Immersive Multimedia Experience

DARE TO PLAY WITH FOOD



Turn Cooking from a Technical Task into a Creative Experience

by Sofia Yotova Octophina

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From the mountains
with love ♡



LISTEN TO THE PLAYBOOK ON SOUNDCLOUD

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THE RHODOPE RHYTHM

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD

Greetings from the Rhodope mountains! Welcome to My Kitchen — and Yours.

The playbook you're about to dive into gave me my excitement back. It woke me up on mornings when getting out of bed felt impossible. It inspired me, empowered me, entertained me, and educated me in ways I didn't expect. It became my own **playground for rehabilitation — a space where I had something to look forward to, something to pour myself into, something that reminded me who I am.** I poured my heart and soul into every single page, along with over a decade of full-blooded experience in the food space. And now I'm handing it to you.

I created this playbook while recovering from a brutal cocktail of burnout and depression in the early weeks of 2026. Out of desperation, I retreated to a **remote yoga center in the heart of the Bulgarian Rhodope Mountains** — a place accessible only by boat, hidden on the shores of the Vacha dam. I spent six weeks away from civilization, fully immersed in nature, cooking in a gorgeous kitchen, and rediscovering the rhythm of everyday chores. That is where this playbook came to life.









I was not alone. My companions were three dogs, ten cats, five wild boars, and two dozen goats — and somehow, that felt exactly right.

For about six months before I arrived there, I hadn't been able to listen to music. It felt physically painful — like my brain simply couldn't take it. And then, slowly, just as spring started arriving and nature started waking up all around me in the mountains, I did too. The songs you're about to listen to found me in that awakening during my mountain getaway healing journey. **This playbook is the blossoming of that internal spring. It is proof that the darkness passes, and that what grows on the other side can be extraordinary.**

The *Dare to Play with Food* soundtrack — on Spotify

As I was blasting this music and playing with my favorite ingredients, I was imagining you — somewhere in the world, in your own kitchen, inventing something delicious to these same sounds.



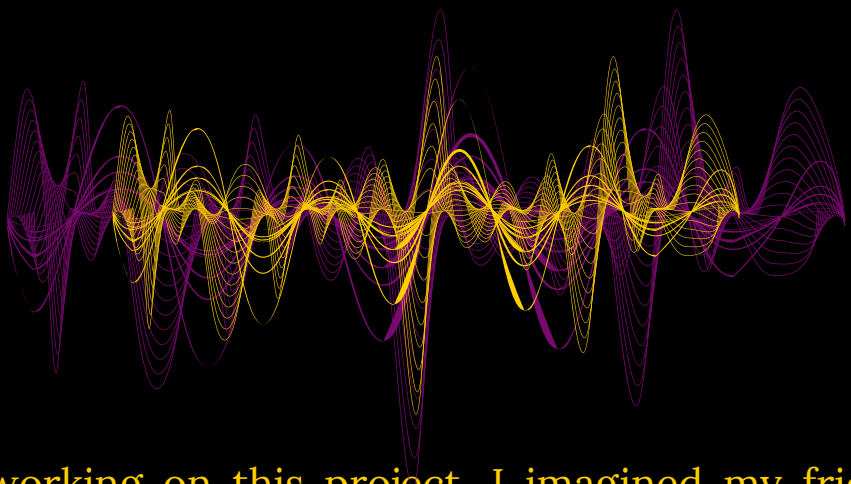
This playlist is a fusion of traditional Bulgarian folklore and modern electronic beats — rooted in the ancient, alive in the now. It is designed to be your companion while you cook — energizing, uplifting, and unlike anything you've heard in a kitchen before. Scan the QR code at the end of this welcome message to open it on Spotify and press play before you start your kitchen adventures.

I also wanted you to be able to experience this playbook the way you experience life — in motion. While commuting, doing the dishes, folding laundry, cycling to work, or simply moving through your day. So I recorded myself reading it. The same words on these pages, in my voice. The sounds you hear underneath the narration are real. I recorded them on a spring morning in the Rhodope mountains — the actual birds I woke up to every day while this playbook was taking shape. Those are the sounds I heard. Now they're yours too.









As I was working on this project, I imagined my friend in the Netherlands hitting play before her morning drive. I imagined another friend — a busy mom of two, always on her bike — listening between school runs and grocery trips. I want this playbook to find you wherever you are, not just at your desk.

Whether you choose to flip through these pages in silence, immerse yourself in the rhythm of the folklore beats while you cook, or let my voice accompany you as you move through your day—know that you are no longer alone in the kitchen. We are a team now.

Below, you can access the ***Dare to Play with Food*** playlist on Spotify. Press play to set the stage.

But before we begin to build, before we unpack the formulas and turn up the sound, I want to take you back to where it all started for me. To my first example of care, and to the voice that first taught me that food is the ultimate language of love.
This journey is for you. But it begins with her.

PLAY ON SPOTIFY

TO MY MOM:
MY FAVORITE TEACHER AND MY FAVORITE STUDENT

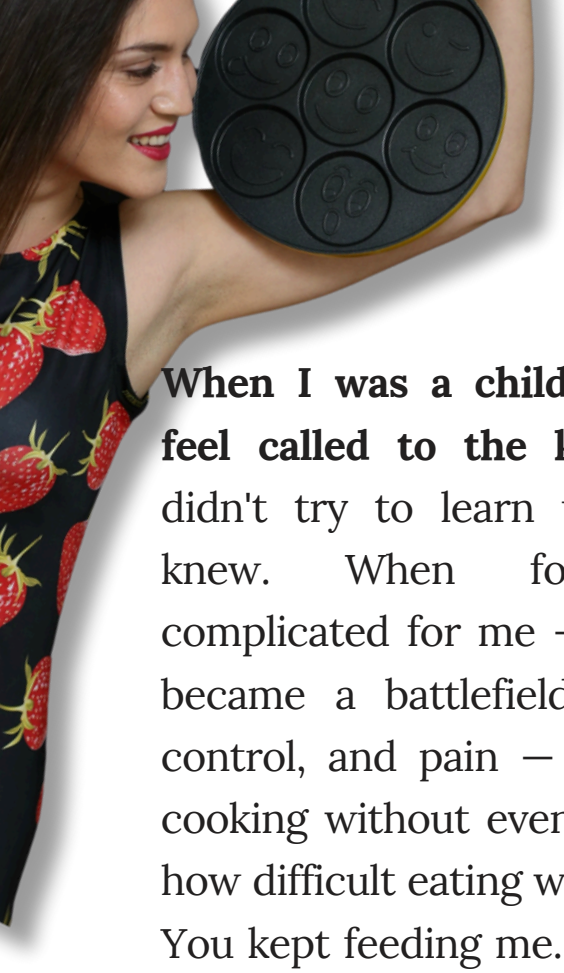
LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD

Before the playful cooking experiments, the food formulas, the tens of thousands of followers, the international recognition, the coaching certification, the book deal, the fancy workshops, the students, the stage appearances, the media interviews — there was you. **Before I ever dared to play in a kitchen, you were the original kitchen queen.**

You were the one who brought food to life and put it on the table. Every day. Every night. For years and years and years. For my brother, for my dad, for me — without complaint, without shortcuts, without applause. Just with quiet, unconditional love and more patience than I knew was possible.

You fed us meals you made from scratch. You filled our table with warmth, flavor, and familiarity. **You made our apartment taste like home.**





When I was a child, I didn't feel called to the kitchen. I didn't try to learn what you knew. When food got complicated for me — when it became a battlefield of fear, control, and pain — you kept cooking without even knowing how difficult eating was for me. You kept feeding me. **You kept loving me through food.** And now, somehow, we're here.

You, the woman who used to follow tradition, now move through the kitchen with your own style that I inspired.

You take the foundations I created, the formulas I invented, the philosophy I gave birth to, and you make them your own - pancakes, cookies, spreads, bakes, and more — all improvised from the same principles that I teach.

You are my original inspiration and my best student. Today, as I eat your creations — made in my style but with your flavor, heart, and hands — I feel something I can't fully explain. It's joy. It's pride. It's home. It's legacy. **It's a hug from the past and the future, all in one bite.**

This playbook might have my name on the cover. But every page carries the memory of your meals. **Every word carries the love you folded into dinners without needing to say a thing.** And every reader who finds freedom in their kitchen is somehow also benefiting from the years you spent quietly, beautifully feeding your family.

You showed me what love tastes like. Now, I get to pass it on. This one's for you, Mom.

Happy 60th birthday!

THE LONG WAY BACK TO THE KITCHEN

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD





Once upon a time, I was known as Sophie Yotova from Foodie Boulevard.

I had built something I was proud of — a food blog that started as a personal healing project and grew into a social enterprise, a workshop practice, a published cookbook, a profitable business. I had burned out from my corporate career in technology in 2017 and made the decision to focus solely on building the business. It was working.

I was leading workshops in the most prestigious school and most innovative companies in Sofia, Bulgaria. I had multiple income streams — partnerships with companies like Philips, dm, Fox, Alpro, BILLA, Kaufland, and many more. I had a proprietary methodology tested and adopted by thousands of people and a life that finally made sense.



I was building all of this alongside my partner of seven years. He was not just the person I loved — he was the context in which Foodie Boulevard was born and grew. He was my supporter, my champion, the person who enjoyed eating hundreds of meals that I cooked with love, inspiration, playfulness, and curiosity.

The relationship and the business were woven together in a way I didn't fully understand until both unraveled pretty much at the same time.

When the pandemic arrived, my world flipped upside down. All my income streams vanished overnight.

Something that had started as a healing mechanism had become my only source of income. And just when it started generating real money, it was gone. I found myself fully reliant on my partner, discouraged in a way that went deeper than circumstance. **I was tired of being pigeonholed as the cooking lady.** I was tired of food. I was tired of everything I had built feeling so fragile.




Foodie Boulevard
СОФИ ЙОТОВА
ВКУСНО
С УСМИВКА
123 кулинарни прикл
НАХУТЕНИ ПАЛАЧИНКИ
СЪС СИРЕНЕ
ПРОДУКТИ
СТЪПКИ
МОИТЕ ИМПРОВИЗАЦИИ
ВКУСНО
С УСМИВКА



So I tried to adapt. In 2020, I created my first digital product — *Practical Cooking for Busy People* — **an encyclopedia of culinary knowledge that turned out to be completely unusable.**



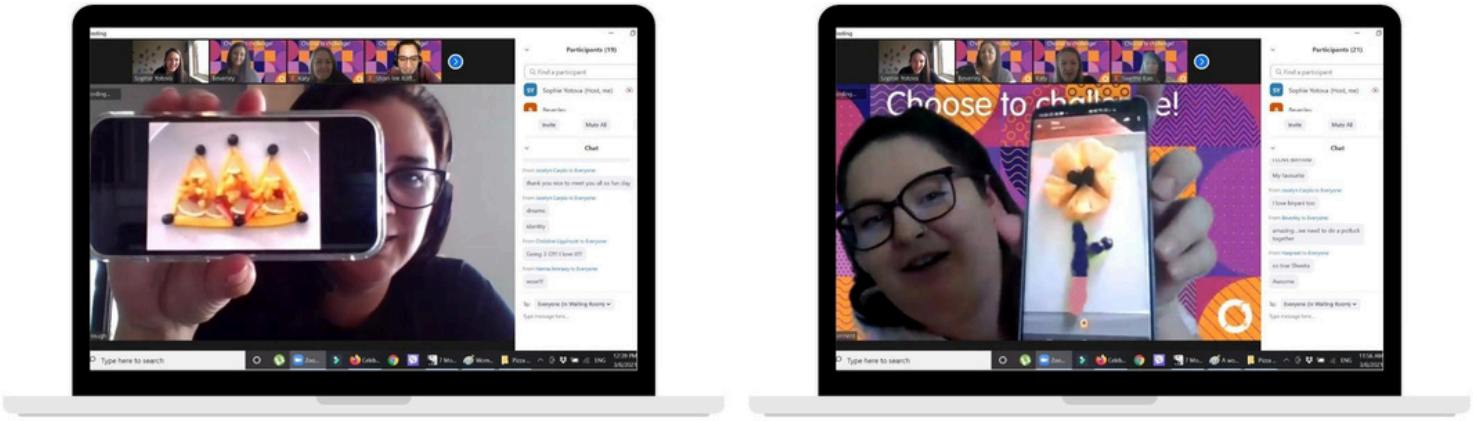
The user experience was overwhelming, the concept was wrong, and it sold exactly one copy. It was a failure, and I knew it.

