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Mighty Spice Cookbook

Written by John Gregory Smith

Published by Duncan Baird Publishers

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MIGHTY SPICE

C O O K B O O K

MIGHTY SPICE

C O O K B O O K

FAST, FRESH AND VIBRANT DISHES
USING NO MORE THAN 5 SPICES FOR EACH RECIPE



JOHN GREGORY-SMITH



DUNCAN BAIRD PUBLISHERS
LONDON

DEDICATION

To my amazing family who have never stopped supporting me

MIGHTY SPICE
COOKBOOK

JOHN GREGORY-SMITH

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dietary requirements or medical conditions, it is advisable to consult
a medical professional before following any of the recipes contained
in this book.

NOTES ON THE RECIPES:

Unless otherwise stated

- Use medium fruit, vegetables and eggs
- Use fresh herbs

Measurements

- Do not mix metric and imperial measurements
- 1 tsp = 5ml • 1 tbsp = 15ml • 1 cup = 250 ml



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Introduction

Spices are my favourite things: I love talking about them, cooking with them and eating them. I have always been passionate about them, and have spent the last 10 years travelling all over the world to learn everything I can about all the different types. Spices have been used in kitchens for thousands of years, and they are as relevant today as they have always been. They have an amazing history; America was even discovered because of them, but I'll tell you more about that when you're hooked! My book is an introduction to cooking with the spices I love so much, to show you how easy and delicious they are to use.

A few years ago, I quit my job and launched a range of fresh spice pastes – The Mighty Spice Company's Chinese Szechwan, Thai Green Curry and Indian Tandoori spice mixes. Initially these sold exclusively at Selfridges, and then in Harvey Nichols, Fortnum & Mason and a few other stores in London. To say things were challenging is an understatement. I worked seven days a week doing demonstrations, farmers markets, PR, marketing, sales and sorting out millions of things that seemed to go wrong. After two years of meetings, tastings and PowerPoint presentations, I scored every food producer's dream – a contract to supply one of the top UK supermarkets. My products launched on a trial basis at a few select outlets and were soon stocked in 250 stores nationwide. It was a great achievement and I loved doing it, but, due to the recession and a down turn in sales of fresh products, I've taken the decision to put the spice pastes on hold for a while.

While on holiday in Spain with my wonderful cousin Lara, I came up with the idea to write a cookbook on spices. I launched my food brand to get people as excited about cooking spicy food as I was; I wanted to encourage people to get back into their kitchens and cook lovely food rather than eat ready-made meals or lazy takeaways. My book had to be an extension of this; something that would get people so excited about cooking that after they read my recipes, they would run to the shop and cook them over and over again, just as Homer did in one episode of the Simpsons: someone offered him something to eat and he ran off to get it before they had a chance to finish their sentence. The guy was then left speaking to a cloud outline of the great man . . . it's a brilliant scene. I spent the next couple of weeks of my holiday drinking rioja, eating tapas and planning my book.

Of course, there are loads of people who like cooking, but not that many who are prepared to give up a normal life to move home, renounce pay cheques and then make it work selling spice pastes and developing recipes for a living. My father, in a very old-school English way, sent my mother off to do a Cordon Bleu cooking course before marrying her. God forbid one should not have a decent stuffed chicken breast at home! Amazingly she didn't give him a black eye and they have been happily married ever since. Anyway, she was and is a great cook. As a child my brother, sister and I were never allowed to eat anything processed. No shop-bought biscuits, sweets or crisps for us.

This might also have had something to do with the fact I was allergic to E Numbers. Already being an overly hyperactive child, E numbers sent me into overdrive, literally climbing the walls and banisters a few times. I remember on one occasion buying a very cool, Optimus Prime-shaped (this is a Transformer to those not

in the know), multicoloured jelly. I took my spoils home and showed my mum. She must have got that sinking feeling she did so many times with me as a child, and told me jellies were much nicer cold, so best to put it in the fridge. Being young and naive I gave up my jelly. When I returned to claim my treat, a heinous crime had been committed, my jelly had gone. Who could believe it, in my own home, my own fridge?

The fact my mum always gave us fresh home-cooked food is definitely how my love of cooking began from a young age. Sadly, it was a bit un-cool for a 12-year-old boy to cook for his mates, so I constantly offered to cook for my amazing family. I have loads of aunts, uncles and cousins who all have marvellous husbands, wives and a huge flock of kids. I also have my mum and dad, who have always supported me, my brother and his wife, my sister and her husband and my crazy niece and nephew Daisy and Jake; I love them all very much. Food has always been massively important to my entire family, and I can't think of anything I would rather be doing than cooking up a feast and tucking in with all of them. As a child, being the youngest meant I had to fend for myself and eat fast. I soon realized, however, if I did the cooking the dynamic changed and I could avoid being so low down the pecking order; I was even offered food first, before anyone else.

