

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP there was a dreadful cooking show on television called King's Kitchen — hosted by a certain Bernard King who was all chunky chains, flared trousers, rings on his pinkies and huge mutton chop whiskers which were forever drooping perilously close to the food. Needless to say I found the show riveting stuff, and I'm sure it's thanks to him that a generation of Australians learnt to do very strange things with tinned pineapple.

What used to drive me spare about his show was the miraculous apparition of dishes in differing stages of production, none done by Bernard himself. He would posture in front of the bench top with all sorts of natty pyrex dishes and say: "Now we whipped the whites until stiff" (*titter; titter*) but of course I don't have time to do it now... (*bowl is thrust into face from stage left*) oh, and here they are, nicely done by our clever little gaffer boy Nigel, thank you dear." And so on.

Naturally any of the dishes he cooked were so excessively elaborate you would rarely bother trying them yourself. (Unless of course you had a Nigel gaffing about the kitchen to help.)

Now living in Moscow, I couldn't but wonder at the waste he generated. All those ingredients half cooked, all that washing up.

The closest extravagance I can match is that traditional Aussie dessert, the Pavlova. It calls for egg whites, and you can be wicked and throw away the yolks.

Lou Lou gave me this recipe, so you can be guaranteed of success. The oven is the principal tool in this dessert. My oven never closes properly and I have no idea when I reach a desired temperature. Hence this cake will probably turn out to be a spectacular flop. If you live in an apartment with a decent oven, proceed. And if you have curious children in the house be sure to have some masking tape handy. This way you can either tape shut the oven for the crucial one hour of cooking — or you can tape up the kids.

The dish is so named because when the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova danced in Australia, everyone was so taken with her they whipped up this dessert in her honor. (Or alternatively they felt so moved by her dying in *Swan Lake* every night, they thought she needed cheering up, and this sugary sweet was the result.)

Lou Lou's Pavlova

4	egg whites
1 cup	superfine sugar
1 tsp	vanilla
1 tsp	vinegar
1/2 tsp	cream of tartar
Plus	whipped cream
	tropical fruit

Preheat the oven to 180° Celsius. Whip eggs and the cream of tartar until the egg whites are holding shape but are not too stiff. Add the sugar in four parts. Beat for 30 seconds in an electric beater after each quarter of sugar has been added — but watch carefully, it is possible the last quarter will need a little less than this. By now the mixture will stiff. Add the vanilla and vinegar and give one last roar of the beater.

By this stage if any children are lingering, licking the beaters will be uppermost in their minds. Fights will break out, fingers will be dipped into the mixture itself if you are distracted, and one sibling will always get more. As they are pulling each other's limbs off on the floor and screaming hysterically, carefully transfer the mixture onto a baking tray covered in aluminum foil, make it into a round pert shape and place into the oven onto the lowest rack.

Now comes the hard part. Immediately turn the oven down to the lowest possible temperature and DO NOT PEEK into the oven for an hour. The meringue will not cook if you do. After exactly one hour open the oven a little and prop it with a tea towel so that the cake cools gently and dries.

As it is cooling whip cream and slice the fruit. If you are inviting an Australian over, smother the pav with fresh passionfruit and slices of bananas and watch them weep.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? Call these biscuits shortbread and you will probably stop reading, right? Shortbread never did it for me. Thin and dry, they crumble on contact, and you need copious cups of tea to get them down. Away with all that. This little biscuit which I found in an old *Gourmet* magazine will have you discovering your Scottish ancestry and inviting friends over for tea.

I once wanted to make this Shortbread but didn't have any lemons. Instead there was a grapefruit lurking in my fridge and I used that. Big mistake. It tasted disgusting. Lemons are the only fruit for this biscuit.

Poppy Seed Shortbread

<i>1/2 cup</i>	butter
<i>1/2 cup</i>	powdered sugar
<i>1-1/2 tbsp</i>	lemon zest, grated
<i>1/2 tsp</i>	vanilla
<i>1-1/2 tbsp</i>	poppy seeds
<i>1 cup</i>	plain flour

Preheat oven to 180° Celsius. Cream the butter and the icing sugar in a bowl until the mixture is fluffy. Add the lemon zest, vanilla, poppy seeds and flour. Beat until well combined.

Press the mixture evenly onto a baking tray that has been lined with aluminum foil or baking paper. Prick the mixture all over with a fork, and cook for 30 minutes. Watch it carefully, it must just be turning golden, but not brown. Remove from oven, cool a little, then slice into bars. Makes about 24 small biscuits.