But something else was emerging alongside that failure. Stuck at home, unable to sit still and meditate the way I had for years, **I started getting creative with food in a completely different way — not cooking, but making art with it. Edible art. It felt like a dynamic meditation.**



I started sharing these experiences online, people responded, and I gathered the confidence to turn it into something. In the summer of 2020 I began organizing Zoom events — immersive creative experiences that became successful very quickly and attracted participants from around the world.





One of my clients was Pizza Hut. They hired me to lead an immersive experience for their female employees across four continents to celebrate International Women's Day 2021. Each participant was asked to gather whatever they would normally eat on a lunch break. And together, through their screens, they used that food to create a visual representation of what it meant to them to be a woman. We called it the Edible Connections session: celebrating women. It was one of the most moving things I have ever facilitated.

At the same time, my mother was going through breast cancer (which she beat!), I was navigating a long-distance relationship, and was trying to rebuild my life and business in a new country during the pandemic. Not surprisingly, I burned out brutally. And I entered a darkness I hadn't known before.

I stopped everything. I spent a year recovering. **The kitchen — the place that had once healed me — was the last place I wanted to be.** I was so depleted that my system began craving a completely different form of expression. Something that could help me transmute what I was feeling without words, without recipes, without structure. **So I started making art.**







NOT BECAUSE I HAD TRAINING. I HAD NONE.

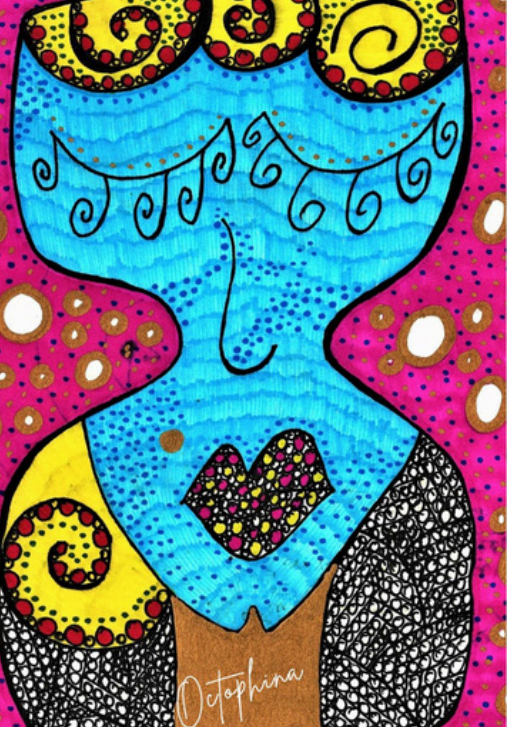
NOT BECAUSE I HAD A PLAN OR A GOAL - I DIDN'T HAVE THOSE EITHER.

I made art the same way I had always cooked: open-endedly, without a recipe, letting my hands move before my mind could interfere. And it worked.

The work that emerged from that period became a body of over 200 pieces. I started sharing it online along with my story. People from around the world began recognizing my style.

The creative play methodology never disappeared from my life when everything else fell apart — it simply moved to a different medium, quietly proving that the way you engage with something shapes everything that follows.




Octophina

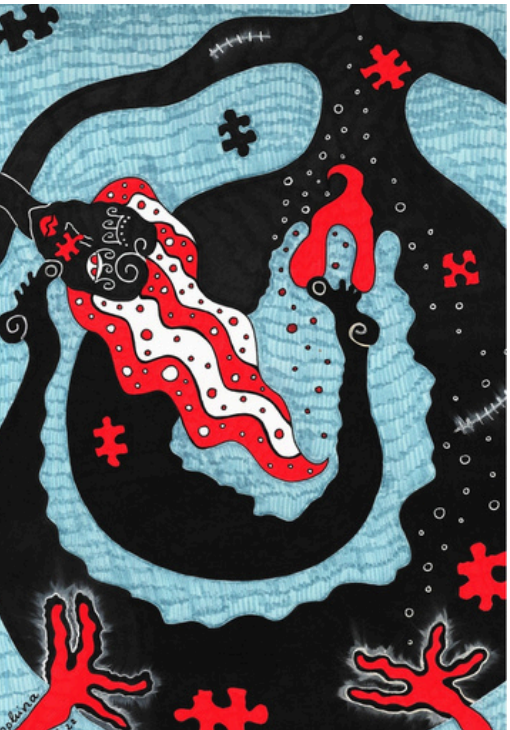

#WOMENINNFT




Octophina
March 6, 2022


Octophina
Find joy!
You're strong!
Speak up!
Love life!
Love yourself!
Choose courage!
You are enough!
Enjoy life!
Respect!
You're trash!
Shut up!
Failure!
You are worthy!
Don't worry!


Jan 8, 22




Octophina


Octophina
March 8, 2022



Collectors from multiple continents bought my artworks as NFTs. I was invited to speak at the NFT London international conference in November 2022 in a venue right next to the Westminster Abbey. My work was exhibited in New York City, in Eindhoven, at Dutch Design Week. Someone who had never considered herself an artist became known internationally — not as the food blogger or the cooking lady as I was known in Bulgaria, but as Octophina - an abstract artist whose creativity saved her life.

The name came to me one morning as I was recovering from a blend of massive burnout and major depression, when I saw the title *My Octopus Teacher* on Netflix. I watched the documentary and something just clicked. Like the octopus, I had always felt that I have multiple hearts and multiple brains, operating simultaneously in ways that confused people — and sometimes confused me. The name Octophina felt true in a way that Sophie Yotova from Foodie Boulevard no longer did. And so I became her.



It was only when I recently stepped back and looked at what had happened across the last five years of my life that I understood something wildly important.

The methodology, which today is my operating system for life, hadn't changed. The medium had.

In the kitchen, I had always worked without rigid recipes — combining unexpected ingredients, trusting instinct over instruction, treating constraints as creative invitations. With my art, I was doing exactly the same thing. The logic was identical. Only the surface was different.

That's when I had the "aha" moment: this was never really about food.





Food was the first unexpected playground that I stumbled upon.

It was the first domain where I discovered what it felt like to approach something with openness instead of fear, with curiosity instead of perfectionism, with a desire to play instead of a compulsion to perform. But the operating system underneath — creative play — transfers. It transferred to art.

It transfers to business, to relationships, to the way you move through the world on a difficult Tuesday when nothing is going according to plan.

I am returning to food now not because I forgot what happened, but because I remember everything. I am not the same person who started Foodie Boulevard. I am someone who spent five years proving — in the most unexpected laboratory imaginable — that the philosophy works. That it scales. That it applies far beyond the kitchen.



This playbook comes from lived experience. It's written by someone who has played her way through grief, reinvention, creative blocks, financial collapse, a failed product, a breakup, and periods of mental health struggle that once made the future feel unreachable.

On the other side of all that, one belief only grew stronger: the way you engage with an activity shapes your entire relationship with it. Playfulness isn't a luxury. It's not an extra layer you add when life is already working.

It is, in fact, the most reliable operating system I know.

What began as a healing experiment in the kitchen slowly revealed itself as something much bigger — a transferable philosophy about curiosity, constraint, and the strange creative power of play.



A DIFFERENT WAY TO COOK

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD



I grew up surrounded by beautiful homemade food.

Both my parents cooked. Both sets of grandparents cooked. Our family enjoyed delicious and nutritious dishes for every holiday, every milestone, every moment of celebration. My grandmothers made masterpiece desserts for birthdays, name days, Christmas, Easter — you name it.

My mom made her signature dishes that tasted like warm love and care every day. My dad made gourmet meals that could belong in restaurants. **Food was everywhere. It was homegrown. Home raised. Homemade. Heart-centered.**

And yet… I didn't care about cooking.

It didn't resonate. I wasn't curious. It felt foreign, external, like something I was expected to do one day but had no real interest in. So, while I was growing up, I never learned the family recipes. I never joined the kitchen adventures. **Food was there, but the joy of cooking wasn't mine.**

And over time, food got… complicated.





From age 15 to 25, the main thing I felt around food was fear. Fear of losing control. Fear of being judged. Fear of my own cravings and my body. I secretly binge ate. I secretly dieted. I tried every system, every "*solution*," every restrictive way to earn the body I thought I needed to be loved.

It didn't work. I failed persistently and consistently.

None of the diets helped me love myself. None of the plans quieted my inner chaos. And eventually, it all became unbearable. I couldn't keep pretending I was fine. I had to do something radically different.

That "*something different*" wasn't a new method. It wasn't even a decision. It was me — desperate, disappointed, discouraged, heartbroken, grieving the death of my grandmother from vulvar cancer in 2015, in the depths of compulsive eating — stepping into the kitchen and doing something I'd never done before.









I DID WHAT ALL CHILDREN ARE TOLD TO NEVER DO.

I STARTED TO PLAY WITH MY FOOD.

Not to follow rigid recipes. Not to deny my cravings. Not to control my appetite. But to experiment. To explore. To engage with food in a completely unfamiliar way — with courage, curiosity, and creativity instead of fear.

I studied my overeating tendencies and examined why I enjoyed the foods that made me feel ashamed for consuming them.



I asked myself questions about the experiences in my mouth that defined my love-hate relationship with food.



I started shifting my attention from what felt limiting to what felt liberating.

I started buying ingredients I liked on their own and began to combine them like they were LEGO® blocks. Not to accomplish anything specific, not to perform any complicated technique — just to see how they behave together. What happened when I changed the proportions? What if I used the same base in muffin tins or baked it into a big pan? What textures did I get? What flavors emerged? What if I made smaller pancakes that were easier to flip?

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I began recording my experiments like a playful scientist — not chasing outcomes, but observing results. I was intrigued. I was open. I was learning in real time and course correcting as I went with the flow.

I unleashed the inner journalist that I studied to become (but never did) and allowed her to investigate a story that ultimately changed not just her life but the lives of tens of thousands of cooking enthusiasts around the world. The story of food beyond the dining table.

And slowly, the fear began to fade. Curiosity replaced control. Playfulness replaced shame.

I let my senses guide me. I let my cravings speak. I gave myself permission to try, to adapt, to fail, to enjoy.

Without knowing it, I was building the foundation of a technique — one that would later help me become a certified Mind Body Eating Coach, a TEDx speaker, a best-selling author, and a recognized name in the food space in Bulgaria. I ended up teaching this technique at workshops I was invited to

lead in front of the employees of major companies on multiple continents. I taught it to international students in Bulgaria's most prestigious school. I used it to develop recipes for national and global brands. Not because I had formal culinary training, but because I trusted the process — and it led me exactly where I needed to be.

And here's something I never expected I'd write: **I would not have created this immersive experience of liberation and self-empowerment through cooking if food had been an easy subject for me. If I had liked my body, if I had felt peace around meals, if cooking the conventional way had worked for me — I wouldn't have needed to find another way.**

But I didn't have those things.

I had discomfort. I had fear. I felt ashamed. I failed at recreating other people's recipes. I had a body I didn't know how to love, a plate that felt like a battlefield, and a brain that rejected conventional cooking approaches.



The moment I got fed up — truly fed up — with failing at a game I didn't even want to play, I found myself at the beginning of a whole new path





And strangely, I'm grateful for all of it.

Because the moment I got fed up — truly fed up — with failing at a game I didn't even want to play, I found myself at the beginning of a whole new path. One that I didn't know existed. One that I had to make up as I went.

