

SWEET POTATO AND SOBA KO FRIES

I used to make these at home for my kids, and no matter how imperfect I thought they were, the kids still loved them. It was a case of not quite getting the crunch I wanted without getting too much colour: very slightly too much colour equals burnt for my kids. 'Overly browned food' is the one thing I can't get them to eat.

The trick with these fries is to give them the old double-cooked treatment. First at a low temperature to soften them up, and then at a

higher temperature to quickly give them a good ole crunching!

I tried to coat them with tempura batter as well as plain flour, but it wasn't 100 per cent and they were slightly chewy. Soba flour sprang to mind because of its lack of gluten. Firstly, I prefer to avoid gluten where possible (well, at least I plan to!), and secondly it makes for a 'shorter' kind of crunch. Plus, it tastes pretty fecking good!

MAKES 1 PORTION TO SHARE OR NOT TO SHARE

1 litre rapeseed oil, for deep-frying
200g sweet potato, peeled and cut into really thin, long chips
60g soba (buckwheat) flour
30ml spicy Korean miso (see page 249)

For the spicy seasoning mix

3 teaspoons Maldon sea salt
2 teaspoons shichimi togarashi
a small pinch of hot dashi powder

For the green chilli dressing (it will make more than you need, but keep it in the fridge for another time)

100g green chillies (take a slice from the fat end first to see how fiery they are; if they're too hot for you, then remove the membrane and seeds)
100ml rice vinegar
120ml grapeseed oil
a pinch of sea salt

To serve - all optional but the more the merrier I say!

chopped green chillies
2-3 lime wedges

First make the green chilli dressing. Chop the chillies into small pieces and combine with the rice vinegar and a pinch of salt. Blend on a high speed until the chillies have broken down. With the motor still running, slowly trickle the grapeseed oil into the blended chilli mix until it has been fully incorporated. Stop the blender immediately, pour the mixture through a fine strainer and keep in the fridge until you need it.

Heat the oil in a fryer or large pan to 140°C/275°F. For the first round of frying, fry the sweet potato for about 4-5 minutes, until soft and kind of soggy looking.

Remove from the oil with a perforated scoop and allow to drain well. Be careful as you move them, as they'll be fragile at this stage.

Increase the temperature of the oil to 180°C/350°F. Put your soggy chips into a bowl and pour over the soba flour and about 2 tablespoons of water. Mix well - gently but thoroughly.

Place these into the oil one at a time and fry for 2-3 minutes, until crunchy, and then remove with a perforated spoon and allow to drain.

To finish off, quickly smash all the spicy seasoning mix together in a mortar and pestle or the Japanese (and far superior) version, the suribachi. Season your hot fries with 10 big pinches of the spicy seasoning mix and serve up with the chillies, lime and dressing on the side. Get 'em while they're hot!



MISO-GRILLED BABY CHICKEN WITH LEMON-GARLIC-CHILLI DIPPER

So here we have some baby chicken, or, as the Frenchies call it, poussin. Quite possibly a far better name; after all, eating the ‘baby’ of something isn’t always such an appealing idea. It does, however, help to describe it on a menu.

This marinade is extremely versatile: use it for salmon belly, scallops, steaks, even tofu. It is also a very good sauce base: just add some mustard and vinegar and serve with sashimi or caramelised onions and it will be your lamb chop’s best mate.

I use baby chicken for this because not only does the skin caramelize very quickly but the flesh cooks through before the skin starts to burn – perfect for our robata grill or your home barbecue.

Pre-barbecue season, you ought to make a batch of this stuff and keep it refrigerated in case you have a last-minute barbie crop up. It lasts for ages and with it on standby you’ll look like the Japanese barbecue emperor with very little effort – you cool mo-fo!

