

Rena Patten

The Mediterranean Table

Easy to prepare meat, seafood, breads and dips, vegetarian and vegan recipes suitable for everyday meals, or platters and grazing boards to share with friends and family.





Contents

INTRODUCTION	9
SOUPS	15
BREADS AND DIPS	29
SALADS	53
PASTA & RICE	77
MEAT	97
SEAFOOD	127
POULTRY	165
VEGETARIAN	187
INDEX	223

About the Author

Growing up with a Mediterranean background, cooking and eating were a big event in my household and the food of Greece, Italy, France and the Middle East was a part of everyday life. From a very young age this instilled a great passion in me and I've now been involved with food and cooking for well over 40 years.

I am a home cook and not a trained chef – I attended what I think was the best cookery school and that was our home kitchen where my teachers were my mother and grandmothers. I have a natural understanding and love of food and I am always happy in the kitchen surrounded by lots of fresh ingredients, cooking and creating new recipes.

My mother went to work when I was 13 and she would come home after a long and tiring day and start cooking the food that we loved and had gotten used to over the years. It didn't matter how tired she was she would always prepare a home-cooked meal.

One day I decided to surprise my parents by preparing the evening meal. It was the first proper meal that I prepared on my own and I remember that it was Greek lamb chops with vegetables and Greek salad.

After that I prepared dinner as often as I could every week and it was then that the cooking bug bit and bit really hard. Since having my own family I have loved nothing more than to cook for them. I have always considered it a blessing and a privilege to be able to do so, something that I hope I have passed on to my children and grandchildren.

To date I am the published author of 11 cookbooks; I was the first person in Australia, or probably the world I am told, to write a cookbook solely on quinoa. What was supposed to be one book and one book only on quinoa turned out to be four.

I have catered extensively over the years, taught cooking at local colleges and shopping centres, have done interviews on TV and radio, talks at many libraries, private functions, shopping centres and well-known homeware stores. I also had a recipe column with a local newspaper for a number of years.

In 2008 and 2009 I was fortunate enough to be involved with the Good Food and Wine Shows in Melbourne and Sydney and the Lifestyle and Retirement Expo in Sydney where I held cooking demonstrations to sit-down audiences. It was then that my association with New Holland began.

Dedication

For
Graeme,
Mum and Dad





Introduction

Welcome to *The Mediterranean Table*, where in my kitchen food from this wonderful region of the world is prepared on an almost everyday basis.

The Mediterranean diet is regarded as one of the healthiest and most popular in the world. It has earned this accolade because of the health benefits associated with the type of ingredients used, its cooking methods, and for being a diet that is so diverse it can be enjoyed by meat eaters and non-meat eaters alike. Vegetarian and vegan meals feature greatly in the Mediterranean kitchen.

I have a Mediterranean background and was born in a Mediterranean country where I was fortunate enough to be brought up enjoying food from Greece, Italy, France and the Middle East.

The main ingredients in the Mediterranean kitchen are simple and readily available comprising lots of fresh vegetables, fruit, legumes/pulses, whole grains, seafood, smaller amounts of meat and poultry, seeds, nuts, herbs and spices, olive oil and of course garlic. These are the ingredients that make up the foundation of the Mediterranean cuisine.

The recipes in this book are mainly traditional recipes that have been prepared in Mediterranean kitchens for many years. They are the recipes that I grew up with, and I remember my mother and grandmother spending hours in the kitchen preparing delicious and healthy meals. There are a wide variety of dishes that were prepared when I was a child as well as ones that I have prepared for my own family for many years. Some have been simplified without losing the traditional flavour to fit in with today's lifestyle.

Although life has changed and most of us do not have the time to spend hours in the kitchen like our mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers did, you will find the recipes in this book easy to prepare using readily available ingredients that are mostly found at the local supermarket.

The wonderful thing about Mediterranean food is that although meals are served and enjoyed as a main meal, a large selection of them are also suitable to be served as mezze (also known as tapas) or on a grazing board to be shared and leisurely enjoyed over a period of time.



Mediterranean cooking and the Mediterranean table are all about fresh home-cooked food and lots of it, cooked with love, shared with family and friends and usually served on big platters that are placed in the middle of the table for everyone to help themselves.

Eating is a very important event in the Mediterranean culture, so much so that I would actually call it a ritual; it is a time where beautiful memories are made, spending time with people we love and sharing food that we love.