That discomfort became the catalyst. It forced me to let go. To try a different approach. To play. To build self-trust in a space that had always felt hostile.

So, if you're starting this adventure in a moment of tension — if food still feels heavy, or frustrating, or confusing — please know this: you are not behind, you are on the brink.

Sometimes the most disempowering feelings are actually doorways. And this experience is your invitation to walk through one.







MIND
BODY
EATING
COACH

GRADUATE COACH

THE WORLD'S
LEADING SCHOOL IN
EATING PSYCHOLOGY

I CALL THIS METHOD OF ENGAGING WITH FOOD CREATIVE PLAY.

It's what happens when you treat ingredients like basic LEGO blocks. You don't follow instructions — you follow your instincts. You build. You remix. You repeat. And the magic lies in the fact that it never has to be the same twice.

Over time, I distilled the principles behind this way of cooking into intuitive formulas — mix-and-match frameworks that empower you to make pancakes, muffins, soups, bakes, spreads, and more, without ever opening a recipe book.



THESE FORMULAS HAVE HELPED ME COOK WITH EASE ON A TIGHT BUDGET, IN LIMITED TIME, IN WILDLY DIFFERENT KITCHENS.

And they've helped tens of thousands of people around the world do the same. These are not recipes. **They're blueprints for creative empowerment through food.**

And something else became clear the more I leaned into this approach: the problem was never that I couldn't cook. The problem was that I expected myself to cook in ways that didn't feel mine.

When I let go of those expectations and honored what felt good to me — that's when everything changed.



Yes, I was raised around delicious food. Yes, I carry the rich culinary heritage of a Balkan country known for bold, comforting dishes. **But food is bigger than that. Food is universal.**

Food is an international language — and my love for it only deepened when I began sharing meals with friends and strangers from dozens of cultures around the world.

Because what connects us most isn't what or how we cook. It's how we experience the context of food.

This playbook is the love letter I never thought I'd write — to food, to the kitchen, and to the part of me that refused to give up when everything felt dark, scary, heavy, and impossible.

So if you're reading this, wondering if there's another way — there is. And it doesn't start with a recipe. It starts with a moment. A little spark of curiosity. A little more trust. And permission to experiment and explore like a child.

This playbook is dedicated to my 25-year-old self — the young woman who stood in the kitchen in a moment of pain and desperation, and chose to try something different.

She didn't take back control with force. She took it back with courage, curiosity, creativity, and play. And she never looked back.

CHAPTER 1

IT'S NOT A BUG, IT'S A FEATURE

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD



Let me tell you something that will either make you feel deeply sorry for me or wildly jealous, depending on your personality.

I've never been able to smell.

Not flowers. Not fresh bread out of the oven. Not rain on hot pavement. Not a newborn baby's head — that thing people apparently lose their minds over. Not your perfume, however expensive it was.

Also not body odour. Not public restrooms. Not the rubbish bin that should have been taken out three days ago. Not poop — of any origin, human or animal. You could take a full and enthusiastic shit right next to me and I would have absolutely no idea.

So, depending on who you are and what kind of day you're having, I may have just described your worst nightmare or your dream superpower.

According to the surgeon who operated on me and tried to restore it when I was 15, it all started with a fall.





I was likely a toddler, at the stage when noses are apparently extraordinarily fragile. I fell. My nose took the impact. And somewhere in that fall, something shifted — blocking access to the receptors in the brain responsible for processing smell. For years, nobody did anything about this. Then I turned fifteen, and my mom decided it was time to try to fix it.

I was put under full anaesthesia in a hospital in my hometown. The procedure was performed. **When I woke up, my nose was packed with what I can only describe as two extremely long strips of medicated gauze that appeared to extend approximately to the interior of my skull.**

The surgery itself — nothing. Full anaesthesia is a remarkable invention. The packing change that followed — a completely different story. **What I experienced was blackness in front of my eyes and tears flying in every direction.** Not emotional crying. The kind of crying that happens when your body registers something extreme and expresses it through every available channel simultaneously.





Two weeks of recovery. Swelling subsided. Healing happened. And then it was over, and I still couldn't smell anything. The surgery hadn't worked. Well, not for the most part anyway.

Here is the complete list of things I can smell:

Mint. And rubbing alcohol.

That's it. That's the whole list.
I don't know why these two made it through when everything else didn't. I've never received a satisfying medical explanation. But there they are — my two olfactory companions, my entire scent universe, my nose's greatest hits.



Here's what they don't tell you about losing a sense: the others compensate. Quietly. Gradually. The brain redistributes its attention. **If one input channel is consistently silent, the others get turned up.**

For me, this meant taste. Texture. Color. **The appearance and the physical experience of food in my mouth became something I paid extraordinary attention to.** The way something melted. The contrast between crisp and soft in the same bite.

I became, without intending to, a connoisseur of mouth experience.

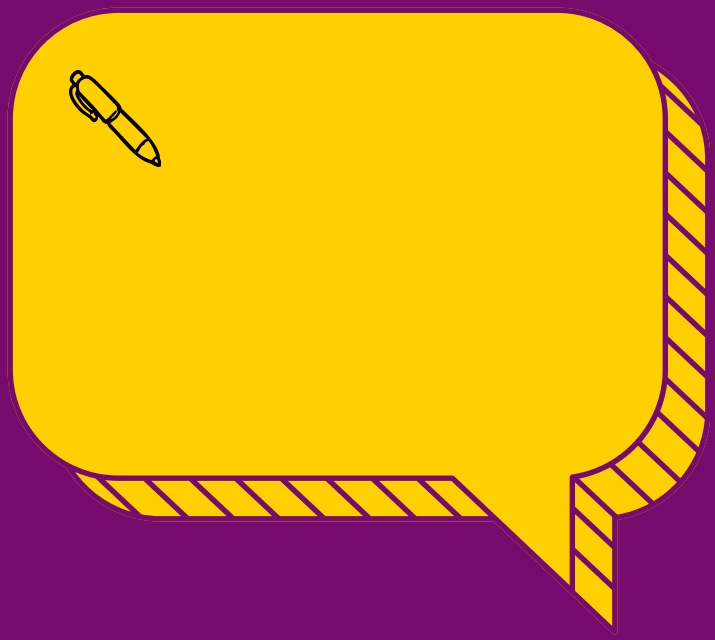
And that changed everything.

CREATIVE CHALLENGE

For one meal today, block one of your senses. Eat with your eyes closed. Or put on headphones. Or hold your nose. Notice your experience — how your attention shifts, what you suddenly notice that you normally ignore. Then eat the same thing again with all your senses open. What changed?

REFLECTION PROMPT

What's something about yourself that you've always framed as a limitation — in the kitchen or anywhere else in your life? What would change if you looked at it as a feature instead?



CHAPTER 2

COOKING WITH A COMPASS, NOT A MAP

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD





MOST COOKS, CONSCIOUSLY OR NOT, USE SMELL TO NAVIGATE THE KITCHEN.

To know when something is ready. To sense which ingredients will work together. To follow the invisible map that generations of culinary tradition have embedded in the collective sensory memory of food culture.

I didn't have that map. Which meant I also wasn't constrained by it.

Because I couldn't smell that certain ingredients *"belong together,"* I had no reason not to try anything with anything.



The conventional wisdom about flavour combinations — built over centuries, reinforced by training, transmitted through smell as much as taste — simply didn't apply to me in the same way. I was operating without inherited assumptions.

So I combined things that trained cooks would not have thought to combine.

I used textures in ways that broke rules I didn't know existed. I paired flavours that had no business being in the same bowl by any conventional logic. And the people around me — people with fully functioning noses and all their conventional expectations intact — would taste these combinations and be surprised.

Bold, they called it. Unexpected. Unusual. I called it Tuesday.

The combinations weren't bold to me. They were just logical — the product of tasting, thinking, adjusting, and following the internal compass of what felt interesting rather than what was supposed to work. Chickpeas paired with banana and blended with peanut butter and honey. I wasn't being adventurous.

I was being practical, with the particular practicality of someone who has to figure things out from first principles because the shortcut isn't available.

This is where **LEGO Cooking** was born. Not from a culinary school. Not from a professional kitchen. Not from years of classical training. But from the specific creative freedom of someone who had to construct flavour entirely from logic, curiosity, and the comprehensive mouth experience she was unconsciously optimising for from the very beginning.

Treat ingredients like building blocks. Combine them through instinct and experimentation rather than instruction and convention. Follow what's interesting. Trust what tastes good. Ignore what you're "*supposed*" to do.

It made my cooking more artistic than technical. More about creative construction than precise execution. And while professional chefs might raise an eyebrow at the lack of formal technique — that's entirely the point. **This approach was never designed for professional chefs.**





It was designed for everyone else. For the person standing in their kitchen on a Tuesday evening with whatever is in the fridge, zero culinary training, and a quiet suspicion that maybe, just maybe, they could figure this out.

You can. I'm living proof.

I **built an entire methodology, a decade of workshops, a cookbook, hundreds of unique recipes, and this very playbook without being able to smell a single ingredient I've ever cooked with.**

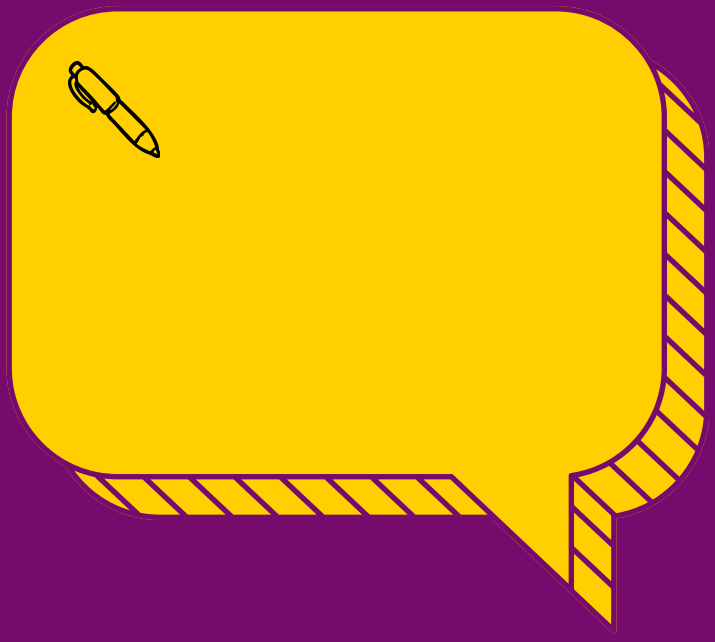
If I can do it without a nose, you can absolutely do it with one.

CREATIVE CHALLENGE

Take one ingredient you've never cooked with before — something you've walked past in the shop a hundred times without picking up. Buy it. Bring it home. Don't look up a recipe. Just taste it raw first, then figure out what to do with it using only what you already have. Let the ingredient tell you where it wants to go.

