Along with eel and butter beans, marsh rat was one of the main ingredients of early Valencian paellas

# EAT SMART

#### **Pumpkins**

Come summer and it is the squash family to the rescue. Pumpkin, a prominent member of this family, has a bright orange colour which indicates that the veggie is rich in beta-carotene. Its seeds, which are edible, are rich in phytosterols, which when present in sufficient amounts, reduces blood cholesterol. The seeds also help in maintaining prostate health and the zinc it contains protects against osteoporosis.



# KITCHEN FUNDAS

### Velveting chicken

Velveting chicken is a Chinese cooking technique used in stir frying. The chicken breast is coated in a mixture of egg white and cornstarch and marinated for up to 30 minutes. It is then cooked in hot oil until the colour turns white. The chicken is then added to the stir fry as per the recipe. Velveting chicken helps because the egg white and cornstarch mixture prevents the chicken from overcooking



# FOOD GEEK

### Miracle berries

for 10 minutes, Add

the saffron and rice.

distributing it evenly

over the surface of

the paella pan. Boil

on a high heat for 8

minutes. Then turn

the heat down low

further 8 minutes so

the bottom layers of

and cook for a

The red-coloured miracle berries were discovered in 1725 in West Africa where members of a tribe would consume them before eating fermented wild plants. The berries contain a glycoprotein called miraculin that binds itself to the sour and bitter receptors in the mouth preventing these flavours from being tasted. Thus, the mind is tricked into thinking that the food

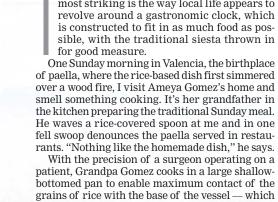


# Paella served Valenciano

Spain's national dish is best relished when the setting is decidedly communitarian, writes Sonia Nazareth from

Valencia

n Spain, dining is a serious pursuit. What's most striking is the way local life appears to revolve around a gastronomic clock, which is constructed to fit in as much food as possible, with the traditional siesta thrown in



is where the flavour resides. As a born-and-



### WHEN THE GROUP IS LARGE, SAY PAELLA

### **INGREDIENTS:**

- Rice Denomination of Origin - Valencia,
- 400g ■ Chicken, 800g Rabbit (optional),
- Vaquetes (snails), a dozen
- Garrofón beans (Large, flat butter beans), 400g
- Tavella beans
- beans), 150g Ferradura beans
- (Wide green beans), Olive oil, 100ml
- Garlic, chopped, 1 clove Ripe tomato, peeled,
- Paprika, 1/2tbsp ■ Saffron threads
- Salt Rosemary (optional)

bred Valenciano, the paella he prepares includes

short-grain rice, parsley, garlic, olive oil, paprika,

tomato, rosemary, and saffron threads. This is the

typical base for a variety of paellas, but he also in-

cludes those ingredients special to Valencia —

chicken, tender white beans, rabbit, a dozen snails, large flat butter beans and wide green beans.

In Spain, community, conversation and hospi-

tality to strangers are integral parts of any good

meal. The entire family is in the kitchen, joking and

laughing, while grandpa Gomez bustles around

with his recipe books. The neighbours drop in for

a bite unheralded. Their presence is as precious to

grandpa Gomez, as is the usage of the bomba va-

riety of rice, which opens out like an accordion

when cooked, allowing for maximum absorption of

diet. Once finished, I'm afflicted by an overwhelm-

ing desire to scurry off to bed for a two-hour-long

siesta. It seems a crime to work after a meal this

satisfying. I'm beginning to understand why since

time immemorial the siesta was obligatory for any

was born and to immerse oneself in the culture of

that place can transform an otherwise ordinary

meal into quite the gastronomic experience. Per-

haps that's why you can order paella the world over,

but it'll never taste quite as sumptuous as it does

If you happen to be in this city for the festival of

San Jose, you'll see neighbourhood paella-mak-

ing contests as part of the street celebrations — along with the marvelous fire-

the streets

crackers and clever sculptural installations. Over 400 people are out there,

trying out different paella recipes

in various squares across the

city, followed by a live disco on

As Valencianos inform

To consume ethnic food in the region where it

I gorge like a carb-hungry faddist coming off her

water while remaining firm.

self-respecting Spaniard.