Both my parents lived abroad when they were little, where they picked up a taste for the exotic; my mother in Pakistan and my father in Turkey. I remember countless curries at my grandparents' house, and became accustomed to fiery chillies and retro curry powders from an early age. I was totally spoilt and taken all over the place by my wonderful parents. Eating always featured, and the second I was old enough I started travelling in search of new and exciting foods. I remember going to Thailand and Hong Kong when I was 16, and discovering tom yum goong and dim sum for the first time. There was literally a world of food out there to be discovered and I was keen to get cracking. I loved finding something new and recreating it back at home, and I would go out of my way to find things like fresh curry leaves and the best coconut milk to make the perfect Thai green curry (that's Chaokoh by the way; it just rocks compared to the rest).

I decided to travel round China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Morocco, Turkey, Lebanon and Mexico to learn as much as I could about how different countries and cuisines use spices while working on the book. Mothers, aunts, sisters and grannies of the world have these secrets, and it was from those guys I got them. I couldn't wait to get started. I arrived at Heathrow to get my flight to Hong Kong for my first trip, and when I tried to check in the lady told me I was very keen and that check-in was usually only two hours before the flight and that I was a month early! Luckily I managed to change my ticket and made it out. I filled my days in Hong Kong eating Dim Sum, but it was on my first night that I discovered a wonderful, modern beef dish, which was the inspiration for my Stir-Fried Beef with Black Pepper and Basil (see page 89). It relied on bucket loads of coarsely ground black pepper to give it a flavour and a real kick, balsamic vinegar for seasoning and a massive handful of torn basil. It was exactly my kind of food and I was really excited to see how pepper can be used as the main spice, which is so common in South East Asia.

Next I headed to China, which was the most surprising destination food wise. Everyone had said the food in China was, well different, to put it politely. Yes they eat some mad things, such as scorpion kebabs, sea cucumbers and cats, but they also eat some of the most beautifully cooked, well-balanced food I have ever tasted. Their use of spices, particularly in the Sichuan Province, is phenomenal. I have always loved the tongue-numbing power of the Szechuan peppercorn, so it was fantastic to learn how to use them in harmony with the fiery hot dried chillies of the area, producing full-on flavour without ever masking the other components of the dish.

My trip round China took me to Chengdu, the capital of the Sichuan Province. From here I had arranged to go into the countryside to learn about real Szechuan cooking; real people, cooking with locally grown ingredients to make simple food for their family and friends. Sadly it was not what I expected. My expectation of rolling bamboo-strewn hills turned out to be a tower block in downtown Chengdu, and the local villagers a Chengduian family called the Hung's. I still had a great time and learnt loads, though. Before cooking we hit a local market and bought fish that were still swimming around in large plastic containers; pork that hung from grim-looking hooks; and a load of fresh fruits and vegetables that put my local supermarket to shame. We returned to their tiny apartment and cooked up a storm. The whole family came over and we ate one of the best meals I have been lucky enough to enjoy. A fiery green peppercorn fish soup, deep fried pork ribs with Szechuan peppercorns, star anise and chillies, and the best rice ever. The ribs were sweet, sour and packed with flavour from the strong spice combination, which regularly features in Sichuan.

The following morning I went to a factory famous for making chilli bean paste, a fermented mix of chillies and soy beans that forms the base of many Sichuan dishes, in Pixian. The paste can be quite hard to find, so I have made a version which you can make really easily. I use it as the base for my Twice-Cooked Pork (see page 111), but you can also use it for any stir-fry dish.

When we arrived I opened the car door to the foulest stench of vinegar, chilli and all things wrong my nose had ever smelled. My translator was dry retching and looked deeply disturbed by the whole thing and kept asking if this was what I wanted to do. Sadly it was. We went through rows of huge fermentation tanks covered in filth and loads of sorry-looking staff, with facemasks on or simply bits of cotton wool stuffed up their noses, sorting dry chillies. This was a privately owned chilli farm, and all I can say is thank god they would never get through our supermarkets' basic food hygiene tests. It was a shame, but what I love about what I do, is that you have to take the rough with the smooth. Dinner the night before was so smooth and this was so rough!

After travelling all around South East Asia I went to India — my favourite country to date — and Sri Lanka. India is amazing; a full-on sensory overload. Everything is good and bad all at once, and nothing makes any sense. You either love it or hate it. I loved every minute I was there. From learning about the heavy use of spices used in Rajasthani cuisine, while everyone threw coloured dye at each other celebrating the festival of

Holi, to learning about the extremely hot coconut curries of the Syrian Christians in Kerala or getting lost in the hills of Munnar.