REFLECTION PROMPT

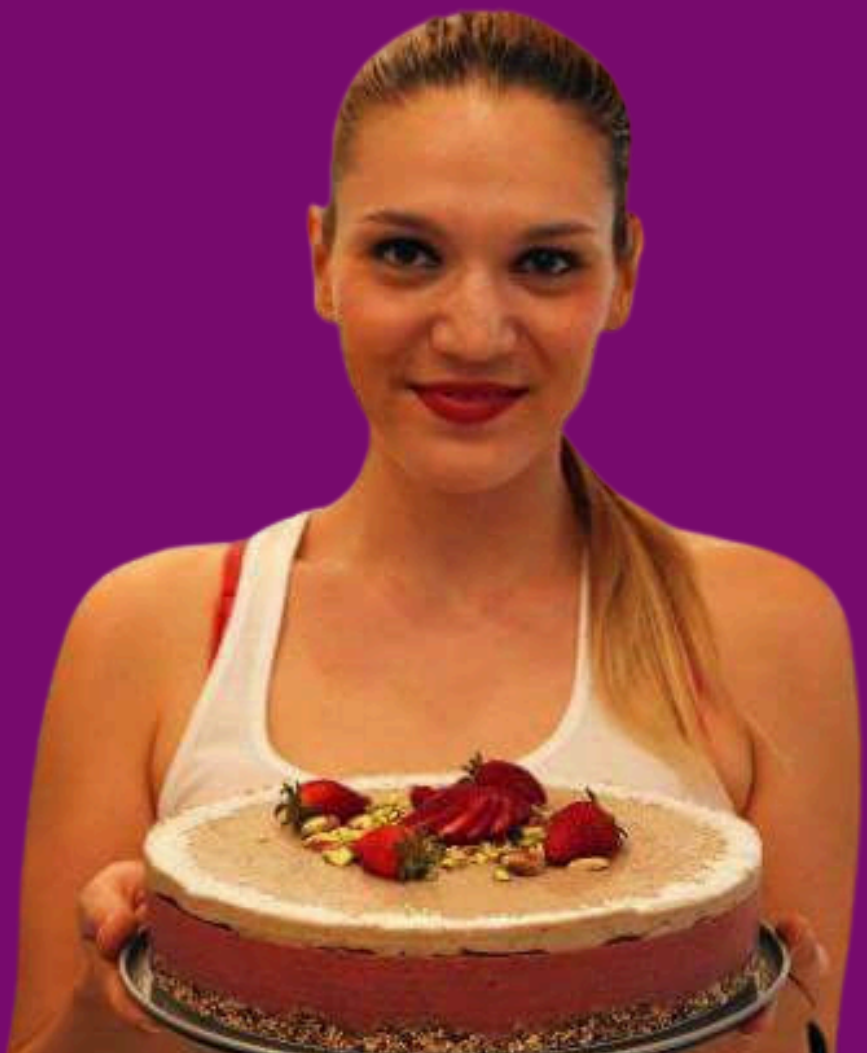
Think about the last time you did something without instructions — without a recipe, a tutorial, a guide, someone else's method. How did it feel? What did you discover that you wouldn't have found if you'd followed the map?



CHAPTER 3

THERE'S NO WRONG WAY TO PLAY

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD



Following a recipe correctly is not the same as cooking well. One is compliance. The other is creation. And for most of us — the ones who grew up feeling vaguely inadequate in the kitchen, who have burned things and under-seasoned things and produced meals that looked nothing like the picture — **the problem was never lack of skill. It was that we were busy playing the wrong game entirely.**

Perfectionism in the kitchen is sneaky. It doesn't always announce itself. Sometimes it shows up as paralysis — standing in front of an open fridge, overwhelmed by the gap between what you have and what a recipe requires. Sometimes it's the quiet shame of a dish that didn't turn out right. **Sometimes it's simply never starting, because starting means risking failure, and failure around food already has too much history attached to it.**





But here's the thing about a playground: you cannot fail on it. That's what makes it a playground. You can fall off the climbing frame, land in the gravel, dust yourself off, and go straight back up. Nobody is grading you. Nobody is watching with a clipboard. The only rule is that you're allowed to try things.

That's the kitchen I want to invite you into.

Not the kitchen of a Michelin-starred restaurant, where precision is everything and the margin for error is zero. Not the kitchen of a cooking show, where everything is pre-measured in little glass bowls and the lighting is perfect and failure is edited out. Your kitchen. On a Tuesday. With whatever's in the fridge and however much energy you actually have — not the energy you think you should have.

Cooking is often sold to us as a technical act. It can be. In certain contexts, it should be. **But home cooking — real, daily, feed-yourself-and-the-people-you-love cooking — is something else. It's a creative act. It's emotional. It's sensory. It's allowed to be messy. Perfectionism steals that from us.**



It turns the kitchen into a stage where we're constantly auditioning for an audience that doesn't exist.

You don't need to audition. You don't need to perform. You don't need to prove anything to anyone, including yourself.

What you do need — and this is the whole methodology in one line — is permission. Permission to try without knowing how it'll turn out. Permission to adjust as you go. Permission to make something that looks like chaos and taste it anyway and decide it's actually pretty good. Permission to experiment your way toward something that works for you, not something that works for a food photographer.



The playbook you're holding is not here to give you more rules to follow. It's here to give you back the freedom you probably had in the kitchen before you learned to be afraid of it. Because you were never the problem. The rules were.

Let the flour spill. Let the timing be off. Let it evolve. This is your kitchen. Your rhythm. Your rules.

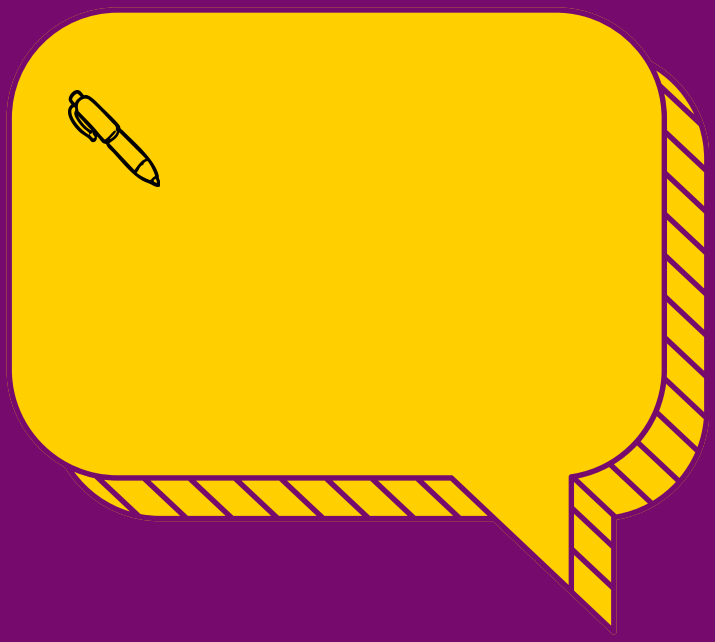
There's genuinely no wrong way to play.

CREATIVE CHALLENGE

Cook one meal this week without measuring anything. Not approximately — nothing. No cups, no spoons, no scales. Use your eyes, your hands, your mouth. Taste as you go. Adjust as you go. Notice how it feels to trust yourself instead of a number.

REFLECTION PROMPT

Where else in my life have I been following rules that were never actually mine?



CHAPTER 4

START WITH WHAT'S ALREADY THERE

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD





The single most paralyzing moment in the kitchen is staring into an open fridge and concluding that there is nothing to eat.

There is always something to eat. What there is not always is the exact combination of ingredients required by the recipe you were planning to make. And somewhere along the way, we confused those two things — as if cooking were only valid when it followed a predetermined plan, and everything else was just making do.

This is the reframe I want to offer you: **improvisation is not what you settle for when you run out of ideas. It is the idea. It is the method. It is the muscle that every confident cook — trained or not — has developed.** And it develops exactly the way any muscle does: by being used, imperfectly, repeatedly, until it stops feeling like effort.



Here's how it actually works. You open the fridge. You pick one thing — whatever catches your eye first. A leftover portion of rice. Half an avocado. Three eggs and a soft tomato. **You ask yourself one question: what could this become? Not what should it become. Not what would a recipe make of it. What could it become, given what else is in there, given how much time you have, given how hungry you are right now?**

That question is the whole framework. Everything else is just practice.

Cooking for your real life — not some idealised version of it — means accepting that your actual life includes days when you're tired, broke, distracted, sad, or all four simultaneously. It means accepting that the thirty-minute gourmet weeknight dinner assumes a level of pre-planning and emotional bandwidth that is simply not always available. And it means building a relationship with food that can flex around all of that — rather than one that collapses the moment reality doesn't cooperate.

Leftovers are not the consolation prize. They are a creative constraint, and creative constraints are one of the most useful tools in cooking. A lone wrinkled tomato. A bit of rice. Half an onion. Two eggs. A heel of stale bread. These aren't scraps — they're building blocks. One good sauté, one smart seasoning, one small twist, and you've created something that didn't exist five minutes ago. Something warm and nourishing and entirely yours.





What you're building, one improvised meal at a time, is kitchen confidence. Not the kind that comes from mastering techniques — the kind that comes from learning to trust yourself. From noticing that when you listen to what your body actually wants, and respond with what you actually have, the result is almost always good enough. Usually better than good enough.

You learn how much salt feels right. You learn when something is ready without a timer, just by looking at it. You learn what you can substitute, what you can skip, what you can add on a whim. **None of this is guesswork — it's accumulated, embodied knowledge that builds quietly every time you cook without a safety net.**

The recipe will always be there when you want it. But you don't always need it.

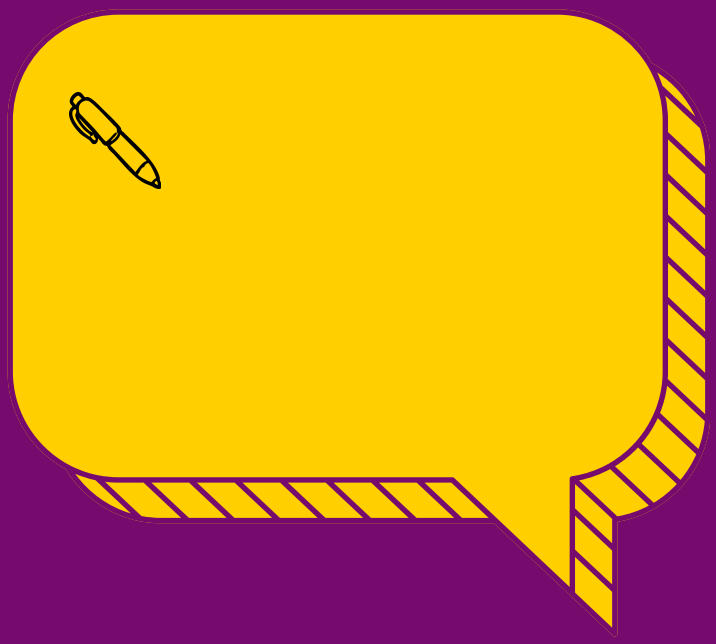
Start with what's already there. That's enough.

CREATIVE CHALLENGE

Open your fridge right now and pick the three ingredients that are closest to being past their best. Don't plan. Don't search for a recipe. Put them on the counter and give yourself fifteen minutes to turn them into something edible.

REFLECTION PROMPT

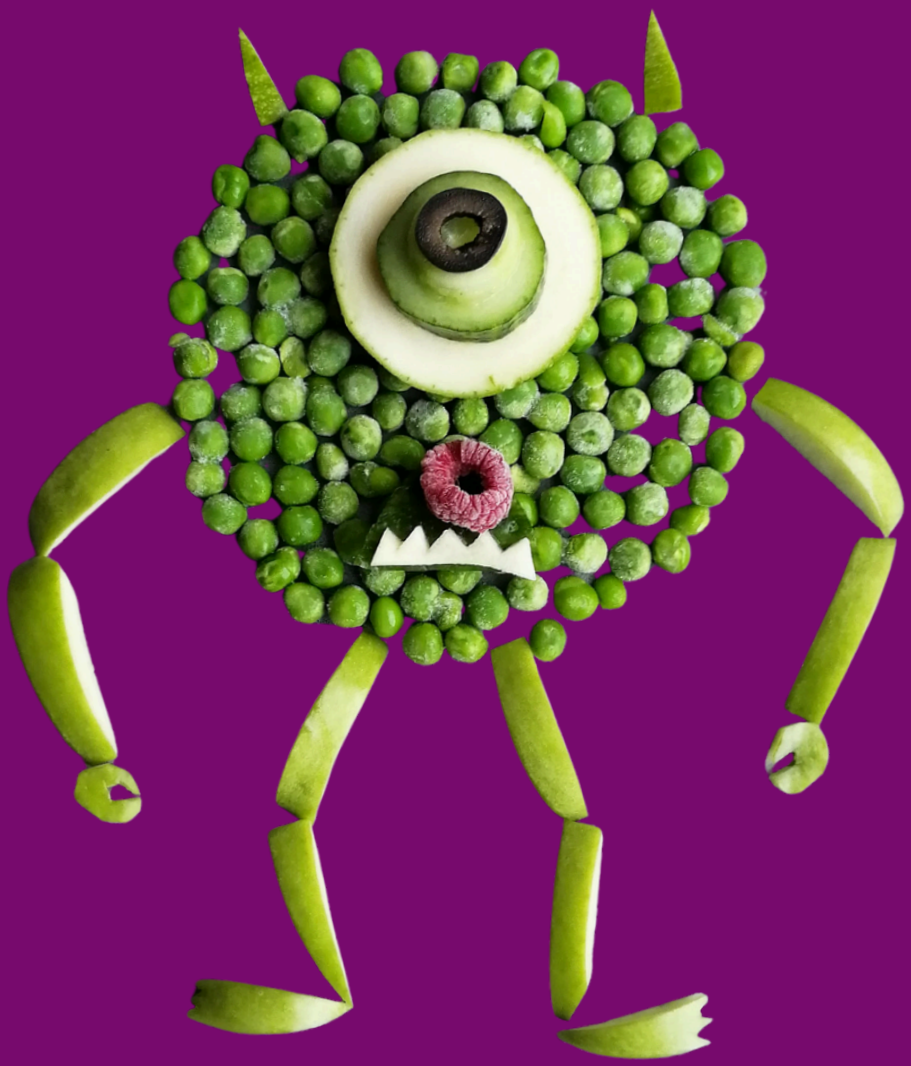
What beauty or resourcefulness am I sitting on that I keep overlooking because it doesn't look like enough?



