



SIMPLY SPA-LICIOUS

Want to feel like you are at a health retreat all year round? Jan Purser shares some spa cuisine secrets.



The joy of staying at a beautiful health-spa retreat is that everything is so delicious. From the peaceful surrounds, the nurturing body treatments to the carefully prepared food, it is a feast for all the senses. You can relive the feast all year round by preparing fabulous spa cuisine at home. We uncover the best tips and cooking tricks from several spa cuisine experts to help you.

David Hunter, the executive chef at the Golden Door Health Retreat in Queensland and co-author of *Purely Golden Door*, recommends you start by buying only unprocessed foods. Avoid highly processed foods such as packaged foods, those that contain additives and preservatives and foods high in fat, particularly fried foods or foods containing saturated fat and hydrogenated fat. Heating oil for frying and the process of hydrogenation changes the molecular structure of the oil, resulting in trans fatty acids, which are thought to contribute to the risk of heart disease.

Instead of using oils, butter or ghee for frying, Hunter uses stock, vinegar or citrus juice as alternatives for pan or wok frying. He also blanches, steams, grills and bakes in preference to frying or roasting in fat. As you would expect, he has a strong focus on fresh produce and his favourite meal is pan-seared snapper with warm Mediterranean salad.

"This dish shows people you can pan-fry without using oil or butter. It's high in protein, low in fat and is excellent for weight loss," he says.

Simple, organic, fresh

Todd Cameron, the head chef at Gaia Retreat in Byron Bay, NSW, believes spa food is the way of the future. His focus is on simplicity and he uses only fresh organic and seasonal produce. He draws inspiration from traditional health systems such as ayurveda, macrobiotic cooking and Chinese medicine.

"If you use fresh, organic produce the flavours are so lovely they stand alone and don't require much seasoning. Rather than serving lengthy cooked desserts, I might make a sorbet from pureed fresh fruit sweetened with a little white palm sugar or rapadura," Cameron says.

Deliciousness, he says, is very important for good digestion. If healthy food doesn't taste great, then enjoyment is reduced and digestion

suffers. He, too, avoids frying in oil and adds cold pressed oils at the end of cooking to add flavour, rather than use them as a cooking medium. He draws on other cuisines that use spices, herbs and sauces for flavour and for their lighter style of cooking. Mediterranean, South-East Asian, Japanese and Chinese flavours lend well to spa cuisine.

Health and balance

Annah Mirananda, the owner of Samadhi Retreat in Daylesford, Victoria, says its chef uses organic and biodynamic foods, focusing on a blend of vegan and macrobiotic styles. Being a one-on-one retreat, the menu is tailored for each guest to suit their specific health needs. Mirananda believes food is an integral part of restoring health and balance to our lives.

What stands out is the importance of using fresh produce that is organic and seasonal, replacing less beneficial cooking methods with healthier styles of cooking and removing processed sugars from the diet. David Hunter uses spelt rather than wheat bread along with rice milk or soy milk rather than dairy. Todd Cameron goes so far as to make his own sesame milk, while Annah Mirananda avoids all animal-based foods in a vegan approach.

For adding sweetness to dessert dishes, apple or pear juice concentrate or agave syrup are great sugar substitutes. Agave is the fruit of a cactus native to Mexico and is very sweet while being a low glycaemic index food. Pure maple syrup also contains minerals and can be used in small quantities.

Some enhancing additions for savoury dishes such as stir-fries, soups, vegetable dishes and dressings are: tamari sauce, a wheat-free soy sauce; Asian sesame oil which adds a unique nutty flavour; a sprinkle of Celtic sea salt or herb seasoning; or a splash of organic vinegar. Spices and fresh herbs are also a wonderful way to add exciting flavours to a simple dish.

Creating a spa cuisine kitchen essentially means simplifying your approach to food. Aim for fresh fruit and vegetables, good fish or seafood, legumes, nuts and seeds, and a good variety of grain foods. Add some essential pantry items and you are well on your way to a fabulous retreat of your own. ■

What you'll find in the spa cuisine pantry...