SERVES 4

2 baby chickens, aka poussins

For the marinade

100ml den miso (see page 244)

1–2 green chillies, chopped (quantity depends on how much you can handle)

For the lemon-garlic-chilli dipper

100ml sake

generous 2 tablespoons dark soy sauce

1 scorcher of a red chilli, finely chopped

2 teaspoons green Tabasco sauce

2 teaspoons fresh garlic purée

2 teaspoons yuzu juice

2 tablespoons lemon juice

2 tablespoons olive oil

For the daikon salad

100g daikon

50g carrot

50g cucumber

5 or 6 mint leaves

10 coriander leaves, with a bit of stem left on

10ml yuzu juice

a few drops of dark soy sauce

a few drops of extra virgin olive oil

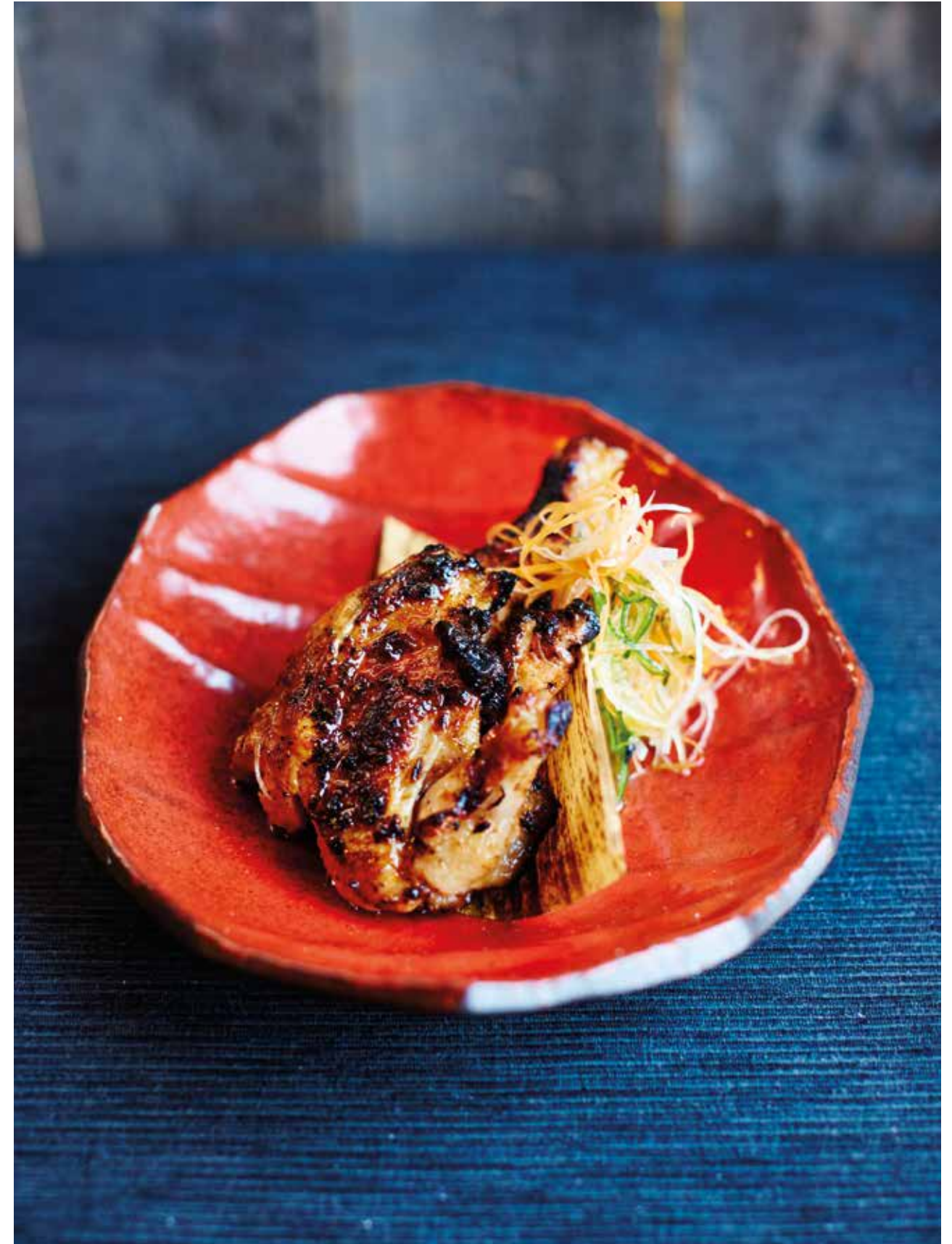
First, make the marinade by mixing the den miso and the chillies together. Use a sharp knife to cut each poussin clean in half and make a couple of score marks, one into the fat part of the drumstick and the other into the thigh. Marinate in the miso-chilli marinade for at least 6 hours and up to 12 hours.