Markets featured heavily in my travels — I feel very comfortable wandering round them, and one of my favourite markets was Khari Baoli in Old Delhi. I was taken round this famous spice market by my friend Madhu Gupta. Old Delhi is bonkers; it's like going back in time. Beautiful madness: smelly for the right and wrong reasons, bustling markets alongside abject poverty. It's everything all at once and really, really busy and I loved it. Open-fronted shops lined the streets selling all kinds of spices and cooking ingredients. We pushed through, looking at everything as people shouted, spat, urinated, stared and shopped all round us.

Madhu took me to her favourite masala shop, which sold pre-ground masalas in amazing boxes straight from the 1970s. Buying a box of masala should be pretty straightforward, but not in India. What happened next was the most brilliant and bizarre way of buying something. The shop had two counters that faced each other and a tiny walkway in between them. You chose what you wanted at counter one and placed your order at counter two, where they gave you a ticket. You then took the ticket back to the original counter to be checked and marked, and then, bear with me, took the same ticket back to the second counter to pay. Finally you took your receipt to counter one to receive your purchase. Are you with me? This is precisely what I love about India; complete organized chaos.

After Delhi, I travelled north to Amritsar in the Punjab. It's the holiest of places for Sikhs, home of the Golden Temple, the Sikhs version of Mecca. The Golden Temple sits in the middle of a huge pool of water, surrounded by a walkway, all within a beautiful, huge, white marble temple complex. People walk in, excitedly take a photo (not just the tourists!) or say a silent prayer and wander around taking it all in. It was peaceful, spiritual and very happy all at once. I know little about religion and less about Sikhism, however, what I do know is they practise tolerance and equality — anyone can enter their amazing temple and eat a free meal at the langar (I'll come to this). If everyone thought in this way a bit more, things would definitely be easier.

Right, moving on to the langar — my reason for travelling to Amritsar (and one of my most remarkable food experiences to date). It's a free kitchen for anyone who needs a meal at the Golden Temple, Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike, and is run by donations and help from volunteers. It's open 24 hours, 365 days a year and serves an average of 40,000 to 60,000 meals a day, consisting of dal, vegetable curry, chapattis and a bright orange dessert. I arrived early in the morning and headed to the kitchen. Everyone sat on the floor podding peas and chopping cauliflowers. They all looked a little baffled as to why I was there, but the peas were arriving by the sack load so there were no complaints. The old guy next to me was a serious podder and raced through them. From an early age I've been oddly competitive, and I must win! Well the competitive John appeared, and before I knew it I was in a silent pea-podding competition. The old guy realized things were hotting up and raised his game. I did well until my useless, untrained pea-podding back gave me trouble. I was flagging; the hands were willing but the

back wasn't. A very jolly man offered me a wooden block to sit on; I was back in the game! I whizzed through the peas and thanks to my non-arthritic fingers raced ahead. The old man gave me the look, which was most likely a polite way of saying, 'I am here all day, every day; try that for a few years and then we'll chat!'

After a few hours I was offered a tour of the monumental kitchens. We started in the washing section. It was epic, hundreds of people chucking metal plates around, cleaning and drying them as they went along; the noise was deafening. Then we went into the main kitchen where groups of women sat cross-legged rolling chapattis. They rolled one at a time, then hurled them onto a hot plate to cook, chatting the whole time, without breaking into a sweat. As we went further inside, huge, bath-sized pots of curry cooked fiercely over wooden fires. Sturdy old men lovingly mixed the curries, literally, with rowing oars. I love curry and had a real curry moment here. My guide knew everyone. It was wicked. They all wanted to have photos taken and would insist on seeing them before I went. The tour finished in the dining room where people sat in neat rows on the floor and ate their meal next to whoever they were lucky enough to find. Some went off to carry on with their day and others did a turn in the kitchen to keep the ever-working food machine going. What an incredible thing to do; so generous in a country where so many have so little, and what better expression of generosity than a delicious home-cooked meal.

After India, I travelled to the Middle East. It kicked off with a three-day 'eatathon' in Istanbul accompanied by my dad. What a city! Split into two sides, European and Asian, with beautiful mosques that dot the skyline, and none more beautiful than the famous Blue Mosque itself. Turkey is the home of the kebab, which is something I am really into. Not those horrid things you eat at 1.00 am after drinking pints of lager, but instead, tender grilled meat, mouth-wateringly spicy salsa, crisp salad, soft flat bread and cool yogurt. We ate like kings and enjoyed everything the city had to offer. I particularly enjoyed the flavour of the wonderful dried Turkish chillies. They have a unique, mild, sun-dried taste, which I discovered when I got home can be substituted with a mix of ordinary dried chilli and sun-dried tomatoes.

