



# An Honest Kitchen

Winter 2009/2010

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&  
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# An Honest Kitchen

I first met Lucy online. A few months after starting Limes & Lycopene I came across her site, Nourish Me. We left each other comments, started emailing and Lucy sent me her remarkable recipe for walnut and fennel pie. The friendship was cemented. Over the last two years we've talked a lot and much of this conversation has of course, been about food. Kitchen successes and failures, ingredients we've found, jam-making, our shared admiration for Nigel Slater.

Health, sustainability, using local and seasonal ingredients are issues that speak to both of us. But more than that we share an approach and attitude to what we cook and eat. Food is central to our lives, but it's simplicity and honesty that draws us both in.

While I love eating out and the utter miraculousness of some restaurant food, at home my cooking couldn't be further from this example. Good basic ingredients; lots of vegetables; the liberal use of fresh and dried herbs and spices; an openness and willingness to experiment; not being precious about what I am doing; and finding joy in a simple meal cooked by my own hands – these are what I go back to when preparing food. These are the attitudes and beliefs that underpin my cooking.

Which is what we're trying to do in *An Honest Kitchen* – show real food, that's good for you. Food that's balanced and made up of ingredients which improve your health, served in realistic portions. Along the way we've tried to simplify, cut back on processes, find ways of making the cooking easier and show the food as it really is. Honest food.

More than that though, we're also trying to be honest about what cooking involves. While these recipes are simpler than many, they're not instant – but then nothing in the kitchen really is. Prepping a few ingredients and making a simple dish will take you at least 20 minutes. However it's time well spent. Rather than veging on the couch or watching TV, you've made something, which in terms of nutrition and flavour far outshines any takeaway or instant meal you could buy.

What we're doing in *An Honest Kitchen* is not complex, lengthy or difficult. This is not restaurant quality food, it's not meant to be the best food you've ever tasted. Instead we're aiming for something you can make in the evening, after a day at work. A meal which isn't going to take too long or prove too difficult, but something you can make to feed yourself and your family. A meal which provides good nutrition and plenty of vegetables.

A damn, fine tasty meal which can be made at home, without too much fuss or preciousness – that's the aim of *An Honest Kitchen*.

## **A note on ingredients:**

Here in Australia our winters are mild. For most of us the temperature never drops below zero, snow is almost unknown and we get through the cold months without any need for thermals. While we all complain about the cold and huddle round our heaters in the evening, really we get off lightly.

This also means we have a wider variety of winter produce than many. Where I live in Sydney broccoli thrives during winter; fennel comes into season in the colder months; and locally grown bok choy is available all year round. This is quite different from many parts of the Northern hemisphere and also means this edition of *An Honest Kitchen* may include some vegetables which are not in season during *your* winter. However, don't worry. My recipes are very flexible and there's never only one way to make something. Therefore under each recipe both Lucy and I have included lots of notes about alternative ingredients, what you can leave out, ways of tweaking and adapting the recipe to suit your tastebuds. These notes include suggestions on ingredient substitutions, so you'll be able to find something which is in season in your local area.

## **A note on measurements:**

All around the world we measure ingredients in slightly different ways. Here in Australia we are firmly entrenched in the metric system, measuring all our ingredients in grams, millilitres and metric cups. While other countries use pounds, ounces and cups which measure out a different overall quantity. Even seeming standard amounts like a tablespoon are different in Australia, the UK and northern America.

This edition of *An Honest Kitchen* has been adapted with these variables in mind. I've generally listed ingredients using both metric and imperial measures – so you'll see items listed in grams and ounces. Where exact volume measures are crucial to a recipe, I've listed them in millilitres and ounces.

However most of the time this level of precision is not required and the tiny variations between your tablespoon and my tablespoon will really make no difference.

All of this means you are free to weigh and measure ingredients in this edition of *An Honest Kitchen* according to your local customs. No conversions, no complicated calculations and no second-guessing the system. Use your measuring system and you will be fine.

*Kathryn*

### **A note on the photographs:**

Food in its natural, beautiful state should be just that: beautiful. In the southern hemisphere, we are blessed with an extraordinary quality of natural light. It's a combination of that light and the fabulous produce we have access to which drives my approach to food photography.

The thought of stepping into post-production photographic programs doesn't make sense given the above. Thus, the pictures you see among these pages are all taken by me, Lucy, in my kitchen, in real time and presented *exactly* as they were taken. I rely solely on the light available through my kitchen's large windows and, because both Kathryn and I want the food to be honest and approachable there's no 'styling' done. Food is plated and photographed before being devoured and, often, it is the ingredients themselves and the imperfections along the way – flecks of sauce on a plate's edge; stray bits of grated lemon zest – which speak most loudly.

