening as it sits. Serve it with thick yogurt or leave it plain. Either way, it doesn't need gilding.

## Ingredients

- 250g ground almonds - 200g caster sugar - 4 large eggs, separated - Zest of 1 unwaxed orange - Zest of 1 unwaxed lemon - 1½ tsp orange blossom water - ½ tsp vanilla extract - Pinch of fine sea salt - Butter and ground almonds for the tin - Icing sugar for dusting (optional)

## Method

1. Heat your oven to 180°C (160°C fan). Butter a 20cm round springform tin generously, then dust it with ground almonds, tapping out the excess.

2. Beat the egg yolks with half the sugar until pale and slightly thickened—about two minutes with a wooden spoon or electric whisk. Stir in the ground almonds, both zests, orange blossom water, vanilla, and salt. The mixture will be stiff and grainy.

3. In a spotlessly clean bowl, whisk the egg whites to soft peaks. Gradually add the remaining sugar, whisking until the meringue holds firm, glossy peaks.

4. Fold a third of the meringue into the almond mixture to loosen it, then fold in the rest gently but decisively. You want to keep the air but lose the streaks.

5. Scrape the batter into your prepared tin and smooth the top. Bake for 35–40 minutes, until golden and a skewer inserted into the centre comes out with only moist crumbs clinging to it.

6. Let the cake cool in its tin for ten minutes, then release the sides and transfer to a wire rack. It will sink slightly in the middle—this is correct.

7. Dust with icing sugar if you like. Serve in slim wedges with coffee or a glass of something sweet.

**Photo brief:** Overhead shot, single wedge on a blush-pink ceramic plate, dusting of icing sugar catching the late-afternoon light. Crumb visible where the slice has been cut. Linen napkin with a small fork resting beside it. Warm, dappled shadows.





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