CHAPTER 5

FOOD IS MORE THAN A MEAL

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD



I want to tell you something about where all of this ends up — because it doesn't end in the kitchen. It starts there.

The kitchen is the entry point, the laboratory, the playground. But the thing you're actually practicing when you cook without rules, when you improvise from what you have, when you stop performing and start exploring — that thing transfers. It bleeds out into other rooms. Other decisions. Other relationships. Other areas of your life where you have been waiting for permission, for the right conditions, for someone to tell you that you're doing it correctly.

Food is never just food. A meal is never just a meal. The act of cooking for yourself — really cooking, with presence and intention and a willingness to try something new — is an act of self-respect. And self-respect is not a fixed quantity you either have or don't. It's a practice. It accumulates in tiny increments, in small daily choices, in the quiet decision to treat your own nourishment as something that deserves care.





This is what I didn't know when I first stepped into the kitchen in a moment of desperation, in the middle of an eating disorder that had been running my life for close to a decade.

I wasn't looking for a philosophy. I was just looking for a way to stop being afraid of food.

What I found was something much larger: a methodology that eventually turned me into a certified Mind Body Eating Coach, a TEDx speaker, a Forbes 30 Under 30 social entrepreneur, and a bestselling cookbook author — without a single day of formal culinary training.

The transformation that began in my kitchen, with whatever ingredients I had on hand and a refusal to keep doing things the way they weren't working, showed up in every other part of my life too.





I'm not telling you this to impress you. I'm telling you because the version of me who started this journey would not have believed it. She would have said: that's not available to someone like me. She would have been wrong.

Food is a connection point. The most universal one we have. It crosses every cultural boundary, every language barrier, every difference in background or belief. When you cook for someone, you are saying something that words often can't. When you eat together, you are doing something that humans have done since before recorded history — creating belonging, creating safety, creating connection.





Think about the dishes that carry memory for you. The ones tied to a person, a place, a moment that still lives somewhere in your body. Cooking those dishes is a way of keeping something alive. Sharing the story behind them is a way of letting someone into your world. Food holds things that language can't always reach.

And on the ordinary days — the Tuesdays with no occasion and no audience — it can still be a ritual. A moment of presence in a life that moves fast. The act of chopping, of stirring, of tasting — these are sensory anchors.





They pull you back into your body, into the present moment, into the simple fact of being alive and needing to eat and having the ability to make something good from what's in front of you.

That is not nothing. That is, quietly, everything.

So dare to play. Dare to experiment, to fail, to invent, to adjust, to enjoy. Dare to rewrite your relationship with food and cooking on your own terms. And then notice what else starts to shift.

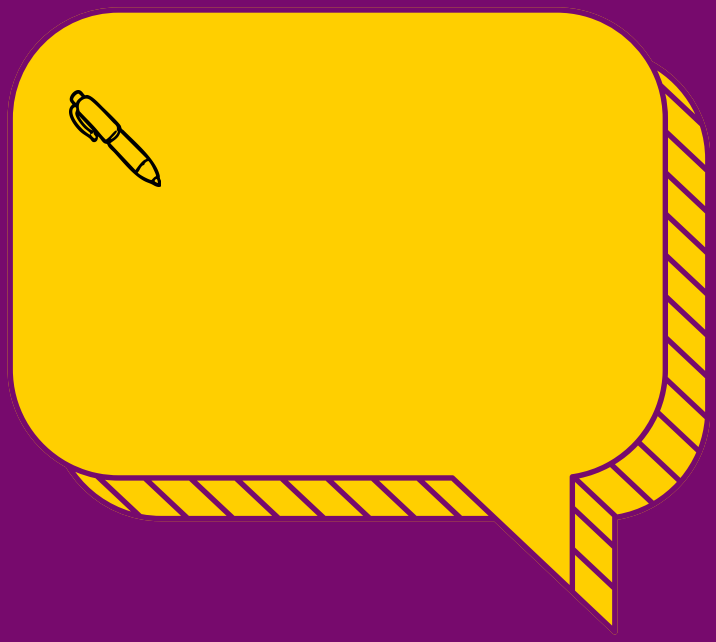
The kitchen was always just the beginning.

CREATIVE CHALLENGE

Think of one person who shaped the way you relate to food — for better or for worse. Write them a message: a thank-you, a question, or something you never said. You don't have to send it. Write it anyway.

REFLECTION PROMPT

If food stopped being just fuel and started being a practice — what would I want that practice to say about how I live?



LET'S PLAY!

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD

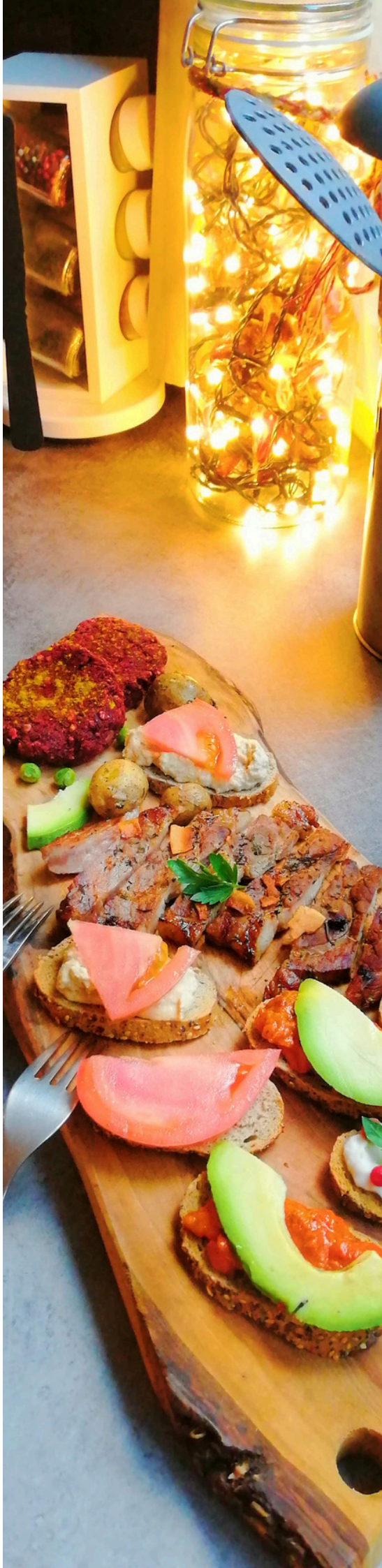


This playbook isn't a collection of rigid recipes. It's not here to tell you the right way to chop, stir, or plate. It's here to help you create a way to cook that works for you consistently — regardless of your skill level, your preferences, or whatever happens to be in your fridge right now.

Here, you'll find ideas and inspirations that invite you to experiment and encourage you to engage with ingredients you like and techniques that feel easy. The goal is to turn cooking from a task you dread into a creative ritual — relaxing, energizing, and empowering well beyond the dining table.

This playbook is for the rebels. The misfits. The creatives. The skeptics. The everyday humans who want to feel at home with food and in the kitchen — without the guilt, exhaustion, or endless meal prep hours.

You don't need to be a meticulous cook. You don't need fancy gear. You don't need rare ingredients. You don't even need to know what you're doing. You just need the courage to try, the openness to explore, and the willingness to trust your own rhythm. That's it.





This is the shortcut I wish I had fifteen years ago. Not to cook like a pro — but to feel at peace around food. To play with ingredients I love, and in the process, reclaim a part of myself.

So let's cook. Let's create.

Let's dare to play with food.

THE FORMULAS

INVENT YOUR OWN RECIPES FROM SCRATCH

LISTEN ON SOUNDCLOUD

PANCAKES
BAKED GOODIES
GRATINS
OMELETTE PIZZAS
"PIZZAS"
SOUPS
SALADS
ENERGY BALLS
SPREADS & DIPS
RAW DESSERTS




merry christmas
IKEA
FOODIE
BOULEVARD



I didn't discover these in a culinary school. I found them the way you find most useful things — by accident, through repetition, while trying to solve a problem with whatever was on hand.

After years of cooking without recipes, without formal training, and without a functioning sense of smell, I started noticing patterns. Not rules — patterns. The way a good pancake always needs something dry, something wet, and something that holds it together. The way a bowl meal works when it has a base, something creamy, something fresh, and something with crunch.

The way a dip comes alive the moment you add an acid and a fat to whatever you've blended.



These patterns became formulas. And the formulas changed everything.

A formula is not a recipe. A recipe tells you exactly what to do. **A formula shows you how something works — and then steps back and lets you make it yours.** Think of it like the grammar of a dish rather than the script. Once you understand the grammar, you can say whatever you want.

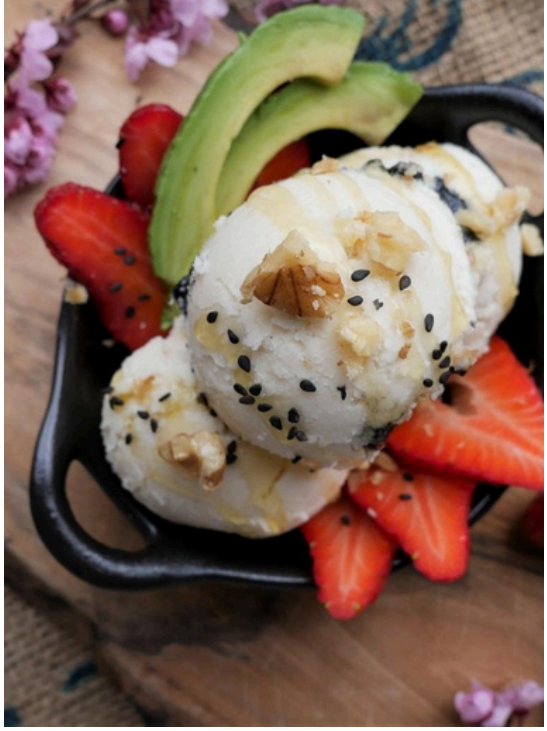
Each formula in this section gives you the anatomy of a type of dish: the key building blocks, how they work together, and the ratio logic that keeps things from falling apart. What it doesn't give you is a fixed ingredient list. That part is up to you — based on what you have, what you like, and what sounds good right now.



After each formula, you'll find a Play Session: a real example of me using that exact framework in a real kitchen moment. Not to show you the right way to do it. To show you one way — and to prove that the formula works even when the ingredients are unexpected, the quantities are approximate, and the plan is made up on the spot.

Use these formulas as long as you need them. Then forget them — because by that point, they'll already be part of how you think.