This is food that has been cooked in a real, *working*, home kitchen. When you're hungry you want to eat immediately and besides, perfection is vastly over-rated, right?

*Lucy*

## **About Kathryn Elliott**

I'm a Sydney based nutritionist and herbalist. I see clients privately at the Balance2health clinic in Gladesville; write widely for magazines and also blog about how to eat well at Limes & Lycopene.

My life centres on food – both professionally and personally. I spend my clinic days working with individuals encouraging and prodding them to eat well; problem solving, motivating and coaching. I spend other days writing about food – why you should eat well, what to eat and how to do it.

And at the end of the day, I relax and recharge through cooking. Taking disparate ingredients and turning them into a meal, something I've produced with my own hands. Food that nourishes and nurtures. My cooking at home isn't fancy. I like experimenting and a lot of the time I cook from a combination of intuition and what's available. It doesn't always work out, in fact the phrase, "it's a bit odd but at least it's healthy" is often used in my house.

I'm continually blown away by vegetables and am mildly obsessed with beetroot. My favourite cookery book of all time is a (now) food splattered old paperback edition, by Madhur Jaffrey. It contains no photos, no styling and no glamour. Instead, it's amazing and astounding food. The recipes work every time.

## **About Lucinda Dodds**

It isn't the camera that makes a good photograph; rather it is what the operator does with it that matters. Among the first lessons I learned at Art School, this simple truth – one easily applied to other tasks in life - has stuck. Visually, the process of cooking, the tools we use and the produce itself is at least as interesting as the finished product. A bookseller for almost fifteen years, I'm (finally) putting some of that art knowledge into practice.

I like silence and solitude, growing my own veg as best I can, dreaming of a much larger plot someday and love to cook. Fennel is my favourite vegetable but in truth, I've never met a vegetable I didn't like. Well, maybe cabbage. It's a work in progress. I live in Melbourne with two teenage stepsons, a small scruffy dog, my partner and a growing family of cameras. Oh, and please, call me Lucy. Most everyone does!

# Chickpea & spinach soup

Serves 2, as a meal

60g (1.75oz) quick-cook dried wheat vermicelli noodles  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
4 green shallots, finely sliced  
250g (9oz) canned or cooked chickpeas  
400g (14oz) canned tomatoes  
½ bunch English spinach, roughly chopped  
¼ bunch fresh mint, roughly chopped  
1½ tablespoons shoyu

**Soaking the noodles:** Put the kettle on to boil. While that's heating up take your noodles and break them up slightly with your hands. You're after short-ish strips for the soup, ones that are easy to balance on a spoon – rather than long, twirly noodles. Place the noodles in a bowl and pour over the boiling water. Put these aside while you're making up the soup.

**Start the soup:** Put a good sized saucepan on a medium heat. Add the olive oil and once that has warmed through, add the shallots. Move these around with a wooden spoon for 2 minutes, so they flavour the oil but don't stick or burn. Turn the heat up and add the chickpeas and tomatoes. You also want to add about 400ml (14oz) of water. I usually fill up the tomato can with water and pour that in, rinsing out the last bits of tomato juice as I go. Bring to the boil, then turn the heat down slightly and simmer for 5 minutes.

While this is cooking, drain the noodles and gently break apart using your fingers.

**Add the greens:** Add the spinach and most of the mint. Drain the noodles and add these as well. Stir and leave to simmer gently for another 2 minutes – until the spinach is cooked, but still bright green and the noodles have started to absorb the tomato flavouring.

**To finish:** Add the shoyu and stir through. Check the seasoning at this point – you may need to add a bit of pepper and a tiny bit more salt. Serve with the rest of the fresh mint sprinkled over the top.

## Cooking & Storage:

Don't let the noodles, green shallots and shoyu fool you, this is a very Mediterranean style soup.

The basic soup without noodles can be frozen. You can then defrost and add the soaked noodles while heating the soup up.

## Variations:

I like the simplicity of using noodles, which just need to be soaked – saving on time and washing up. However you could replace these with pasta. Strips of spaghetti or any small shaped pasta would work. You will need to cook these separately and add to the soup once cooked.

## Lucy's Notes:

Delicious and unthinkably easy to make; great food for a tired cook. The combination of mint and spinach is what, for me, makes this soup stand out.