### PREPARATION:

Cut the chicken (and rabbit) into pieces and salt them. Heat the oil in the paella pan. Brown the chicken pieces very slowly and thoroughly. Then add the beans and brown them as well. Next, add the garlic,

paprika and tomato.

rice are crispy. Recipe approved by the Head Chefs' Club Add 1.2litre of water and the snails. Boil of the Region of Valencia

me, paella is best relished when the setting is decidedly communitarian. Tonight, under the silvery moon, below streamers strung between buildings, there's mirth and gaiety, family jokes and pulsing music, a robust conviviality that makes the food all the more idyllic. Even if the resultant offering is a little burnt on occasions, it's more than compensated for by the energy and love

around me. If you don't have a Valenciano friend who can cook paella, you have to make do with the fare in restaurants. But you have to be careful that you're tasting the real McCoy. Given that every traveller who potters through Valencia trawls through the thickets of the town for a bite of its national dish, it's not uncommon for an unscrupulous restaurateur to prepare any rice preparation and label it paella.

To make sure I'm getting the real deal, the dish flavoured with saffron and not yellow dye, I quiz the locals and head only to places that they recommend. Restaurants like Seu-Xerea, next to Virgin Square, La Lola, one of the city's most celebrated eating-houses and the Mateu restaurant, near the Albufera National park, fit the bill completely.

In Seu-Xerea I'm taken aback by the abundance of seafood in my paella, but am informed that the city has veered away from the traditional dish, swaying in-step with the times, to cater to a wide variety of palates. Today a multitude of combinations of rice, meat, fish and vegetables allow for over 40 variants of this versatile and ubiqui-

When I leave Seu-Xerea, it is cold and blustery, but the cultural satiation and warmth, that comes from a good dish served up with tender loving care more than compensates for the wind-chill.



# **MAGANDEEP SINGH**

# Beyond wine jargon ome time back I was reading a book about wine philosophy, and it made 🕽 a very valid point about wine tasting and that self-styled clan referred to as 'wine critics'. The question is whether wine tasting really helped bring the best

wines forward, or was it just a way for the elite to look busy and feel important? I admit that I too would be inclined to go with the latter choice. How difficult can it really be to sip a few wines first thing in the morning and then write something hifalutin and indecipherable about them? I, too, was quite the sceptic, but then I read this article. This is what

it mostly said. A wine, as a tangible thing is an absolute. It is a chemical emulsion with a fixed set of compounds in it. In that sense the aromas that a wine emits are fixed and dependent on the constituent compounds — this is to say that for a wine to smell like apples, it must contain one of the many esters that make up the smell of apples. So, the basic set of aromas in a wine is not just the function of one man's command of the English vocabulary combined with a vivid imagination. A wine is a piece of canvass, but not a blank one; it has been painted over by the winemaker and although it may evoke a different personal sentiment in each per-



son who takes it in it still remains an absolute: a stolid and set entity in itself.

So when wine-tasters congregate and start describing a wine they are not shooting arrows in the dark. They are trying to identify that which is already there. It is more a game of scrabble where the letters are given and you try to unscramble them into something meaningful, or Pictionary where we try and transfer from one sense (visual) onto another (verbal). Given this basic perimeter you should now see how a wine evaluation is not a subjective exercise, when done right that is. If done wrong then prejudice and personal preference take up all the space and there is no room left for judging a wine for how good it is and for what it represents.

All in all, I am here judging at two of the most prestigious wine competitions in the world, the Decanter World Wine Awards and the International Wine Challenge and having spent some time with some of the most amazing critics in the universe, I can assure you this, wine judging is a valid job. Also, it can be quite a hard job, especially when flights after flights of wine keep coming at you.

I was trying to make a point, which I somewhat did, and then somehow obfuscated. Wine can do that. Which is why the first rule of wine judging is this: Spit!

