

## MICROWAVE STEAMING

### STEAMED GARLIC PRAWNS

The microwave is by far the least fiddly and the fastest way to enjoy this Thai treat; it's one of the few Thai recipes which uses fresh ginger root rather than galangal, and thus is much more achievable in the Western kitchen. If you have bought cooked prawns, or raw prawns which are shelled, the flavouring ingredients can be reduced by as much as a half.

#### How to do it

Serves 2-3 as a main: 4-6 as a first course

500g/ 1lb raw or cooked prawns – see above

1 tablespoon cooking oil

½ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon ground white pepper

1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh ginger root

4 large garlic cloves, finely chopped

3 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander, including as much scraped root as you can.

2 tablespoons finely sliced spring onions

Mix all the flavouring ingredients together and then turn in the prawns until they are evenly coated. I like to leave them up to an hour at room temperature which improves the flavour gigantically. Then arrange around the edge of a flat plate. Shell-on prawns will steam to succulence in 2-3 minutes on High in an 850 watt microwave. Shell-off prawns take marginally less. An alternative is only to add the coriander and spring onions after the prawns are cooked, which makes their flavour and colour more vivid.

## **THE ESSENTIAL STEAMED PUDDING**

The single most appreciated thing at any table, and in any season. But now you steam in a microwave they will take only minutes to cook, and can do so while you serve and eat the main course.

### **How to do it:**

Serves four to six

150g/6oz butter

150g/6oz caster sugar

2 eggs

200g/7oz self raising flour

1 tablespoon milk

Chosen flavourings – see below

900ml or 1 ½ pint pudding basin, buttered and floured

Really cream the butter and sugar until the mixture looks like cream and the sugar has dissolved completely. The better you do this, the better the end result. It does take longer than you expect . . . Beat in the eggs one at a time and then beat in the flour until it is just incorporated. Stir in the milk.

Spoon the mixture into the basin – don't pour it. If you are to steam in the old-fashioned way, make a circle of greaseproof paper and top it with one of foil at least 10cm/4" greater in diameter than the bowl. Fold in half and then fold one side back about 2-3cm/1"; this allows for expansion during cooking. Put these on the bowl foil side out, smooth down the edges and then tie with string under the rim, making also a handle across the top. Fill a saucepan of water in which stands a trivet or upturned saucer, lower in the pudding and bring to the boil, turn down to a simmer and cover. Cook 1½ hours, checking the water level from time to time; it should be up to the bottom of the bowl's rim. Leave in the basin for ten minutes or more, so it shrinks and comes away from the basin. To be sure, run a knife around the inside of the basin, before turning out into a warmed dish with a lip which will embrace any hot sauce.

Otherwise, cover only with an inverted plate and microwave 8-10 minutes at Medium High in an 850 watt cooker, but around Medium on a 1000-1200 watt cooker: Check it is well-risen and spongy to the touch. Sometimes an extra 30 seconds might be all it needs. Then let it stand three to five minutes, run a knife blade around the inside of the bowl and then invert as above.