This is where the playing actually starts.








PANCAKES

My original pancake inspiration comes from my mom, who made them constantly when I was a child. When I tried to replicate hers as an adult, something never quite worked — so I went in a completely different direction. I became addicted to a 15-minute kitchen ritual: food processor, one egg, something dry, something wet, and whatever I wanted to experiment with that day. Blended chickpeas. Steamed pumpkin. Spinach. The question was never "*can I make a pancake from this*?" It was always "*how can I make a pancake from this*?" This led to unexpected discoveries and delightful results.



PANCAKE FORMULA (SWEET / SAVORY)

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO 1 part dry : 1 part wet : 1 part binder : 1/2 part flavor + ½ part crunch

BUILDING BLOCKS

Dry Base	Any flour, oats, ground seeds, flakes, bran, wheat germ
Wet Base	Milk (dairy or plant-based), yogurt, kefir
Sticky (Binder)	Eggs, mashed banana, applesauce, soaked flaxseed or chia (1 tbsp + 3 tbsp water = 1 egg), husk fiber
Flavor (Optional)	Forest fruits, dried fruits, grated vegetables (carrot, pumpkin, potato, zucchini), leafy greens, chickpeas, olives, cheese, herbs, spices, cocoa, vanilla, etc.
Crunch (Optional)	Walnuts, peanuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.

For thin large pancakes
Use more wet base — aim for a consistency like thin porridge.

For fluffy small pancakes
Use more dry base — aim for a concistency like cake mix.

METHOD

1. Mix or blend your ingredients together until smooth.
2. Pour batter onto a lightly oiled pan over medium heat.
3. Flip the pancake once bubbles form on the surface. Use a silicone spatula for easiest flipping.

PRO TIP

The smaller the pancake, the easier the flip.

KEEP IN MIND Gluten-free flours and non-traditional dry ingredients can make the pancakes fragile, so it's best to make small pancakes (5–6 cm) which are easy to flip.

Sweet Examples

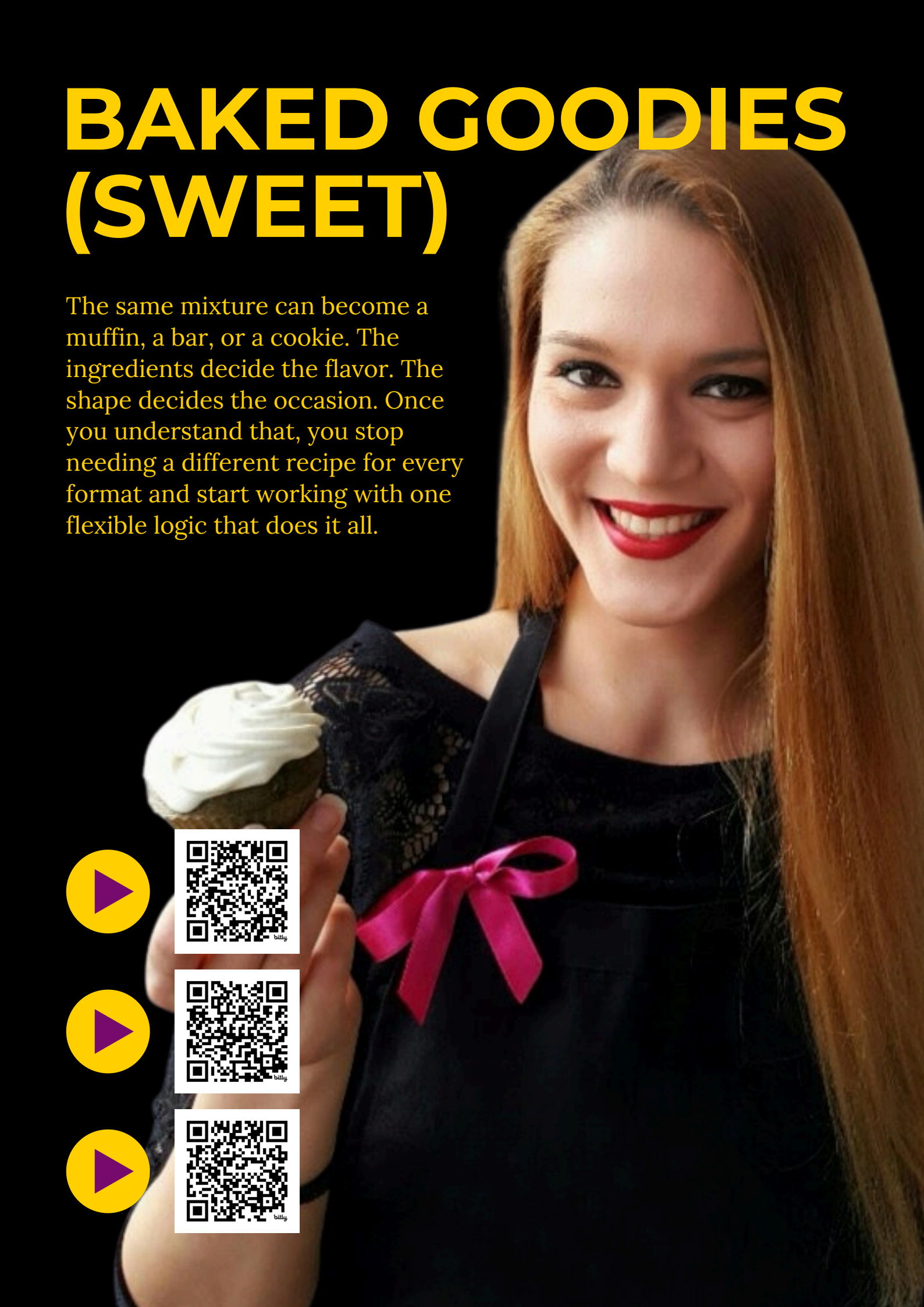
- Oats + coconut milk + egg → serve with banana, walnuts, honey
- Coconut flour + egg + banana → serve with agave nectar and cashews

Savory Examples

- Flour + chickpeas + egg → serve with cheese, avocado, tomatoes
- Oats + spinach + egg + olives → serve with avocado and smoked salmon

BAKED GOODIES (SWEET)

The same mixture can become a muffin, a bar, or a cookie. The ingredients decide the flavor. The shape decides the occasion. Once you understand that, you stop needing a different recipe for every format and start working with one flexible logic that does it all.



BAKED GOODIES FORMULA (SWEET MUFFINS, BARS, COOKIES)

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO **3 parts dry : 1 part wet : 1 part binder : 1 part sweetener : flavor & crunch to taste**

BUILDING BLOCKS



 **Dry Base**	Any flour (wheat, spelt, rye, oat, chickpea, buckwheat, almond, coconut, rice, or gluten-free alternatives), oats, or flakes (buckwheat, spelt, quinoa, millet, rice, oat)
 **Wet Base**	Milk (dairy or plant-based), yogurt, kefir
 **Sticky (Binder)**	Eggs, mashed banana, applesauce, soaked flaxseed or chia (1 tbsp + 3 tbsp water = 1 egg), husk fiber
 **Sweetener**	Dried fruits (dates, figs, raisins) maple syrup, date syrup, coconut/dark sugar, date sugar, molasses
 **Flavor (Optional)**	Forest fruits, cocoa, carob, vanilla, cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, citrus zest, coconut flakes, chocolate chips
 **Crunch (Optional)**	Walnuts, peanuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.
 **Leavening**	Optional: 1 tsp baking powder or baking soda

For bars and muffins (batter)



Aim for a thick, "droppable" consistency—it should fall off a spoon in a heavy clump.

For cookies (dough)



Add a touch more Dry Base until the mixture is tacky but holdable—it should stay in a ball.

METHOD

1



Mix dry and wet ingredients separately, then combine until well blended.

2



Pour batter into a lined tin, fill silicone molds, or scoop onto a tray to shape your cookies.

3



Bake at 180°C / 350°F for 20–25 minutes until firm and golden. A toothpick should come out clean.

Examples

- Oat flour + mashed banana + egg + cinnamon + walnuts + dark chocolate chips
- Buckwheat flour + yogurt + egg + cocoa + dates + cashews
- Spelt flour + grated carrot + egg + maple syrup + ginger + coconut flakes

PRO TIP

Fudgy & Dense: Omit leavening agents; use extra mashed fruit for a moist, soft finish.

Light & Fluffy: Use baking powder/soda; keep the batter thick but pourable (like cake mix) without extra liquids.

BAKED GOODIES (SAVORY)

The oven doesn't care whether you put sugar or paprika in the bowl. A savory bake follows the same logic as a sweet one — dry, wet, binder, flavor. The difference is only in the direction you take it. Shape the same mixture into a muffin for a snack, press it into a bake and slice it into bars for a lunchbox, or drop it onto a tray for something closer to a savory cookie. A full meal in a portable shape, ready when you are.



BAKED GOODIES FORMULA (SAVORY MUFFINS, BARS, COOKIES)

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO 3 parts dry : 1 part wet : 1 part binder + flavor & crunch to taste

BUILDING BLOCKS

Dry Base	Any flour (wheat, spelt, rye, oat, chickpea, buckwheat, almond, coconut, rice, or gluten-free alternatives), oats, or flakes (buckwheat, spelt, quinoa, millet, rice, oat)
Wet Base	Milk (dairy or plant-based), yogurt, kefir, cooked vegetables (potato, sweet potato, pumpkin, carrot, etc.)
Sticky (Binder)	Eggs, soaked flaxseed or chia (1 tbsp + 3 tbsp water = 1 egg), husk fiber
Flavor & Seasoning	Grated or chopped vegetables (zucchini, carrot, spinach, kale, mushroom), olives, chickpeas, cheese (feta, mozzarella, parmesan, cheddar), cooked grains, legumes, olives, sun-dried tomatoes, cooked meat or fish, herbs, spices
Crunch (Optional)	Walnuts, peanuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.
Leavening	Optional: 1 tsp baking powder or baking soda

For bars and muffins (batter)
Aim for a thick, "droppable" consistency—it should fall off a spoon in a heavy clump.

For cookies (dough)
Add a touch more Dry Base until the mixture is tacky but holdable—it should stay in a ball.

METHOD

1. Mix dry and wet ingredients separately, then combine until well blended.
2. Pour batter into a lined tin, fill silicone molds, or scoop onto a tray to shape your cookies.
3. Bake at 180°C / 350°F for 20–25 minutes until firm and golden. A toothpick should come out clean.

Examples

- Oat flour + egg + grated zucchini + feta + oregano + black pepper
- Chickpea flour + yogurt + egg + roasted red pepper + olives + cumin
- Spelt flour + egg + spinach + parmesan + garlic + sunflower seeds

PRO TIP

Dense & Soft: Omit baking powder; add extra mashed or grated vegetables for a moist, filling, and compact result.
Light & Fluffy: Add baking powder; avoid extra moisture. Aim for a thick, scoopable consistency—like muffin batter.

MEATBALLS, PATTIES & BURGERS



Кюфте = meatball, is a Bulgarian dining table staple. If children can make convincing balls from mud and soil, you can do it with any combination of ingredients. Shape it, bake it, see what comes out. It always comes out great.

MEATBALLS, PATTIES § BURGERS FORMULA

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO — **2 parts main base : 1/2 part dry binder : 1 part sticky binder : seasoning & crunch to taste**

BUILDING BLOCKS



Main Base
pick one or combine

Legumes and grains: quinoa, amaranth, bulgur, buckwheat, lentils, spelt, barley, millet, beans
Vegetables (shredded): pumpkin, zucchini, potato, sweet potato, carrot, celeriac, beetroot, parsnip, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower
Meat: minced meat, chicken liver, pork liver, white chicken
Fish: boneless fillet
Other: wheat granules, wheat germ, soy mince, vegetable pulp (leftover from juicing carrot, zucchini, or beetroot)



Dry Binder — Any flour, oats, flakes, bran, ground flaxseed



Sticky Binder — Eggs or plant-based alternative (1 tbsp ground flax + 3 tbsp water = 1 egg), tahini, nut butter (any)



Seasoning — Spices of choice, salt or soy sauce



Crunch (Optional) — Walnuts, peanuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.

