

by Alex Hollywood

WITH two best-selling cookery books under my belt and 16,000 followers on my foodie Instagram account, you'd have thought I'd be very particular about using the freshest-possible, seasonal ingredients.

But I'll let you into a secret — some of my favourite recipes are made from tinned food. In fact, I'm convinced a cupboard well-stocked with tins holds the key to rustling-up delicious meals: it offers inspiration, speed and minimal waste.

After my split from Great British Bake Off judge Paul Hollywood three years ago, and now that our 19-year-old son Josh has just gone off to university, I'm beginning to adapt to a regular routine of cooking just for me.

More often than not, I'll open my larder cupboard and rifle through the tins until inspiration strikes.

Tinned food has such a bad reputation, languishing with Pot Noodles at the bottom of the culinary food chain, and it's perhaps not surprising if your view of canned food has been tainted by spaghetti hoops and spam. But a recent Which? report found that some tinned foods contain more nutrients than fresh (fish, for instance, is canned hours after it is caught) — and tins are often less wasteful because of the long 'best before' dates that mean the contents are less likely to go off before you've had a chance to eat them.

Like every home cook, I've got rows of tins of chopped tomatoes and baked beans, sweet corn and tuna, but I've also built up a clever collection of more exotic tinned ingredients, which will completely transform an ordinary lockdown supper.

On my kitchen shelves, you'll find tins of artichoke hearts, and mussels, chestnuts and asparagus, jars of roasted peppers and aubergine, poached pears, cherries and raspberries.

As well as tinned tuna, I keep pink salmon, anchovies and sardines in olive oil, olives black and green, pickled walnuts, preserved lemons and juicy fat capers.

I've got tinned beansprouts and water chestnuts to bring a crunchy authenticity to a stir-fry and a rainbow assortment of different beans and pulses.

But my favourite canned staple is the 'confit de canard'.

YOU might think duck legs slow-cooked in fat would make a pretty unappetising prospect, but lay them on a baking sheet in a hot oven or under a grill to crisp and they taste utterly delicious added to a cassoulet with a can of flageolet beans or eaten with a tangy tinned fruit-infused sauce (see recipe, right).

Lockdown gave me the opportunity to embrace the power of my larder — and, if another period of isolation is on the cards, you could do worse than fill your kitchen cupboards from the tinned foods aisle.

Next time you're in the supermarket, simply grab one can of each of the many different kinds of beans you can find: black beans, flageolet beans, kidney, cannellini, butter beans, borlotti, black eye, haricot, edamame.

Each imparts a subtly different flavour and texture, and they are a healthy way to add fibre, nutrients and bulk to a meal.

You can boost a simple bolognese quite simply by draining half the sauce from a can of baked beans and tipping the rest in with the meat, a splash of wine and some Worcestershire sauce.

And, in my opinion, you can never have too many chickpeas — blend them with tahini to create hummus, mosh them with herbs to form falafels, and even bake them into

Gourmets may scoff, but food writer ALEX HOLLYWOOD says...
Cook posh nosh from a tin?
YES YOU CAN!

brownies. As for fruit, humble tinned pineapple can be converted into a delicious dessert if you mix some of the juice with a little vanilla, brandy or rum, then pop the pineapple rings under the grill to caramelize and serve with creme fraiche.

Tinned cherries, apricots and peaches can be seeped in fortified wine and baked under a cobbler topping. And poached pears are sublime drizzled in ginger liqueur and covered with a brown-sugar crumble topping.

That inauspicious tin of white asparagus tips will give crunch and flavour to a risotto or salad; while mussels from a can or jar give a delicious depth of flavour to a paella.

And I love to blend a jar of grilled aubergines with tahini to create a smoky baba ganoush, and add them to salads or pizzas, or layer them with a homemade tomato sauce and crumbled feta cheese.

Tinned fish, meanwhile, is an incredibly healthy and inexpensive way to stock up on omega-3s. You can create a delicious, nutritious quiche with a tin of salmon and a tin of artichoke hearts.

If I'm roasting lamb, I stuff slithers of anchovy into deep holes in the joint with garlic shards and sprigs of rosemary to infuse the meat as it cooks — the salty fish provides a delicious richness which cuts through the sweetness of the lamb.

The recipes on my Instagram aren't forensically measured and tested — it's just me experimenting, and playing with flavours in my kitchen, and I urge you to do the same.

So go ahead and build up your can collection.

Trust me, you'll never look at a tin of marrowfat peas in the same light again.

As told to LOUISE ATKINSON.



Well stocked: Alex with her pantry and above, with her cassoulet



A PERFECT way to use tinned tuna and sweetcorn.

SERVES 4

- 400g dried short pasta
- 50g butter
- 40g plain flour
- 500ml milk
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 100g rocket leaves, roughly chopped
- 250g strong Cheddar cheese, grated

- 2 x 120g cans tuna in oil, drained
- 1 x 200g can sweetcorn, drained
- Salt and pepper
- 3tbsp fresh breadcrumbs

COOK the pasta according to the packet instructions but reduce the time by 1 ½ minutes. Drain, reserving 3tbsp of the pasta cooking water. Melt the butter in a large saucepan, add the flour and cook for 2 mins. Slowly whisk in the milk and bring to the boil, stirring all the time.