I also spent a week cooking in Beirut, which is one of the coolest cities I have ever been to. The architecture is a mixture of old Arabic meets slick Parisian, and the people are so very smart and full of optimism. The food was incredible: lots of crisp salads and delicately spiced stews made with loads of garlic and fragrant spices, such as cinnamon and saffron, slowly infused with the meat; a punchy mix of sumac, salt, sesame seeds and dried thyme, called a Zaatar blend, generously lathered over grilled meats and freshly baked flat breads, giving a wonderful sour flavour and bright red colour. And I couldn't forget the national food treasure kebbe. Kebbe is a mix of finely minced meat, which can be raw or cooked, bulgar wheat, spices, herbs and lemon. My favourite was the raw goat kebbe, which is simply made with young raw goat's meat finely minced with salt, bulgar wheat, lemon juice and a huge handful of fresh mint. And what they can't do with an aubergine is not worth knowing — grilled with lemon juice, roasted with spices, mashed with tahini and then cooked with

lamb or braised in yogurt. I spent my days cooking, eating and wandering around the city, soaking up the sense of excitement that filled the air.

The last stop on my wondrous journey was Mexico. I had visited Mexico before when I learnt little more than how to get a suntan and ask for a beer, 'una cerveza por favour'. This time round I wanted to avoid the beaches and learn about real Mexican food from real Mexican people. I decided to visit Puebla, Veracruz, Oaxaca, and finally, Mexico City, which, by the way, is one of the great cities of the world. I spent my first week in the capable hands of Jon and Estella, learning about Pueblan cuisine — one of the main cuisines of Mexico and characterized by complex dishes such as the Mole Poblano, which uses chocolate and over 30 ingredients including cinnamon, cloves and chillies. They spent hours showing me how to make the perfect sauces. We would always start by dry-roasting spices, tomatillos, onions and garlic in a heavy pan, until they were beautifully charred and tender, and then blend them up as the base for the various sauces we made. This gave the sauces a really smoky flavour, which is so typical of Mexican cuisine, and the experience taught me all about the wicked fresh, dried and smoked varieties of chillies that feature so heavily in Mexican cuisine.

Their beautiful home sat on a hillside under the watchful eye of a smoking volcano and a load of mad dogs, and next to the wildest nightly rave in Mexico. Every evening when the sun went down the perfect tranquillity was pierced by a crazy Mexican band, which played the same song repeatedly all night, only stopping to make a very odd squelching noise, a bit like if you trod on a large frog.

As happy as I am trotting round spice-strewn hills, I feel more relaxed strolling round a concrete jungle; after all, London is my home. Mexico City is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, and it was a real treat for me to be there after having gone rural for the best part of three weeks. I based myself in the centre, walked everywhere and ate everything. My favourite meal was always breakfast at Café Maque. They did the most amazing scrambled eggs, which were cooked with really spicy chorizo and chilli and served with a rich tomato sauce.

I got back to London and worked up the recipes in this book. I've created them so each one is interesting, delicious and shows how easy it is to cook with spices. Some are versions of traditional recipes, while others take inspiration from different cuisines and cultures. So many of the wonderful people I ate with while travelling brought loads of different dishes to the table for everyone to share. This is a lovely, sociable way to eat, and the recipes in this book have been designed with this in mind. Try making a few recipes and enjoy the variety of tastes, textures and aromas.

To keep things really simple, and to help you out on your spice adventure, I have only used up to five spices per recipe, so you will be able to grab everything you need from the local supermarket. There are ten featured spices showcased throughout the book and 25 spices used in the recipes in total. Images of each spice used are pictured with the recipes and a key and description can be found in the spice directory on pages 218–221.



CHAPTER ONE

Soups and Salads

In this chapter you will discover how truly versatile spices can be. They can be used to make something really light and refreshing, warm and smoky and even hot and fiery – and with the right combination you only need to add a few spices to a dish to create something extraordinary. Fresh peppery ginger and star anise flavour the delicate Chinese Pork Dumpling Soup, for example; a few crushed fennel seeds bring the Pomegranate, Fennel, Orange and Watercress Salad to life; and with only five spices you can make a Singapore Coconut and Prawn Laksa. This is a dish that traditionally uses loads of different spices, but by balancing the flavours of fragrant lemongrass, hot chilli, earthy turmeric, garlic and beautifully sour tamarind you can make this delicious, rich soup without any hassle.