For firm, pan-searable patties

Use a drier Main Base (grains/minced meat) and aim for a "play-dough" consistency that doesn't stick to your hands.

For soft, oven-baked meatballs

Use a moister Main Base and aim for a "tacky" consistency—it should hold a ball shape but stick to your hands.

METHOD

1



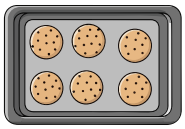
Prep & Mix
Cook and mash your base. Squeeze out excess liquid from vegetables. Combine all ingredients until uniform.

2



Shape
Roll into balls or press into patties. For extra crunch, roll the outside in seeds or crushed nuts.

3



Bake
Arrange on parchment paper. Bake at 180°C / 350°F for 20–25 mins until they release easily from the paper.

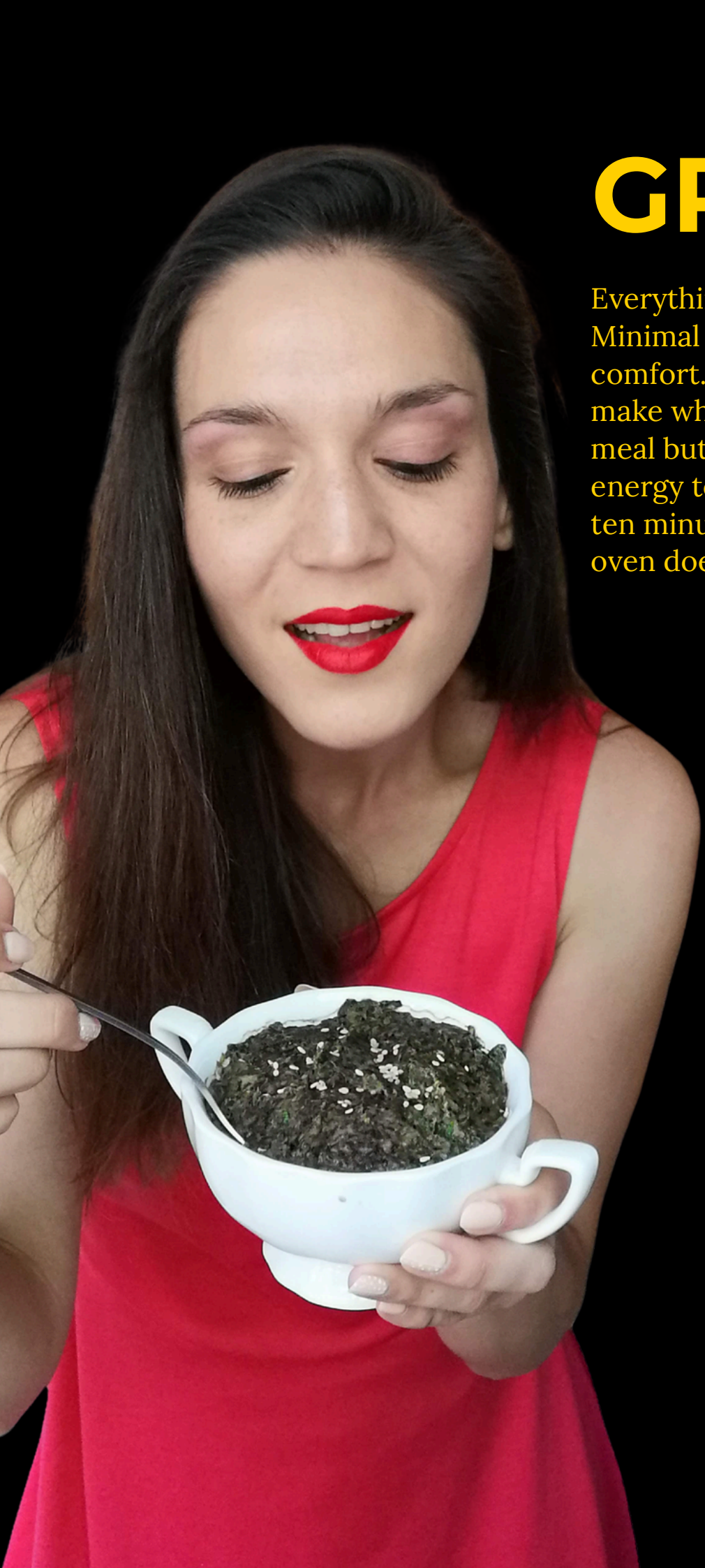
Examples

- **Simple Fish Patties:** White fish + flour + egg + salt & pepper
- **Basic Meatball:** Minced meat + oats + egg + onion + garlic
- **The "Juicer" Special:** Vegetable pulp + oats + egg + soy sauce

PRO TIP



The Secret is Dry
Squeeze moisture from veggies before mixing. If the batter feels too wet to shape, add more Dry Binder. For maximum crisp, use the oven fan setting.



GRATIN

Everything goes in one dish. Minimal prep, maximum comfort. This is the thing I make when I want a proper meal but have almost no energy to make one — five to ten minutes of prep, then the oven does everything else.

GRATIN FORMULA

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO — **3 parts main base : 1 part wet element : 1 part sticky binder : 1 part melty topping : seasoning + crunch + extras to taste**

BUILDING BLOCKS

 **Main Base** pick one or combine	**Grains** (quinoa, bulgur, buckwheat, barley), **legumes** (lentils, beans chickpeas), **vegetables** (pumpkin, zucchini, (sweet) potato, carrot, beetroot, broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, kale), or **minced meat**
 **Wet Binder**	Yogurt, strained yogurt, ricotta, mascarpone, sour cream, crème fraîche, tomato sauce, tomato purée, or plant-based alternatives
 **Melty Topping**	Mozzarella, feta, goat's cheese, parmesan, cheddar, emmental, or plant-based alternatives
 **Sticky (Binder)**	Eggs or plant-based alternative (1 tbsp ground flax + 3 tbsp water = 1 egg), tahini, nut butter (any)
 **Seasoning**	Spices of choice, salt or soy sauce
 **Crunch (Optional)**	Walnuts, peanuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.
 **Extras**	Corn, peas, chickpeas, olives, mushrooms, sun-dried tomatoes, tofu

For a creamy gratin

Use high-moisture wet elements like ricotta, mascarpone, or yogurt. Aim for a "thick stew" consistency before baking.

For a firm bake

Use tomato purée or strained yogurt and extra grains. The mixture should be dense enough to stand a spoon up in the bowl.

METHOD

1



Prep Base
Preheat oven to 180°C / 350°F. Boil, grate, or chop your base ingredients as needed.

2



Mix
Mix all ingredients in a bowl. Transfer to a greased baking dish and sprinkle a little cheese on top.

3



Bake
Bake for 20–25 minutes until the center is set and the top is bubbling and golden.

Examples

- Quinoa + egg + yogurt + roasted pumpkin + feta + cumin.
- Buckwheat + egg + tomato purée + spinach + mozzarella + oregano.
- Sweet potato + egg + ricotta + onion + parmesan + thyme.

PRO TIP

If your mix is very liquid, use the oven fan setting to help it set faster.

Let the gratin cool slightly before slicing. It holds its shape better and reheats beautifully the next day.



OMELETTE PIZZA

I got bored of eating the same three egg dishes every time I wanted a quick protein meal. So I borrowed the pancake logic — egg mixed with something dry to create a stable base — and instead of folding the filling inside like an omelette, I treat the top like a pizza. Same ingredients, completely different experience. Ready in 15 minutes. Nobody ever guesses what it is.



OMELETTE PIZZA FORMULA

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO **3 eggs : 6 tbsp dry base : 1 part sauce : 2 parts toppings : flavors & crunch to taste**

BUILDING BLOCKS

Base	Eggs + 2 tbsp dry ingredient per egg — any flour, oats, flakes, bran, ground seeds, or protein flour
Sauce	Tomato purée, ajvar, tahini, olive paste, pesto, or mustard
Topping	**Vegetables** (tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms, onion, gherkins, spinach, avocado), **cheese** (mozzarella, feta, parmesan, cheddar), cured meats, tuna, smoked salmon, corn, chickpeas, olives
Flavor	Herbs and spices of choice, chili, crunch elements (nuts, seeds, sesame)
Crunch (Optional)	Walnuts, peanuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.

For a crispy, thin crust

Use a very wide pan and spread the base as thin as possible. Lean toward flour or ground seeds in your dry base.

For a soft, deep dish

Use a smaller pan for a thicker base. Use oats or flakes in your dry base for a more "bready," absorbent texture.

METHOD

1



Blend your base ingredients until smooth. Pour into a lightly oiled low-heat non-stick pan.

2



Cook for 1–2 minutes on low heat. Once the base sets, spread your sauce and layer the toppings.

3



Cover with a lid. Cook for 7–10 minutes on low heat until the cheese melts and the base is fully firm. Release with a silicone spatula.

Examples

- **The Classic:** Oat flour + egg + tomato purée + mozzarella + basil + olives.
- **The Mediterranean:** Buckwheat flour + egg + tahini + roasted peppers + feta + chili.
- **The Protein Boost:** Hemp flour + egg + pesto + smoked salmon + avocado + capers.

PRO TIP

If the pan is too hot, the bottom will burn before the toppings have a chance to warm up and set.

Spread your toppings evenly to the edges so the middle doesn't get soggy or heavy.



"PIZZA"

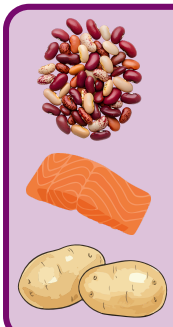
I have never been a dough person. But I always loved how pizza looks and the logic of being able to put anything on top. One day, too lazy to shape individual patties, I asked myself whether I could just spread the whole mixture flat and treat it like a crust. Turns out you can. In endless ways.

PIZZA FORMULA

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO — **2 parts main base : 1/2 part dry binder : 1 part sticky binder : topping to taste**

BUILDING BLOCKS



Main Base
pick one or combine

Legumes and grains (cooked): quinoa, amaranth, bulgur, buckwheat, lentils, spelt, barley, millet, beans
Vegetables (shredded): pumpkin, zucchini, potato, sweet potato, carrot, celeriac, beetroot, parsnip, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower
Meat: minced meat, chicken liver, pork liver, white chicken
Fish: boneless fillet
Other: wheat granules, wheat germ, soy mince, vegetable pulp (leftover from juicing carrot, zucchini, or beetroot)



Dry Binder — Any flour, oats, flakes, bran, ground flaxseed



Sticky Binder — Eggs or plant-based alternative (1 tbsp ground flax + 3 tbsp water = 1 egg), tahini, nut butter (any)



Topping

Sauce: tomato purée, ajvar, tahini, olive paste, pesto, mustard
Vegetables: cherry tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms, onion, spinach, avocado, capers, gherkins
Cheese: mozzarella, feta, goat's cheese, parmesan, cheddar, or plant-based alternatives
Extras: eggs, tuna, prawns, smoked salmon, corn, chickpeas, olives, cured meats, tofu
Flavor & Crunch: herbs and spices of choice, chili, nuts, seeds

For a sturdy crust

Use grains or minced meat as base. Aim for a "pliable dough" consistency that you can press flat with your palms without it sticking.

For a veggie crust

Squeeze all liquid from grated vegetables before mixing. The texture should be like "thick mash"—moist but holds its shape.

METHOD

1



Prep & Shape
Mix or blend base ingredients until uniform. Spread onto a parchment-lined tray, shaping the crust to about 7–8mm thick.

2



Pre-bake
Bake at 160°C (with fan) for 15–20 minutes until the base releases cleanly from the paper.

3



Finish
Slide a spatula under to ensure it's loose. Add sauce and toppings, then return to the oven for 5–10 minutes.