DID ANYONE EVER WARN US about November? Anyone ever explain to us that Moscow winters were a glorious experience... around about January. That's the month when the occurrence of sunny days and freezing temperatures would have everybody setting off to work with silly grins on their faces and a jaunt in their stride (not the best posture to strike on black ice admittedly, but who cared?)

This is a poor excuse for winter; and last November was exactly the same. Every day the sky was gray, the temperature a wimpy zero degrees and suddenly you started asking yourself whether working in the Solomon Islands or Vanuatu wasn't a better career option.

And if there is anything that would drive you to stay indoors and rearrange the contents of your sock collection, or take up cooking in serious way, then this is it.

Think of this as homemade biscuit season: Mouth-watering treats that take about ten minutes to cook, thirty seconds to eat, and you can make a batch of thirty and not feel a little bit guilty about devouring the lot. You are going to need cheering up to get through November so you might as well admit it.

Russian Tea Biscuits

1 cup	butter, softened
1/2 cup	superfine sugar
1 tsp	vanilla
2-1/2 cups	plain flour, sifted
1/2 tsp	salt
5/4 cup	walnuts, chopped
1/2 cup	powdered sugar

Preheat the oven to 200° Celsius. Mix together the softened butter, sugar and vanilla, add the sifted white flour and half a teaspoon of salt (omit this if your butter is the salted variety) and stir well. You will be surprised at the texture of the biscuits by this stage; fear not. They are meant to be crumbly and dry.

Carefully chop the walnuts finely. Add them to the mixture and then put the whole bowl into the fridge. Keep the mixture cool for about half an hour, wash your hands in some of that delicious icy Moscow water so your hands are frozen (you don't want the butter to start melting in your hot hands before they go into the oven) and start rolling the mixture into little round balls. Keep them an even size of about two and a half centimeters in diameter and place them on a greased oven tray.

Cook them for twelve to fifteen minutes —until just golden, but not brown.

While they are cooking, sift the powdered sugar into a large flat bowl. Pull out the tea cakes (and set up the crash barriers around the entrance to the kitchen as this is the moment when family and friends, driven wild by the smell, are going to try and storm the oven and eat them hot) and quickly roll them in the powdered sugar.

Wait till they cool a little and roll them in the powdered sugar again. Unleash the salivating hoards from the locked broom cupboard and devour them all.

THIS PROBABLY SHOULDN'T be mentioned here, but it's true: I'm hopeless at making pastry.

It reduces me to pitiful sobs. I turn over recipe books with great haste whenever I see the words "first make the pastry dough" or "bake the pastry shell blind in a hot oven for ten minutes." There's just something wrong with me: I can mix the ingredients, prepare a lightly floured board, and even roll out a thin layer of pastry. But can I ever unstick the damn thing and get it into the baking tin in one piece? *Jamais la vie*. I always have to do serious jigsaw work pasting the pieces back into a semblance of a flat pastry shape.

The good news is that I'm learning to cheat. And so can you. As long as no one is watching, you can scrape the bits that get stuck to the table and put them into the tin and press the shapes together. Better still, do what sensible cooks do and roll the pastry between two pieces of plastic wrap.

That crisis solved, back to the practical matters. This is a great alternative to Pumpkin Pie for Thanksgiving.

Tasmanian Apple Pie

<i>1 1/2 cups</i>	plain flour
<i>1/4 cup</i>	powdered sugar
<i>5/4 cup</i>	butter, cut into cubes
<i>1</i>	egg yolk
<i>1 tbsp</i>	milk
<i>5</i>	cooking apples, cored, thinly sliced
<i>Juice of 1</i>	lemon
<i>5/4 cup</i>	cream (add 2 drops lemon juice)
<i>5/4 cup</i>	vanilla sugar
<i>1</i>	egg, beaten
<i>2 tbsp</i>	plain flour
<i>1 tsp</i>	ground cinnamon
<i>5/4 cup</i>	hazelnuts, crushed
<i>1/2 tsp</i>	ground cinnamon
<i>2 tbsp</i>	brown sugar

Pie Crust: Sift the flour, powdered sugar and a pinch of salt into a bowl. Rub in the butter until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Mix in the egg yolk and the milk and make a smooth dough. Wrap the dough in plastic and place in the fridge for about an hour.

Filling & Topping: Preheat the oven to 180° Celsius. Roll out the chilled pastry and use enough to line a well greased pie plate; trim the edges and keep the extra pastry for the top. Toss the apple in the lemon juice then combine them with the soured cream with the vanilla sugar, egg, flour and cinnamon. Place in the pastry shell.

Combine together the topping ingredients and sprinkle them over the apple filling. Roll out the reserved pastry trimmings, cut them into thin strips with a knife and decorate the top of a pie in a lattice pattern.

Bake the pie for 45 minutes.