Once boiled, remove the roux from the heat then stir in the mustard, rocket and cheese (reserving a large handful). Stir until the cheese has melted, then stir through the pasta, reserved pasta water, tuna and sweetcorn. Season well with salt and pepper. Tip into an ovenproof dish, sprinkle over the breadcrumbs and remaining cheese and bake in a pre-heated oven at 180c for ten minutes until bubbling and golden brown.

Black bomber bake



USING tins of tomatoes, kidney beans and black-eyed beans, this is a great way to bulk up a bolognese.

SERVES 4-6

- 400g minced beef
- 2tbsp olive oil
- 1onion, very finely diced
- 2celery stalks, very finely diced
- ½tsp chilli flakes (optional)
- 2tsp smoked paprika
- 100ml red wine
- 2tbsp tomato puree
- 2x 400g cans chopped tomatoes
- 100ml chicken or vegetable stock
- 1x 400g can red kidney beans, drained and rinsed

- 1x 400g can black-eyed beans
- 1tbsp tomato ketchup
- 1tbsp chipotle chilli sauce

HEAT oil in a pan, add onion and celery and fry for five minutes until soft and starting to colour. Add chilli and paprika then stir in meat and fry until brown, breaking up with a spoon. Add wine, then bring to the boil. Stir in tomato puree, canned tomatoes and stock. Simmer for 25 minutes till sauce thickens. Add beans, ketchup and chipotle sauce. Cook for five minutes. Serve with jacket potatoes topped with avocado, coriander, sour cream and cheese.

Pissaladiere

My MOTHER made this French-style pizza whenever we had parties, sleepovers or picnics — it makes the most of tinned anchovies and olives.

SERVES 6

- 375g ready rolled puff pastry
- 1kg onions thinly sliced
- 1garlic clove, crushed
- 1bouquet garni (sprigs of rosemary, parsley and thyme tied together)
- 2large tomatoes, skinned and chopped
- 16anchovy fillets, drained



- 30pitted black olives
- Preheat the oven to 180c/gas mark 4

LIGHTLY flour a work surface and roll out the pastry to fit a

25 x 38cm baking sheet and leave a 2cm overhang. Turn the overhang in to make a rim all around the edge. Gently fry the onions, garlic and herbs in a little butter and olive oil for 20 minutes, stirring, until the onions are sticky, translucent and golden. Add the tomatoes and cook for 2 minutes, then discard the herbs, season and stir. Then spread the mixture over the pastry. Arrange the anchovies in a criss-cross pattern over the surface, and then dot the olives all over the top. Bake for 25-30 minutes until golden brown.



Cupboard cassoulet

MADE with confit de canard (available in Waitrose), it brings memories of Carcassonne and the wonderful food markets found in every village. This is one of those dishes you can throw together in less than half an hour and it really is the most delicious supper.

SERVES 4

- 1large can confit de canard (4 legs)
- 190ml red wine
- 2tsp cranberry sauce
- 2tsp sweet chilli sauce
- 50g blueberries
- 50redcurrants, or can of cherries
- Handful of parsley, chopped

REMOVE most of the fat from the

duck legs, leaving just a slight covering, and lay them in a roasting tray. Pour in the wine, then stir in the cranberry and chilli sauces. Sprinkle the blueberries and redcurrants all over the duck legs. Cover securely with foil and roast for 25-30 minutes, checking halfway through that the sauce is syrupy and not burning (add a little water if you're worried). Transfer the duck to a warm serving dish, spoon the excess fat off the sauce. Crush some of the berries into the sauce with the back of the spoon and pour over the duck. Garnish with the parsley and serve with garlicky mashed potato and salad.

Chocolate & raspberry brioche pudding

RAID the larder for tinned raspberries or cherries to create this scrumptious dessert.

SERVES 4-6

- 3large eggs
- 300ml double cream
- 300ml crème fraiche
- A little vanilla extract
- 100ml milk
- 1tbsp caster sugar
- 1x 600g brioche loaf

LIGHTLY whisk the eggs, cream, crème fraiche, milk, caster sugar, and vanilla. Cut the brioche into 2cm chunks and scatter

half into a buttered 30 x 20cm ovenproof dish along with half the chocolate buttons and raspberries/cherries. Repeat this process once more. Pour over the cream and egg mixture, press down lightly then bake for 25-30 mins at 170c (gas 3) until golden brown. Serve with cream or custard.



Banoffee Crunchie Eton pie

A DELICIOUS way to use tinned caramel.

SERVES 6-8

- 1x 397g can condensed milk caramel
- 500g cream cheese
- 200ml double cream, lightly whipped
- 4bananas, peeled and chopped
- 1tsp vanilla extract
- 2Crunchie bars
- 2digestive biscuits
- A pinch of salt

IN A large bowl, mix together the cream cheese, cream, half of the condensed milk caramel, the chopped bananas and vanilla extract. Crush one of the Crunchie bars and mix it in as well. Then spoon into wide glasses. Crush together the digestives and the other Crunchie bar then sprinkle on top of the glasses. Mix together the remaining caramel and the salt and then drizzle on top.

Recipes taken from *Cooking Tonight* and *My Busy Kitchen* by Alex Hollywood, published by Hodder & Stoughton in hardback and ebook.