LEFT: Chinese Pork Dumpling Soup (page 15)

Turkish Lentil Soup

SERVES 4

200g/7oz/heaped $\frac{3}{4}$ cup split red lentils, washed and drained
2 tbsp olive oil
1 tsp flour
2 tsp dried mint
1 tsp mild chilli powder
1 tbsp sun-dried tomato purée or tomato purée
875ml/30fl oz/3½ cups chicken or vegetable stock
50g/1¾oz/heaped $\frac{1}{4}$ cup bulgur wheat
50g/1¾oz butter (optional)
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 lemon, cut into wedges, to serve

GOES WELL WITH

Moroccan Lemon Chicken
(page 67)
Persian Saffron and Honey Lamb
Stew (page 101)
Lebanese Lemon and Vanilla Cake
(page 192)

- 1 Put the lentils into a large saucepan over a high heat with 750ml/26fl oz/3 cups water and bring to the boil. Cover, reduce the heat and simmer for 15–20 minutes, or until the lentils have absorbed all the water and are tender. Check them every couple of minutes after the 15-minute mark to make sure they are not burning.
- 2 Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat and add the flour, mint and chilli powder. Stirring continuously, add the sun-dried tomato purée after 10 seconds, then after another 10 seconds tip in 2 tablespoons of the stock to loosen up the mixture. After a couple of seconds, slowly add the rest of the stock, stirring as you go, to make sure there are no lumps. Stir in the cooked lentils and bulgur wheat and season with a really good pinch of salt and pepper. Bring to the boil, then turn down the heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes.
- 3 Stir in the butter, if using, and serve immediately with wedges of lemon – the juice will bring out all the delicious flavours.



Chinese Pork Dumpling Soup

SERVES 4

1.2l/40fl oz/4¾ cups chicken stock
2 star anise
5cm/2in piece root ginger, peeled and roughly sliced
1 garlic clove
4 spring onions, cut into thin batons
200g/7oz Chinese leaf lettuce, finely sliced
1 large handful coriander leaves, roughly chopped
1 tbsp soy sauce

FOR THE DUMPLINGS

250g/9oz minced pork
2.5cm/1in piece root ginger, peeled and finely grated
2 spring onions, finely chopped
1 tsp light soy sauce
1 tsp sesame oil

GOES WELL WITH

Dongbei Cumin and Coriander
Stir-Fried Lamb (page 99)
Steamed Ginger Custard Pots
(page 199)

- 1 To make the dumplings, put all the dumpling ingredients in a large mixing bowl and mix well, using your hands to mash everything together. Make sure all the ingredients are evenly distributed to ensure maximum flavour. Cover and set aside for 30 minutes to let the flavours develop, or overnight in the refrigerator if time allows.
- 2 Meanwhile, pour the stock into a large saucepan and add the star anise, ginger and garlic. Bring to the boil over a high heat, cover, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes.
- 3 Pull off a golf ball-sized piece of the pork mixture and roll it into a smooth dumpling using the palms of your hands. Set aside and repeat until all of the pork mixture is used up. You should get about 8 dumplings.
- 4 Using a slotted spoon, carefully drop the dumplings into the saucepan with the spiced stock. Add the spring onions, Chinese leaf lettuce, coriander and soy sauce and gently mix everything together. Bring to the boil, then turn the heat down to low and simmer for 8–10 minutes, or until the pork dumplings are cooked through and beautifully tender. You can cut one open to test. Serve immediately so that the greens stay lovely and fresh.



Singapore Coconut and Prawn Laksa

SERVES 4

1 tsp tamarind paste
400ml/14fl oz/1½ cups coconut milk
250g/9oz raw large king prawns, peeled
and deveined
110g/3¾oz/1¼ cups bean sprouts
110g/3¾oz rice noodles
2 tbsp vegetable oil
sea salt
coriander sprigs, to serve

FOR THE SPICE PASTE

2 lemongrass stalks
1 red chilli
4 garlic cloves
1 tsp shrimp paste
½ tsp turmeric
2 tbsp vegetable oil

GOES WELL WITH

Mango, Orange and Nutmeg
Cheesecake (page 201)
Vanilla and Honey Syllabub
(page 202)

- 1 To prepare the spice paste, remove the really tough outer leaves of the lemongrass and cut off the ends of the stalks. Starting at the fatter end, roughly slice each lemongrass stalk into rings. You should see a purple band in the rings. Stop slicing when there are no more purple bands, as the tops will be too tough to eat. Set the tops aside to add to the laksa later and put the sliced lemongrass in a mini food processor. Add the other spice paste ingredients and blend to a smooth paste.
- 2 Put the tamarind paste and 100ml/3½fl oz/⅓ cup water in a small bowl. Mix well and leave to stand for 5 minutes, or until the paste has dissolved, then remove any lumps. Heat a large saucepan over a medium heat and spoon in the spice paste. Stir-fry the paste for 30 seconds until fragrant, then pour in the coconut milk, prepared tamarind, 200ml/7fl oz/scant 1 cup freshly boiled water and season with a pinch of salt. Mix well, then turn up the heat to high and bring to the boil. Add the prawns, bean sprouts and lemongrass tops, turn the heat down to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes, or until the prawns have turned pink and are cooked through. Remove the lemongrass tops.
- 3 Meanwhile, cook the noodles according to the packet instructions, drain and drizzle with the oil to prevent sticking. Divide the cooked noodles into four deep bowls and ladle in the hot soup. Add a coriander sprig to each bowl and serve immediately.