### **Increasing your repertoire**

- Steamed puddings were often made with breadcrumbs and, perhaps surprisingly, this gives a nice light texture. You can replace the flour with 200g to 250g/6-8 oz fresh white breadcrumbs from a good proper bread (Sainsbury's Campagne loaf or the Continental from M&S) or use a mixture of 50g/2oz self-raising flour and 100-150g/ 4-5 oz fresh white breadcrumbs. Crumbs from sliced white bread are less than useless.
- Chocolate: use 50g/2oz less flour but add 50g/2oz cocoa (not drinking chocolate) and 50-100g/2-4oz chopped chocolate.: serve with hot chocolate sauce, custard sauce (chocolate or not) a nut sauce or a raspberry sauce.. Most of the mixtures you'd put into the bottom of a plain, orange or lemon steamed pudding can go into the basin of a chocolate one. Fresh raspberries in and under a chocolate pudding gets the vote of the more sophisticated palate. For a real buzz, add the chocolate in chunks, add small marshmallows and then lightly season the pudding mixture with Tabasco – that's Rocky Road Steamed pudding – and who needs to wait for winter to try that!
- Golden syrup: stir a generous slug through the mixture and as much as you like at the bottom of the basin – three or four tablespoons is the norm: ring the changes by also adding long shreds of lemon or orange zest or a mixture of both
- Jam: you can use any fruity jam and not just the usual raspberry; add three or four tablespoons of apricot or plum or pineapple or strawberry or greengage jam or lumpier conserve to the bottom of the basin before you add in the mixture. The possibilities are amazing if the sponge is spiced or citrus flavoured, especially if you choose orange.
- Lemon: put two tablespoons of butter, the grated zest of one lemon and the juice of two into the bottom of the basin: stir the zest from the second lemon into the mixture.
- Maple syrup & pecan: micro-roast a handful of pecan nuts and chop about a third of them quite finely. Stir the finely chopped nuts and a tablespoon of maple syrup through the pudding mixture. Put three tablespoons of maple syrup, a tablespoon of butter and the rest of the nuts in the bottom of the pudding basin.
- Marmalade: three or four tablespoons of coarse cut marmalade at the bottom of the basin: zest of an orange through the pudding. Some dark rum sprinkled over the marmalade is only a good thing. For puddings, Cooper's Oxford is superior to their very dark Vintage marmalade
- Mixed berries: half a pack of frozen mixed berries makes a spectacular base for a steamed pudding. The other half can be lightly heated in the microwave at the last moment and then artfully tumbled over the servings. Lashings of cream seem miserly with this; it needs clotted cream and ice cream.

- **Pie mixes:** cans of thickened fruit mixtures meant to be baked in a pie make wondrous accompaniments to steamed puddings; the best is black or red cherry or anything based on berries or mixed berries but if you use apricots sharpen the flavour with lemon, lime or orange zest. Put up to a half in the base of the pudding bowl, perhaps choosing a slightly bigger bowl than normal; the remainder is heated and served as a sauce. See above for suggestions about serving cream.
- **Raspberry/strawberry:** this can be anything you like. Just jam – three to four tablespoons in the bottom of the bowl or jam in the bottom and fruit mixed through, or mashed fruit, sugar and butter in the bottom . . . you can't go wrong really
- **Spiced:** add a tablespoon of ground ginger, cinnamon or good fresh mixed spice through the mixture; if you are cooking by microwave, use half that amount. Particularly good with golden syrup.
- **Toffee-pear and rum:** peel core and then roughly chop 500g/1lb firm sweet pears: Williams or Comice are always the best choice. Melt together 90g/3oz butter, 175g/6oz muscavado or dark brown sugar and two tablespoons dark rum until blended. Put one-third of this into the base of a buttered and floured 1.5 litre/3 pint pudding bowl. Mix the pears into the remaining warm liquid. Make the basic sponge pudding and then swirl the pear mixture unevenly through it – don't fuss, because an informality of colour and flavour is this pudding's appeal. Rum custard or cream, of course.

## MARGUERITE PATTEN'S PERFECT CHRISTMAS PUDDING

This is microwave steaming at its most astonishing – a Christmas pudding from start to finish in less than thirty minutes and without a cluttered hob, and a house full of steam. It was created by Marguerite Patten OBE for The Microwave Association, which is a great on-line source for microwave recipes. If it's come from, and good enough for, an unassailable culinary icon, who has been sharing recipes for the best of British food for most of her 90-plus years, including keeping the country healthy during the Second World War, who are we to gainsay?

If you expect the stolid stodge of old you'll be amazed. For this is light, and plenty of citric highlights make it refreshingly clearer and cleaner to eat at the end of a big meal.

For more than four servings, it's best to make two puddings I find; sometimes the second one is not needed even for six. Yet if you have just one big one there is always the greedy guts who feels it must be demolished. Unfair to you, because leftovers are great for reheating the day after, or for frying in butter and then crumbling into ice cream with whatever alcohol lurks

### How to do it

To serve 4 to 6

50g/2oz plain flour  
1 teaspoon mixed spice  
75g/3oz fresh white breadcrumbs from a good loaf \*  
100g/4oz muscavado, Barbados or dark brown sugar  
150g/6oz sultanas  
75g/3oz raisins, ideally seedless muscatels  
50g/2oz stoned dates, roughly chopped  
50g/2oz glace cherries, halved  
125g/5oz currants  
25g/1oz finely chopped glace lemon, orange or mixed peel  
2 eggs, beaten  
2 tablespoons treacle  
1 tablespoon golden syrup  
50ml/2fl oz orange juice, cream sherry or port  
50ml/2fl oz apple juice, brandy, cognac or Cointreau  
50g/2oz butter, melted but not hot

\*Sainsbury's Campagne or M&S Continental loaves

Sieve the flour and spice together into a large mixing bowl, and then add the fresh breadcrumbs and mix until even. Stir in the sugar, the fruits and the peel. Mix together the beaten eggs, treacle, golden syrup, juices or alcohol and the melted butter and then stir these in very well - remember to let everyone have a stir and a wish.