- Cold pressed oils – olive, macadamia, sesame
- Organic wheat-free tamari sauce
- Nuts and seeds
- Legumes
- Organic vinegar
- Variety of grains – quinoa, polenta, oats, spelt, buckwheat
- Wholemeal spelt bread
- Milk substitutes – rice milk, almond milk, oat milk, soy milk
- Sea salt
- Herb seasoning salt
- Spices
- Sugar substitutes – organic apple or pear juice concentrate, agave syrup, evaporated sugar cane juice such as rapadura

... and in the refrigerator...

- Fresh organic fruit and vegetables
- Free-range eggs
- Fresh fish and seafood
- Organic tofu and tempeh
- Fresh organic herbs





Pearl barley and kidney bean soup

Serves 4

3 tbsp raw pearl barley, soaked overnight
85g kidney beans, soaked overnight
½ teaspoon mustard seed oil or olive oil
1 white onion, chopped
85g diced peeled sweet potato
3 tbsp diced celery
3 tbsp diced leek,

white part only
2 garlic cloves
2 sprigs fresh rosemary
2 tsp fine polenta
750mL homemade vegetable stock
1 tomato, diced
2 tbsp snipped chives

Rinse the pearl barley and kidney beans and then boil in separate pans of water until tender (the barley will need about 15 minutes and the beans about 25 minutes). Drain.

Heat the oil in a large stockpot and add the onion, sweet potato, celery and leek and fry over low heat for 3 minutes. Add the garlic, rosemary, polenta, stock, barley and kidney beans and boil gently for 20 minutes.

Add the tomato and chives a few minutes before serving.



Recipes and images extracted from *Purely Golden Door* (Murdoch Books), RRP \$44.95.

For more information about *Purely Golden Door* or the Golden Door health retreats, visit www.goldendoor.com.au.



Teriyaki beef with cannellini bean puree

Serves 4

85g dried cannellini beans
1 tbsp wholegrain mustard
1 garlic clove, crushed
1 tsp chopped pickled ginger
2 tbsp tamari soy sauce
4 x 150g (500g total) beef fillets
8 asparagus spears
8 mushrooms
350g cherry tomatoes
250mL beef or veal stock
3 tbsp verjuice
2 tsp balsamic vinegar
½ tsp cornflour

Boil beans for 45 minutes or until very soft. Put in a blender with the mustard and puree until smooth. Mix together the garlic, ginger and soy sauce. Add the beef and leave to marinate for 30 minutes.

Grill beef medium rare or until cooked to your taste. Blanch the asparagus in boiling water for 2 minutes and refresh in cold water. Put the tomatoes on a baking tray and roast in the oven for 5 minutes. Saute the mushrooms in a non-stick pan lightly sprayed with oil.

Put the stock, verjuice and balsamic vinegar in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer until reduced by half. Mix the cornflower with a little water until smooth and then whisk into the sauce. Bring back to the boil and remove from the heat.

Arrange the beef on a mound of bean puree, with the asparagus, tomatoes and mushrooms to the side. Pour a little sauce around before serving.

Orange and raspberry cheesecake

Serves 12

1kg low-fat cottage cheese
3 eggs, plus 2 egg whites
1 lemon (juice and zest)
1 orange (juice and zest)
4 tbsp cornflower

½ cup honey
1 cup rice flakes (Freedom brand, crushed)
2 x 150g of fresh raspberries (reserve one pack for garnish)



Pre-heat the oven to 140°C (280°F). Put the cottage cheese, eggs and egg whites, lemon juice and zest, orange juice and zest, cornflour and honey in a food processor and mix until smooth.

Lightly crush the rice flakes and spread them on a paper-lined 30cm x 25cm baking tray. Pour the cheese mixture over the rice flakes and top with half the raspberries.

Bake for 45 minutes or until set and golden.

Allow to cool, then chill in the fridge and serve with remaining raspberries.