Grilled Halloumi, Tomato and Olive Salad

This is adapted from a salad I had in Istanbul, where they use wonderful Turkish chillies that have a mild, smoky, sun-dried taste. I found that by mixing sun-dried tomatoes and chilli flakes you can create a similar flavour.

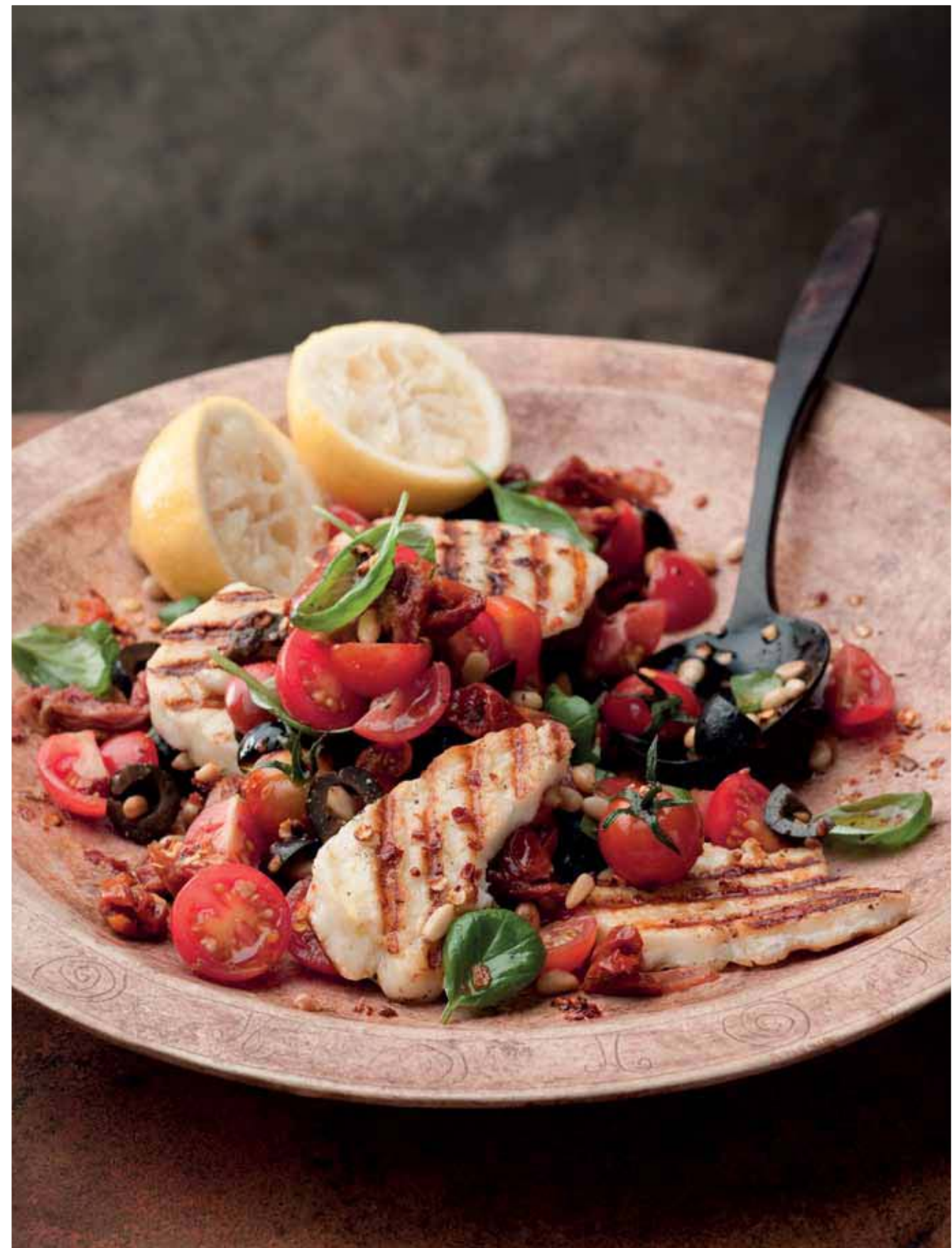
SERVES 4

250g/9oz halloumi, cut into 5mm/¼in thick slices
 50g/1¾oz ⅓ cup pine nuts
 250g/9oz cherry tomatoes
 100g/3½oz/heaped ¾ cup pitted black olives, roughly chopped
 2 large handfuls basil leaves, roughly torn
 100g/3½oz/1 cup sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained and finely chopped
 juice of 1 lemon
 ¼ tsp chilli flakes
 1 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for dressing (optional)
 sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

GOES WELL WITH

Marinated Lamb Chops with a Spicy Mango Salsa (page 102)
 Mexican Cinnamon Peaches (page 206)