Lightly grease a half litre (1 pint) pudding basin and fill with mixture.

Cover with loosely fitting cling wrap. Stand on a microwave trivet or on an upturned saucer in the centre of the microwave oven and cook at 650- 700 watts for 10 minutes. This is Medium High in an 850 watt cooker, but around Medium on a 1000-1200 watt cooker.

Leave to stand for 10 minutes after cooking. Serve with a thin rum or brandy flavoured custard and whipped cream

To flame it, turn the pudding onto a flat plate or dish with a deep lip. Dim the lights in the dining room, get children, cats, dogs and drink-sodden relatives off the floor. Heat four tablespoons of brandy, cognac or rum until only the edges begin to bubble, tip the saucepan away from you, lean back in the opposite direction and then light the fumes with extended arms; if you have only two, get someone else to do the lighting with their extensions. Pour slowly onto the pudding and carry quickly to the table lightly rocking it back and forth, which keeps the flames going.

Although you can make and eat this on Christmas day it will improve for some weeks but should be kept tightly wrapped in the refrigerator as it doesn't have the high fat content of many puddings. On the day, it will reheat directly from the refrigerator in only two or three minutes.

### **Increasing your repertoire:**

- Cranberries: those sweetened dried cranberry fragments called Craisins make a delicious trans-Atlantic difference – use them instead of the currants
- Ground almonds: three or four tablespoons of ground almonds or ground hazelnuts make a delicious and mysterious difference, but add at least another 1 ½ tablespoons of fruit juice or alcohol as they are very absorbent
- Nuts: finely chopped and roasted almonds, walnuts or hazelnuts add great eating interest – two tablespoons should be enough and a tablespoon more of liquid

- Soaked fruits: you can soak the currants, sultanas etc in some or all of the juices/alcohols, but drain them and still use the same liquid amounts in the recipes, incorporating the run-off

Note: if you use large or very large eggs the pudding will be both lighter and more able to moisten or absorb extra quantities of anything you have added with festive but unthinkingly gay abandon.

## **TUMBLED POTATOES**

These are rough mixture of two or more mashed or crushed vegetables. Microwave starchy potatoes, peeled or not, and one or two other root vegetables, which should cook separately. Garlic can be added to any of these. Drain all the vegetables and crush them separately. Just before serving, fold them together very roughly and irregularly as possible. Dribble on a little olive oil or dot with butter.

For children and for adults with long memories quickly fold in pats of butter, which will later be discovered as treasure troves of melted butter. Heaven. Any of the tumbled mixtures can also be fully pureed, when they become mysterious and intriguing to eat, or you can crush one ingredient and mash another before mixing. No creative boundaries here

### **Increasing Your Repertoire**

- potato and pumpkin – the original and still the best. Must have hidden bits of butter and lots of parsley
- potato and sweet potato or kumara – the texture and flavour made even better with toasted almonds or hazelnuts
- potato, sweet potato and parsnip – balance the sweetness by grating on some lemon or orange zest and sprinkle with cinnamon and flat-leaf parsley
- potato, pumpkin and parsnip – ditto, and dust with sweet spices, just cinnamon, or allspice or even a good mixed spice
- potato and celeriac - very good with watercress leaves added at the last minute and even better if you also add roasted and crushed coriander seeds.
- potato, pumpkin and swede – an earthy combination that might need a little sherry or port, but should certainly have roasted and crushed black peppercorns added.
- potato and turnip – American Shakers finished this combination with cream and white pepper, to protect the marmoreal splendour of its appearance and then they called it Alabaster. Even better is totally mashed and served as an alabaster puree
- potato and pea – crushed potatoes and roughly mashed green peas (ex-frozen of, course): one of the best and all the better for being finished with roasted cumin seeds, a very Indian thing to do