Grazing Boards/Mezze/Tapas

Mezze/tapas are very popular in a lot of Mediterranean countries; it is a very common way of enjoying food and a way that makes having a meal a fun experience. They are not a course in a meal such as an appetiser or an entrée, they are a selection of small dishes which become the entire actual meal. These dishes are usually salty, spicy or savoury, can be served hot or cold, and might be enjoyed as a leisurely lunch or dinner, or at any time of the day with or without drinks.

These dishes are perfect to serve on grazing boards. The grazing board is really an adaptation of a mezze/tapas meal, very much like an antipasto platter. The array of food is usually served on a beautiful large wooden board or tray to be shared.

Dishes in this book that are suitable for serving on grazing boards are marked as such as are the vegetarian and vegan meals.

Health Benefits

There have been a lot of studies done on the benefits for those who fully or partially follow a Mediterranean diet. These have shown that the traditional food from the region has huge benefits in controlling certain diseases as well as resulting in an overall feeling of wellness. Eating a Mediterranean diet has been known to lower the risk of certain conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes to name a few. It can also be beneficial in lowering cholesterol, promoting healthy aging and help establish healthier mental function.

Preparation

You will find all the recipes in this book easy to prepare using ingredients that are readily available from the supermarket, your local delicatessen, green grocer, butcher





or fishmonger. You will not have to travel the world to find them. There are just a few basic things to remember though:

- Firstly, not all cookware, stoves and ovens are the same and so cooking and baking times will vary depending on how your own stove and oven work as well as the type of cookware that you use.
- For the recipes that require grilling or frying, I find a good non-stick griddle pan or frying pan works really well on top of the stove.
- For ease of cleaning I like to line baking trays with non-stick baking paper so that any mess can just be thrown away.
- Most of the recipes in this book have been designed to feed 4–6 or 6–8 people.
- Basic pantry must-haves for Mediterranean cooking are olive oil (preferably extra virgin), onions, garlic (and lots of it), tinned tomatoes, tomato paste, dried and tinned legumes/pulses such as lentils, chickpeas and beans (tinned legumes are great for quick cooking with no long soaking time required and they work beautifully in most dishes), pasta, rice, vinegars, fresh and dried herbs and spices, and fresh lemons and limes.
- The seasoning of food is one of personal taste and differs greatly between people. That is why for the most part I have not specified amounts, I have left that entirely up to you.
- For convenience sake with today's busy lifestyles, I have used ready-made pastry in some recipes that call for the use of pastry. The quality of ready-made pastry available these days is so good that I don't feel it is always warranted for anyone to spend time making their own.
- I tend to use extra-virgin olive oil for just about everything. I love using it and find it adds so much flavour to dishes. I use it for cooking, frying, basting and of course in salads or for that extra drizzle on cooked food.

Happy cooking and I truly hope you have many happy and memorable moments as your travel through my Mediterranean kitchen.





SOUPS



Rustic Beef, Vegetable and Cracked Wheat Soup

SERVES 6



2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
1 leek, washed and finely sliced
2 medium potatoes, cubed
2 medium carrots, cubed
2 stalks celery, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
750 g (27 oz) gravy beef,
cut into chunks
2 tomatoes, skinned,
de-seeded and chopped
2 litres (64 fl oz) beef stock
salt and freshly ground pepper
150 g (5 oz) frozen peas
large handful of fresh baby spinach
125 g (4 oz) cracked wheat/bourghul
250 ml (8 fl oz) boiling water
lemon juice for serving

Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium–high heat and sauté the onion, leek, potatoes, carrots, celery (including some of the more tender celery leaves which have been chopped), and garlic until soft and just starting to take on some colour. Add the beef, tomatoes and stock and season with salt and pepper. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat, cover and simmer on low heat for an hour.

Add the cracked wheat and boiling water, bring back to a full rolling boil, reduce the heat, cover, and continue simmering for another 40 minutes, or until the meat is tender and the soup has thickened.

Stir in the peas and spinach and cook for another 10 minutes.

Take off the heat and leave to stand for 15–20 minutes before serving with crusty bread and a sprinkle of lemon juice. The meat can be pulled apart with two forks into smaller pieces for serving.

Note: This is a hearty and thick soup ideal for the cold winter days. Great for freezing.