- 1 Heat a griddle pan over a high heat until smoking, then griddle the halloumi pieces for about 30 seconds on each side, or until you can see lovely charred lines. Remove from the heat and set aside.
- 2 Heat a small frying pan over a medium heat. Add the pine nuts and gently toast for 1–2 minutes, or until the pine nuts are golden brown. They will change colour very suddenly, so watch them carefully, and every now and then, shake the pan so the nuts move about and don't burn. Transfer the pine nuts to a plate to cool.
- 3 Cut the cherry tomatoes into different shapes and sizes: lengthways, sideways, quarters and leave some whole. This will make the salad look amazing and more interesting to eat. Put them in a large mixing bowl with the olives, basil, sun-dried tomatoes, lemon juice, chilli flakes and half the toasted pine nuts. Season with a small pinch of salt and good pinch of pepper and mix well. There should be enough oil in the sun-dried tomatoes to coat everything. If not, stir in extra olive oil.
- 4 To serve, heap the cherry tomatoes in a large serving bowl and scatter over the remaining pine nuts. Top the salad with the grilled halloumi, then drizzle over a tablespoon of olive oil. Serve immediately with the squeezed lemon halves.



Feta, Walnut and Nigella Seed Salad

- 1 To make the dressing, whisk the oil and lemon juice in a bowl and season with a good pinch of salt and pepper. Add the spring onions and set aside for 5 minutes to take the rawness out of the spring onions.
- 2 Put half the chopped walnuts in a large mixing bowl and crumble in half the feta. Pour over the dressing, chuck in the green chilli, tarragon, parsley and mint, then toss everything together.
- 3 Divide the salad onto four serving plates, scatter the nigella seeds and the remaining walnuts and feta cheese over the top and serve immediately.

SERVES 4

50g/1¾ oz/scant ½ cup walnuts,
roughly chopped
200g/7oz feta
1 green chilli, deseeded and finely
chopped
1 large handful tarragon leaves, roughly
chopped
2 large handfuls parsley leaves, roughly
chopped
2 large handfuls mint leaves, roughly
chopped
1 tsp nigella seeds

FOR THE DRESSING

juice of 1 lemon
2 tbsp olive oil
4 spring onions, finely sliced
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

GOES WELL WITH

Grilled Coriander and Mint Chicken
(page 64)
Creamy Coriander Swordfish with
Red Onion Raita (page 123)
Dark Chocolate, Clove and Cinnamon
Brownies (page 196)



Pomegranate, Fennel, Orange and Watercress Salad

SERVES 4

1 pomegranate
3 oranges, peeled and cut into segments
½ red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
75g/2½oz watercress
1 fennel bulb, very finely sliced or shaved with a mandolin

FOR THE DRESSING

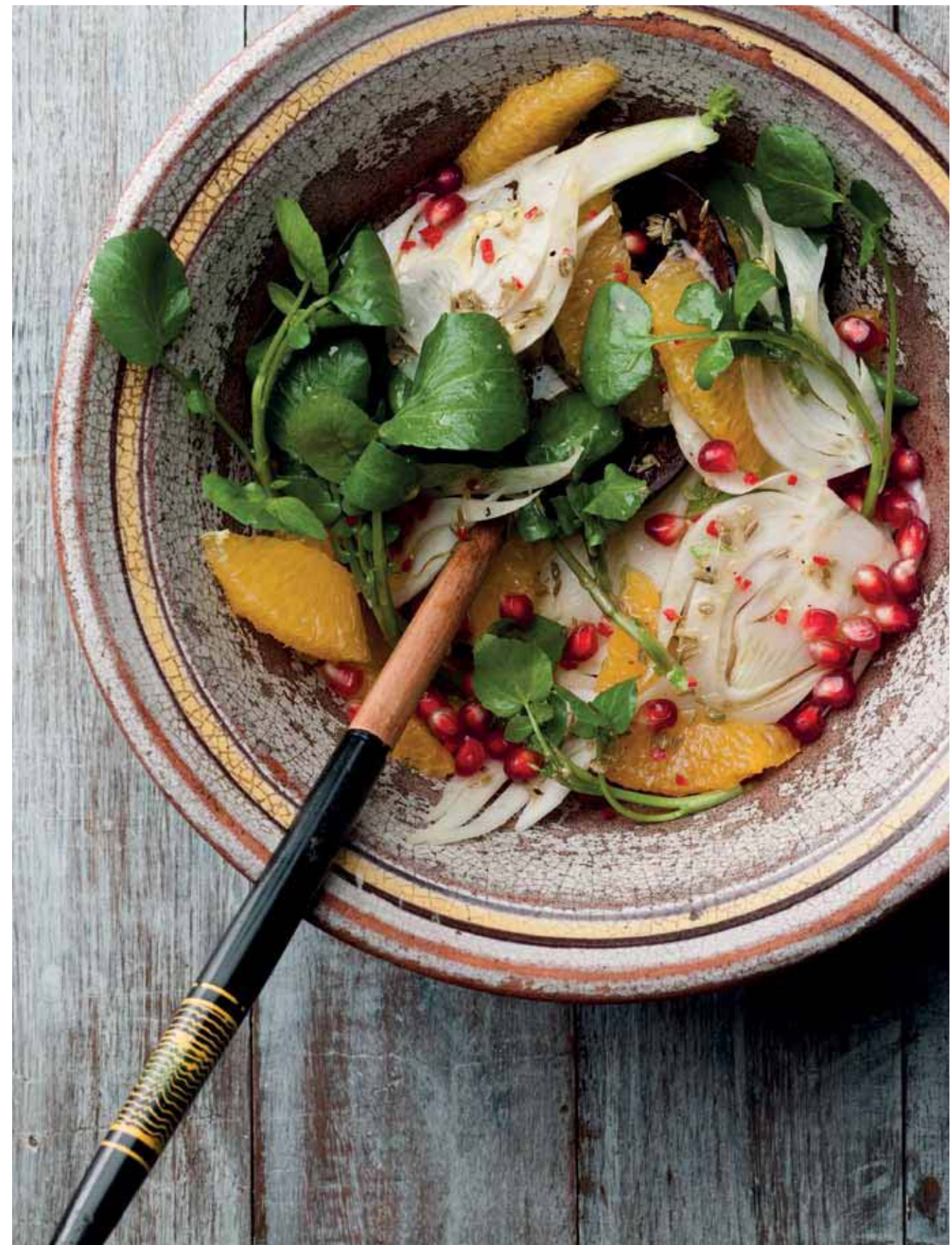
1 tsp fennel seeds, lightly crushed
juice of 1 lemon
2 tbsp orange juice
1 tbsp olive oil
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

