

Eat in, bistro-style

Turn an evening meal for two into a special occasion with BARNEY DESMAZERY'S relaxed French supper
Photographs LIS PARSONS



Staying in has become the new going out for my wife, Emily, and me, especially since we became parents. After a busy week, we are normally too tired to venture outdoors and would rather 'nest' in the comfort of our own kitchen. This doesn't mean we cut corners, though. The food we cook is well sourced and deliciously simple. Bistro-style dishes like these rely upon a few good-quality ingredients, and need no fussy garnishes or preparation – perfect for the home cook who wants to impress without stress.

YOUR MENU FOR TWO

- Steamed mussels with leeks, thyme & bacon
- Whole roast bream with potatoes & olives
- Goat's cheese & bistro salad
- Mini plate of lemon puds

YOUR TIMEPLAN To eat around 8pm

- **7PM** Remove the cheese from the fridge. Put the potatoes on to boil, scrub the mussels and prepare the other ingredients for the mussels
- **7.20PM** Drain the potatoes and leave to cool. Get the salad ready for the cheese, but don't dress it and leave in the fridge ready to serve. Slice the walnut bread
- **7.40PM** Slice the potatoes and toss with the other ingredients. Place the fish in the oven, then start cooking the mussels
- **7.55PM** Finish the mussels, pour the wine over the fish and place back in the oven
- **8PM** Sit down, pour yourself a glass of wine and enjoy the mussels while the fish finishes cooking



The first two courses are based around a morning trip to the fishmongers. For this dish, try to buy the smallest mussels you can find – they are always the sweetest. If you want to make the whole menu meat-free, simply leave out the bacon.

Steamed mussels with leeks, thyme and bacon

SERVES 2 • PREP 20 mins • COOK 15 mins
Easy

- 750g/1lb 10oz mussels
- 25g/1oz butter
- 6 rashers smoked streaky bacon, chopped into small pieces
- 2 small leeks, sliced on the diagonal
- handful thyme sprigs
- small glass cider or white wine

Scrub and de-beard the mussels. Heat half the butter in a pan, then sizzle the bacon for 3-4 mins until starting to brown. Add the leeks and thyme, then sweat everything together for 4-5 mins until soft. Turn the heat up high, add the mussels and cider or wine, then cover and cook for 4-5 mins, shaking the pan occasionally, until the mussels have opened. Discard any that don't open. Scoop the mussels and the other bits into a dish, then place the pan back on the heat. Boil the juices for 1 min with the rest of the butter, then pour over the mussels and serve with crusty bread.

PER SERVING 377 kcalories, protein 24g, carbohydrate 9g, fat 26g, saturated fat 12g, fibre 2g, sugar 5g, salt 2.76g

Roasting a whole fish has to be one of the easiest ways to cook it, and serving it is dead simple, too – all you do is bring the dish to the table.

Whole roast bream with potatoes and olives

SERVES 2 • PREP 10 mins • COOK 40 mins
Easy Good source of omega-3 and vitamin C

- 400g/14oz new or small potatoes
- large handful small black olives
- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- large bunch flat-leaf parsley, leaves roughly chopped, stalks reserved
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- zest ½ lemon
- 1 whole sea bream, about 450g/1lb, gutted, head on
- small glass white wine

1 Heat oven to 220C/fan 200C/gas 7. Cook the potatoes in boiling water for about 10 mins, cut into thick slices, then cool. In a bowl, toss the potatoes with the olives, garlic, half the chopped parsley, half the olive oil, the lemon zest and salt and pepper. Tip this mix over the bottom of a medium gratin dish.
2 Season the fish and place the parsley stalks in the cavity. Lay the fish on top of the potatoes and drizzle with the rest of the olive oil. Bake for 15 mins until the potatoes start to crisp up around the edges. Pour the wine over, then return to the oven for 10 mins more until the potatoes have browned and the fish is cooked.
3 Remove the dish from the oven, scatter over the rest of the parsley and bring the dish to the table. When you serve up, don't forget the lovely white wine juices in the bottom of the dish. Delicious with a simple bowl of spinach.

PER SERVING 463 kcalories, protein 34g, carbohydrate 36g, fat 20g, saturated fat 3g, fibre 3g, sugar 6g, salt 0.81g



Easy yet impressive



No cook

By grilling a few slices of bread and tossing together a simple salad, a piece of cheese becomes a course in itself.

Goat's cheese and bistro salad

SERVES 2 • PREP 10 mins • NO COOK

Easy  

1 little goat's cheese, about 150g (see Buy the Best, below)
4 thin slices walnut bread

FOR THE SALAD

handful lamb's lettuce or watercress
small handful walnut pieces
1 small shallot, finely chopped
1 tbsp walnut or olive oil
1 tsp sherry vinegar

Take the cheese out of the fridge at least 1 hr before serving. Brown the bread in a toaster until crisp. While the bread is toasting, toss all the salad ingredients together. Serve the salad on the same plate as the cheese and toast.

PER SERVING 419 calories, protein 14g, carbohydrate 23g, fat 31g, saturated fat 11g, fibre 1g, sugar 19g, salt 1.16g

TO FINISH YOUR MEAL Mini plate of lemon puds

If, like my wife, you think a meal isn't complete without something sweet to finish it, then this cheat's dessert is ideal. Buy two slices of lemon tart from a bakery or patisserie and, as an optional extra, dust them heavily with icing sugar and caramelize the tops with a cook's blowtorch. Serve each slice with a small scoop of shop-bought lemon sorbet.

Buy the best

Mussels Most fishmongers sell mussels loose, but some only sell them in 500g or 1kg bags, in which case simply adjust the recipe to 500g. Look for mussels that are tightly closed. When you get them home, rinse them under cold running water and drain. To prepare, pull the piece of thread, known as the beard, off the mussels and discard any that are wide open. If some are slightly open, tap them against the side of the sink; if they close straight away, they are fine. If they remain open after tapping, discard them. Once cooked, don't eat any that are still closed.

Sea bream A very tasty, firm-fleshed fish widely used in Mediterranean cooking. It is now being responsibly farmed alongside sea bass in Greece.

Sea bream is also called gilt-head bream and should be available from larger supermarkets. Choose firm fish with bright shiny scales and bright eyes. For this recipe, ask the fishmonger to scale and gut the fish but leave it whole. Red bream or a whole small sea bass could also be used.

Goat's cheese A little goat's cheese (known as a crottin in French) is the ideal amount to share. As the theme of the menu is French, go for a Crottin de Chavignol – a dry-textured, nutty-flavoured cheese that is sold in different degrees of ripeness. If you prefer a milder flavour, look for a small cheese called a Mâconnaise.