PRO TIP

Always slide a long spatula under the base before adding toppings. If it sticks now, it will definitely stick later!

Examples

- Cauliflower + chickpea flour + tahini -> pesto + mushrooms + roasted pepper + olives.
- Sweet potato + oats + egg -> tomato purée + spinach + cherry tomatoes + feta.
- Minced beef + oats + egg -> ajvar + mushrooms + onion + cheddar.



SOUP

Soup was the first thing I ever cooked when I started living alone — in a studio with no proper kitchen, just a microwave and a €15 food processor with a blending attachment. I steamed vegetables, blended them, and realized I couldn't go wrong. That was the beginning. I've been making soup ever since, in every possible variation. It is genuinely the most forgiving formula in this entire playbook.

SOUP FORMULA

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO — **2 parts wet base : 2 parts main ingredients : 1/2 part thickener : flavor to taste**

BUILDING BLOCKS





Wet Base — Vegetable or meat broth, milk or dairy-free option, water, or a combination



Main Ingredients — Pumpkin, carrot, sweet potato, potato, tomatoes, zucchini, beetroot, leek, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, parsnip, leafy greens



Thickener — Beans, lentils, chickpeas, cooked rice, cream or plant-based version, tahini, nut butter



Flavor — Onion, garlic, ginger, leek, celery, salt, cumin, coriander, turmeric, paprika, curry, black pepper, chili, herbs of choice, lemon juice, soy sauce, etc.

For a silky, creamy soup

Blend until completely smooth. Use high-fat thickeners (coconut cream, tahini, or cashews) for a "velvet" finish.

For a hearty, chunky soup

Leave vegetables in bite-sized pieces. Use legumes (lentils/beans) or grains as your thickener to add "bite" and protein.

METHOD

1



Sauté & Simmer
Sauté onion, garlic, or ginger in oil. Add Main Ingredients and Wet Base. Simmer until tender (or roast them first for deeper flavor).

2



Texture Check
Creamy: Transfer to a blender, add your Thickener, and whiz until smooth.
Chunky: Keep as is or partially mash; stir in your Thickener for extra body.

3



Finish & Boost
Return to the pot. Adjust consistency with more Wet Base if needed. Stir in Flavor elements and season generously.

Examples

- Roasted pumpkin + coconut milk + ginger + turmeric + chili.
- Lentils + carrot + celery + tomato purée + cumin + smoked paprika.
- Broccoli + spinach + leek + tahini + lemon juice + toasted seeds.

PRO TIP



If your soup is too thin, blend in a handful of cooked beans or a spoonful of nut butter—it adds instant creaminess without dairy. If it's too thick, add your Wet Base slowly while blending until it "swirls" easily.



SALAD

Salad is so universal, it barely needs an introduction. What it does need is a reframe. For a lot of people, salad means obligation — a few sad leaves, a diet food, something you eat instead of what you actually want. That's not a salad. A real salad is a layered composition with texture, color, and a dressing that ties everything together. Think of it less like a side dish and more like a bowl you haven't cooked.

SALAD FORMULA

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO **2 parts base : 1 part protein : 2 parts vegetables : 1 splash dressing : crunch to taste**

BUILDING BLOCKS





Green or Grain Base

Raw: arugula, spinach, kale, mixed leaves
Cooked: lentils, quinoa, couscous, bulgur, pasta, buckwheat



Protein

Chickpeas, beans, boiled eggs, chicken, tuna, smoked salmon, tofu, cheese, prawns



Vegetables

Raw: cherry tomatoes, cucumber, shredded carrots/beetroot, radish, spring onion, peppers, celery
Roasted/Cooked: pumpkin, (sweet) potato, broccoli, cauliflower, celeriac



Crunch & Extras

Crunch: nuts, seeds, crackers, croutons
Extras: fruit (apple/mango), avocado, olives, pickles, fresh herbs



Dressing

Base: olive oil + acid (lemon/vinegar)
Boosters: mustard, honey, garlic, tahini, soy sauce

For a light, fresh salad

Use Green Bases and focus on Raw Vegetables. This creates a hydrating bowl that's perfect for an energizing lunch.

For a warm, hearty bowl

Use Grain Bases and focus on Roasted Vegetables. Adding warm proteins makes this feel like a substantial main meal.

METHOD

1



Layer the base
Start with your Green or Grain Base at the bottom of the bowl.

2



Add the body
Layer your Protein and Vegetables.

3



Finish
Top with your Crunch & Extras. Drizzle with Dressing just before serving.

Examples

- Arugula + quinoa + roasted pumpkin + goat's cheese + walnuts + balsamic.
- Mixed leaves + chickpeas + shredded carrots + cherry tomatoes + tahini dressing + sesame.
- Spinach + smoked salmon + cucumber + avocado + capers + lemon & olive oil.

PRO TIP



For the best bowl, pick at least one "Raw" vegetable for crunch and one "Roasted" vegetable for sweetness. This contrast makes the salad feel like a professionally designed meal.



ENERGY BALLS

If you like nuts and you like dried fruit, energy balls are one of the least complicated desserts you can make. Blend them together and you have a sticky, shapeable mixture that holds almost anything. I think of them as the most portable expression of the formula logic — everything you'd want as a topping on pancakes, compressed into something you can eat in two bites on your way out the door.

ENERGY BALLS FORMULA

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO 2 parts dry base : 1 part sticky binder : boosters & coatings to taste

BUILDING BLOCKS





Dry Base

Raw nuts and seeds (walnuts, hazelnuts, cashews, almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, sesame, flax, hemp, poppy), coconut flakes, cocoa, carob powder, cacao nibs, coconut chips



Sticky Binder

Dried fruit (dates, figs, apricots, prunes, raisins, goji berries, mulberries), **liquid sweetener** (honey, maple syrup, date syrup, molasses, coconut nectar), tahini (any variety), nut butter (any variety) cocoa butter, coconut oil



Boosters

Sea salt, vanilla, cinnamon, cardamom, orange zest, ginger powder



Coatings

Sesame seeds, cocoa powder, shredded coconut, coconut flour, crushed nuts, matcha powder, spirulina, beetroot powder

For a nutty, crunchy ball

Pulse the Dry Base briefly so some larger pieces remain. Use less liquid sweetener and rely on tacky fruits like figs or raisins.

For a smooth texture

Blend the Dry Base into a fine flour before adding the Sticky Binder. Use dates or nut butters for a fudgy finish.

METHOD

1



Pulse & Mix
Blend your Dry Base ingredients until they reach your desired texture (fine or chunky). Add your Sticky Binder and flavorings.

2



The Squeeze Test
Blend until a dough forms. If it's too crumbly, add a splash of water or more binder. If too sticky, add more dry ingredients.

3



Shape & Chill
Roll into balls of your preferred size. Roll them in your chosen Coatings for extra texture, then chill in the fridge to set.

PRO TIP



Dates are the "super-glue" of energy balls. If yours are very dry, soak them in water for 10 min to make them tacky.

Examples

- Walnuts + dates + cocoa + coconut flakes.
- Cashews + dried apricots + peanut butter
- Almonds + figs + cacao nibs + orange zest.
- Hazelnuts + goji berries + honey + sea salt
- Sesame + dates + matcha + coconut chips
- Macadamias + dried mango + coconut + lime zest



SPREADS & DIPS

In Bulgaria, many families still make their own *лютеница* — roasted peppers and eggplant with a mix of seasonings, blended and packed into jars at the end of summer. It was probably the catalyst that helped me realize that blending ingredients into a concentrated, scoopable form was its own category of cooking entirely. From there it was guacamole, then hummus, then every roasted vegetable I could think of. The sweet version of this logic lives in the next formula. This one is all savory.

SPREADS & DIPS FORMULA

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO **3 parts main base : 1 part creaminess : flavor & crunch to taste**

BUILDING BLOCKS





Main Base

Cheese: ricotta, cottage cheese, mascarpone, skyr, yogurt or plant based alternative
Vegetables: roasted/steamed (potato, sweet potato, carrot, peas, pumpkin, beetroot, broccoli, cauliflower), avocado
Other (cooked): chickpeas, beans, lentils, liver (chicken/pork), eggs



Creaminess

Tahini (any variety), nut butter (any variety), coconut cream, butter, ghee



Flavor

Garlic, fresh or dried herbs, lemon juice, mustard, olives, pesto, ajvar, chili, salt, soy sauce, spices



Crunch (Optional)

Walnuts, peanuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.

For a rustic, chunky dip
Use a fork or potato masher to break down the Main Base. This works best for avocado, boiled eggs, or soft beans like chickpeas.

For a silky, aerated spread
Use a high-speed blender. Add your Creaminess element slowly while blending to give the mixture "whipped" texture.

METHOD

1



Prep the Base
Boil, bake, or steam your Main Base ingredients as needed. Place into a bowl or blender.

2



Blend & Tweak
Add your Creaminess element and blend. Only then use Texture Tweaks (water or oats) to reach your final desired consistency.

3



Flavor & Serve
Mix in your Flavor elements. Taste as you go—adjust salt or acid. Top with Crunch and serve with bread, crackers, or raw vegetables.

Examples

- Roasted beetroot + tahini + garlic + lemon + cumin.
- Chickpeas + olive oil + garlic + lemon + smoked paprika.
- Strained yogurt + roasted garlic + fresh herbs + olive oil.

PRO TIPS



If using chicken or pork liver, it must be fully cooked (sautéed or boiled) before blending.
If you use butter, ghee, or coconut cream, the spread will firm up in the fridge.



RAW DESSERTS

Same logic as the spread — blend, taste, serve. The difference is direction. This one is sweet, and it goes further: freeze it and it becomes ice cream. I have a sweet tooth, and when I started moving away from sugar I had to find a different way to satisfy it. Blending ripe fruit with natural sweeteners and something creamy turned out to be the answer. A few spoonfuls of something cold and sweet. That's all it needs to be.



RAW DESSERTS FORMULA

BUILD IT LIKE THIS:

RATIO **2 parts base : 1/2 part sweetener : 1/2 part creaminess : booster & crunch to taste**

BUILDING BLOCKS

 **Base Ingredients**	**Fruit:** ripe banana, mango, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, avocado, kiwi, pineapple **Hearty:** soaked raw nuts, cooked sweet potato/pumpkin/carrot
 **Creaminess**	Silken tofu, yogurt, ricotta, mascarpone, cream, coconut cream, nut butter (any variety)
 **Sweetener**	Dried fruits (dates, figs, raisins - soak in warm water for 10 min and drain before blending) maple syrup, date syrup, coconut/dark sugar, date sugar, molasses
 **Booster**	Cocoa powder, carob, cacao nibs, vanilla, cardamom, citrus zest
 **Crunch (Optional)**	Walnuts, peanuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.

For an airy mousse or cream
Use fresh, room-temperature Base ingredients like silken tofu, ricotta, or avocado. Blend on high speed to incorporate air and serve immediately.

For a scoopable ice cream
Use frozen fruit (like bananas or mango) as your Base. Blend while frozen and serve immediately, or freeze the final mixture for 3–4 hours.

METHOD

1. 

Combine & Blend
Place your Base, Sweetener, and Creaminess elements into a blender. If using frozen fruit for ice cream, blend straight from the freezer.

2. 

Smooth & Taste
Blend until completely smooth. Taste and adjust sweetness or add Flavor Boosters (like cocoa or vanilla) until it reaches your desired profile.

3. 

Set & Serve
Fold in Crunch after blending. Serve immediately as a mousse. For ice cream, freeze for 3–4 hours. Remove from freezer 10 minutes before scooping.

Examples

- **The Choco-Sesame:** Frozen banana + cocoa + tahini + vanilla
- **Tropical Dream:** Mango + coconut cream + cardamom + agave
- **Berry Ricotta:** Ricotta + strained yogurt + honey + berries

PRO TIPS

Frozen banana is the most reliable ice cream base.

Silken tofu and coconut cream produce the smoothest, most indulgent textures without any dairy.

To create a rich chocolate flavor, add cocoa powder or carob.

