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From The Sunday Times

April 29, 2007

You need help

And arame, wakame, kombu, nori and dulse. Just a few fronds of seaweed pack a lot of flavour, says Sybil Kapoor



RECOMMEND?

Seaweed is being hailed as a wonder ingredient by scientists working in areas as diverse as skincare and biofuel. Thankfully for the rest of us, it's also useful in the kitchen. It's packed with goodness, and just a little can transform a dish. It naturally adds the taste of umami (savouriness) to food; a small amount of kombu (Japanese kelp), for example, briefly marinated with meat, fish or vegetables, both tenderises and adds an appetising savouriness. Thanks to these properties, the world's leading chefs — including the gastro-visionary Ferran Adria of El Bulli — are exploring its culinary potential. I hope these recipes inspire you to do the same.

GRILLED HONEY CHICKEN WITH NOODLE SALAD

The arame seaweed in the noodle salad adds a subtle texture and a depth of flavour.

Serves 4

- 1 tbsp honey
- 6 tbsp soy sauce
- 6 tbsp sake
- 1 fat clove of garlic, finely chopped
- Zest of 1 lemon, finely grated
- 4 chicken breasts, skinned and trimmed
- 2 tbsp sesame oil
- 30g dried arame, shredded
- 240g vermicelli rice noodles
- 2 large carrots, peeled
- 4 inner celery stems, trimmed
- 2 bunches of chives, roughly snipped
- 1 large handful of coriander leaves

Place the honey, soy, sake, garlic and lemon zest in a small saucepan. Simmer gently for 3 minutes or until the honey has melted. Leave to cool until tepid.

Cut each chicken breast into four pieces. Place in a bowl and mix in one-third of the marinade. Add 1 tbsp sesame oil and leave to marinate while you prepare the salad.

Soak the arame in plenty of cold water for 10 minutes. Drain and place in a mixing bowl with the remaining marinade.

In the meantime, prepare the noodles according to the packet instructions — usually by soaking in boiling water for 5 minutes. Drain and shake dry. Mix into the seaweed with 1 tbsp sesame oil. Slice the carrot and celery into matchsticks, about 5cm in length, and mix into the noodles along with the snipped chives and coriander leaves.

Preheat an oven-top griddle pan over a medium-high heat. Remove the chicken from the marinade and cook in the griddle pan for 4 minutes on each side, or until cooked through with no

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Kombu naturally enhances flavour, transforming the taste of fish so that it needs no seasoning or lemon.

Serves 4

For the fish

- 4 x 15cm length dried kombu
- 1 tbsp sake
- 4 x 450g sea bass, filleted
- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

For the salad

- 1 tbsp white-wine vinegar
- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cucumber, peeled
- 100g crisp mixed salad leaves
- 6g dried wakame

Place the dried kombu on a large plate and gently rub the sake into its leathery leaves. Leave to soften for 10 minutes.

Cut three angled slashes into the skin of each sea-bass fillet. Place a piece of softened kombu onto the flesh of the first fillet and sandwich the second fillet, flesh side down, onto it. Repeat with the remaining fillets. Set aside for 20 minutes and no longer.

In a small bowl, whisk together the vinegar and olive oil to make a vinaigrette for the salad. Season to taste.

Cut the cucumber in half lengthwise and finely slice. Place in a salad bowl with the crisp mixed lettuce leaves.

Soak the wakame in a large bowl of cold water for 10 minutes. Don't oversoak, or it will become too soft. Drain and rinse in fresh water. Pat dry and cut away the tough ribs before ripping into easy-to-eat pieces. Add to the cucumber salad.

Preheat an oven-top griddle pan over a medium-high heat for 5 minutes. Discard the kombu and gently rub the fish with 2 tbsp olive oil. It needs no further seasoning. Grill flesh side down for 3-4 minutes or until seared with golden marks, then flip over and cook for a further 3 minutes or until cooked through.

Quickly toss the vinaigrette into the salad and serve immediately.

SEAFOOD BROTH

Don't be discouraged by the length of this recipe — most of the preparation can be done in advance, leaving you free to heat the broth and cook the prawns and scallops at the last moment. Clearspring Sea Salad is a ready-mixed packet of dried dulse, sea lettuce and nori (visit www.clearspring.co.uk for stockists).

Serves 4

- 500g large raw prawns, whole
- 4 tbsp sunflower oil
- 2 cloves of garlic, roughly chopped
- 5 shallots, roughly chopped
- 1 litre good chicken stock
- 500g mussels
- 400g clams (optional)
- 4 stalks of lemon grass, roughly sliced
- 4 large scallops
- 2 tbsp Clearspring Sea Salad

Peel the prawns and set aside the heads and shells. Clean them by running a knife down the length of their backs and removing the thin digestive cord. Wash, pat dry, cover and chill until needed.

Heat 2 tbsp oil in a large saucepan over a medium-high heat. Add the garlic, 4 shallots and the prawn heads and shells. Stir-fry briskly for 2 minutes, or until the shells turn pink. Add the chicken stock, bring to the boil, skim and then simmer for 20 minutes. Strain through a fine sieve into a clean saucepan.

Scrub clean the mussels and clams under cold running water. Discard any shells that refuse to close when tapped against the sink and pull away the mussels' tough beards.

Heat 2 tbsp oil in a large saucepan. Add the lemon grass and remaining chopped shallot. Fry briskly for 2 minutes, then add 100ml water and bring to the boil over a high heat. Add the mussels, cover and cook for 3 minutes or until they open. Remove from the pan and repeat the process with the clams — they also take 2-3 minutes.

Set aside 8 whole mussels and 8 whole clams, then remove the flesh from the remaining shellfish, mix together, cover and chill until needed.

Clean the scallops by removing the dark digestive cord from their waists, along with the tough white muscle. Slice them into thin

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discs, cover and chill.

When you are ready to serve, place 2 mussels and 2 clams in each soup bowl. Reheat the stock to simmering point. Add the prawns and cook for a minute; then add the scallops and continue to simmer for 2 minutes; then add the shelled mussels and clams and heat for a further minute. Stir in the sea salad, remove from the heat and divide into the bowls. Serve immediately.

THE GOOD SEAWEED GUIDE

Arame is a mild-tasting Japanese seaweed normally sold shredded and dried.

Carrageen (Irish moss) is traditionally used by British cooks to set jellies and mousses.

Dulse has a slightly spicy taste that is good in salads.

Kombu (Japanese kelp) is usually sold dried in sheets. The best are speckled with a white, salty bloom and should never be washed. Instead, wipe with a damp cloth. It acts as a tenderiser for raw fish and pulses and as a flavour enhancer in savoury broths.

Laver (nori) is a small, thin-leaved, red seaweed that grows extensively across the world; dried sheets of nori are widely sold in supermarkets and are good lightly toasted and crumbled onto oriental salads, or as an essential part of sushi.

Sea lettuce is a light-green seaweed that makes a pretty addition to a salad or clear soup. It has a delicate texture once rehydrated, so add at the last minute.

Sea spaghetti (thongweed) has a delicate flavour similar to clams. Use in salads, pastas and oriental noodle dishes.

Wakame, once soaked, needs its tough ribs cut away before being added to salads or miso-style soups. It turns a beautiful deep green and tastes of the sea.

Seaweed sources [Delicioso; 01865 340055, www.delicioso.co.uk](http://www.delicioso.co.uk). *Clearspring; 020 8749 1781, www.clearspring.co.uk*

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