GOES WELL WITH

Grilled Lamb Skewers with a Bulgur Wheat Salad (page 106)
Cardamon and Pistachio Nut Kulfı (page 205)

This is a great-looking fresh salad, bejewelled with pomegranate seeds and orange segments. It showcases the lovely fresh aniseed flavour that comes from the finely shaved fennel and lightly crushed fennel seeds, which are used in the dressing and bring everything together.

- 1 To make the dressing, whisk all the ingredients together in a mixing bowl, season with a good pinch of salt and pepper and set aside.
- 2 Roll the pomegranate back and forth a couple of times on a hard surface to loosen the seeds, then cut it in half. Using a wooden spoon, bash the seeds out into a bowl. This can get quite messy, so wear an apron to cover your clothes and put the bowl into the sink while you're bashing — this way any mess can easily be washed away. Remove any white bits from the seeds and drain off the excess juice. Transfer the seeds into a mixing bowl along with the orange segments, red chilli, watercress and fennel.
- 3 Pour the dressing over the salad, toss well and serve immediately.



Chilli

I absolutely love chillies – they are my favourite spice. There is something so beautiful and exotic about them; from warming mild chillies to smoky dry chillies or the full-on punch-in-the-face hot chillies. They are all amazing to cook with.

The chilli has a really interesting story. It was discovered when Christopher Columbus bumped into America by accident, while trying to find a faster route to the spice islands of Indonesia. The Europeans weren't very receptive to this odd-tasting spice, but the locals of a certain colony in India, called Goa, went mad for it. It quickly replaced the expensive black pepper as the piquancy in the local Goan food – and eventually made its way into dishes throughout the world.

Fresh chillies are generally red or green, and the smaller they are the hotter. You get the wonderful Asian chillies, fat mild jalapeños, fruity hot Caribbean Scotch bonnets and the scorching little bird's eye chillies that are generally used whole and, to release even more heat, can be pricked a few times with a sharp knife. When buying chillies, you want to look for ones that are juicy, firm and shiny skinned. The heat is mainly in the seeds and the thin layer of skin on the inside of the chilli, so if you want to avoid the full hit of heat, scrape the seeds and the thin layer of skin out with a teaspoon. Also, a quick rinse will remove even more of the heat. When preparing any sort of chilli, please remember not to rub your eyes. Fresh chillies are quite robust and will normally last about a week in the fridge.

Dry chillies come whole, crushed or powdered and in an array of different strengths. They have a more intense, full-bodied, smoky flavour than fresh chillies, and the powders also provide a beautiful red colour. Most of the dried and powdered chillies available will last about six months in a dry, airtight container that is kept out of direct sunlight.

If you get a bit overexcited and chuck too much chilli into your wonderful culinary creations, coconut milk, cream or yogurt will help take some of the heat out. And if you have a mouthful of something that's a bit too adventurous, don't grab for the water – this will only make the hot sensation worse. Instead, have some yogurt, milk or plain rice to take away the intensely spicy edge!