# Twist like a Babka



# **BAKE OUT**

# **SHAHEEN PEERBHAI**

Shaheen Peerbhai is a camera toting food blogger who is always thinking about what to bake next. She blogs at www.purplefoodie.com

If baking bread seems daunting, you can start with the Babka which is a cross between a cake and bread

o you remember that Seinfeld episode that saw Jerry and Elaine fight for the last Chocolate Babka in the store? The Babka looked scrumptious, but vou always wondered what on earth it really was, and, more importantly, how you could eat it. Well, the Babka is a popular Eastern European festival bread. Its etymology is interesting. *Babushka* is Russian for grandma, while Babcia (pronounced bapb-cha) is Polish for grandma. And that's where this glorious golden loaf, swirled with spice, chocolate, nuts and other good things, gets its name from. The Babka dough is en-

riched with butter and egg volks, and that makes it similar to the French Brioche. the Austrian Kugelhopf and the Isreali Kranz cake. Amongst all these varieties, the Kranz cake is the one that has the best visual appeal. The bread shaped using this method looks spectacular with the filling oozing out of exposed swirls of the braided loaf of bread. Traditionally, the Babka filling is made up of nuts and raisins but in this case, veering away from the norm and using chocolate and cinnamon is a change for

the better. This is the kind of bread you want to try your hand at when you want to take the

leap from baking cakes to

baking bread. Cakes are sim-

pler - they don't need the finicky yeast, nor do they need all the waiting time for the dough to rise and develop in flavour and structure. Breads, on the other hand, come with all those hassles in addition to the nagging fear of all the effort falling flat quite literally.

As daunting a task as it might seem, this recipe is easy, because the technique is a cross between that of making cake and bread. You begin with creaming sugar and butter, adding the egg yolks, mixing in the flour, and pouring in the milk with yeast in it. Before you know it, your experiment comes together in the form of supple golden dough waiting to be baked two hours later. And the bonus? You'll have melted chocolate perfumed with cinnamon in every bite, and in your fingers while baking.

### **Chocolate Cinnamon Babka**

# Yield: 2 loaves

# **Ingredients:**

- Instant yeast, 2 tbsp / 19g ■ Lukewarm milk, 3/4th cup/
- Butter, 6 tbsp / 85g
- Sugar, 6 tbsp / 85g
- Vanilla extract, 1 tsp
- Egg yolks, 4 ■ All-purpose flour, 3.5 cups /
- Salt, 1 tsp

# For the filling:

- Dark chocolate, coarsely grated, 1.5 cups / 225g
- Ground cinnamon, 1 tsp ■ Butter, 1/4th cup / 55g

# Method:

- Whisk the yeast into lukewarm milk and set aside
- for about 5min. ■ In a large bowl, cream together the sugar and
- butter until smooth. Add the yolks to the bowl, one at a time, mixing
- constantly for 30s between each addition. Add vanilla and mix until light and fluffy
  - roll it into a sheet with a thickness of 1/8th to 1/4th inch. Ensure the sheet is welldusted with flour at all times. Spread the chocolate
    - mixture over it.

Add the flour and salt and

Now mix in the milk and

continue to mix until it al comes together.

veast mixture and knead

overnight, making sure to

remove it from the fridge two

cinnamon together in a bowl.

together to form a soft,

Let this rise for about 2

hours, or refrigerate

hours before baking.

For the filling: mix the

chocolate, butter and

Once the dough has risen,

supple dough.

- Roll the dough like a Swiss roll cake and then pinch the seams to seal it. Cut it into half along the width for two medium loaves.
- For the twisty shape, cut the log down the middle lengthwise, making sure to keep half an inch at the top end attached. Twist each leg over each other alternately to get the braided look.
- Now, keep it aside for

- another 45 minutes to let it
- Preheat the oven to 175 degrees Celsius and bake for 15-20 min.

Babka is best served with a cup of coffee or sliced and slightly toasted the next day for breakfast.

Some pointers: If you're going to be baking a lot of bread, I recommend using instant veast. It is available at the Tower Store at Crawford market and lasts over a year when refrigerated. Another option would be to ask your local bakery for some

fresh yeast worth Rs 5-10. Shape the bread on the baking pan — this is the best way to keep the shape intact instead of transferring from work surface to baking sheet.

The Babka tends to brown quickly because of the addition of sugar. Cover it with a sheet of foil if you'd like to avoid this. I don't because I feel that it lends a warm glow to the bread.

Adapted from: Artisan Breads Everyday by Peter Reinhart