To make the dipper, whisk all the ingredients, except the oil, like a crazy fucker. Slowly whisk in the oil until emulsified. This will keep in the fridge until the end of time, maybe.

To make the salad, thinly slice the daikon on a Japanese mandoline and layer the slices in piles of 5 or 6 and, using a knife, shred very thinly. Do the same with the carrot and cucumber and mix together. Add the mint and coriander leaves and drizzle with the yuzu, soy sauce and extra virgin olive oil.

Set up your barbecue and get the charcoal super-hot – the flames start to die down a little, and the embers will be glowing – then put your poussins on the grill. If you’re concerned about the poussins not being cooked through enough and burning, take off the barbecue and finish cooking in a hot oven, about 180°C/160°C fan/Gas Mark 4 for 8–10 minutes. To test the chicken to see if it’s fully cooked, insert a thin metal skewer or the sharp end of small knife into the thickest part of the thigh, pause for a couple of seconds, pull it and hold the skewer to your lip. Feel burning? It’s cooked through. Didn’t burn much? You’ve either lost all feeling to your lips (dial for help!) or it’s not done yet – keep on cooking. Once cooked, serve it up as it is, or, if you want to get a little bit fancier, chop it up into smaller pieces.

We serve this in the restaurant with the shredded daikon salad on the side, which is a nice and refreshing contrast to the miso and chilli.



GRAINS AND GREENS SALAD WITH HONEY, SOY AND GINGER DRESSING

I almost don't want to like this salad whilst it's trendy. The grains stare up at me proudly and say, 'Hey, it's okay man; you're part of the superfood-dudes club now, you've been saved!' Serve it in a vintage wheelbarrow and you can claim hipster status.

Turn up the music and ignore those pesky grains

while I tuck in. Superfood-dude members or not, I feel like a million bucks after knocking off a big bowl of this.

This works well with other grains or greens - get experimental! Deck it out with hot-smoked salmon or serve with barbecued scallops; or everybody's mate, avocado, fits in well too.

SERVES 6 AS A SIDE SALAD, OR 2 AS A MAIN COURSE

unsalted butter, or olive oil, for frying
120g pumpkin or sweet potato, cubed
1 garlic clove, crushed
80g tenderstem broccoli
50g sugar snap peas (or whatever is in season, such as green beans)
40g roasted cashews, roughly chopped
30g roasted pine nuts, roughly chopped
2 or 3 leaves baby gem lettuce
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the grains

60g dried green lentils, rinsed and well drained
60g soba grains, rinsed and well drained (or use buckwheat grains if you can't source soba)
60g quinoa
3cm piece kombu

For the honey, soy and ginger dressing

130ml liquid honey
55ml Japanese rice vinegar
45g lemon juice
20g pickled ginger, finely chopped
20g freshly grated ginger
6g garlic purée
40ml dark soy sauce

Heat the butter in a large frying pan and roast the cubes of pumpkin with the garlic for 15 minutes over a medium heat.

Meanwhile, put the lentils and grains in separate pans and cover with cold water. Break the kombu into 3 pieces and add a strip of kombu to each pan. Bring them to the boil and simmer for 20 minutes, until the grains are tender. Drain.

Dead simple to put together once all your bits and pieces are cooked. For the broccoli and sugar snap peas, trim and blanch for a few seconds in salted, boiling water - the veg should be quite crunchy still. Drain and rinse under cold water.

To make the dressing, whisk together all the ingredients with 1 tablespoon of water.

On a big serving plate, mix all the ingredients, including about one-third of the dressing. Mix well and season with salt and pepper.

You might want to serve some extra dressing on the side, it's the type of salad that can take loads of dressing.

