



# HOME COOKING FROM THE CAUCASUS

*Carla Capalbo's recipes have been gathered from her trips to Georgia and can be served together as part of a supra – a Georgian mezze-style feast – or work equally well individually as delicious family suppers.*

Like many wine lovers, I first visited Georgia to understand more about its ancient winemaking culture. I soon discovered that Georgia's unique food and hospitality are as exciting as its wine. The warmth and generosity of Georgia's people captivated me, as did its physical beauty. After decades living in remote parts of Italy, Georgia feels both different and familiar to me. Despite having its own language and history, Georgia is an agricultural country and the small family farms, with their mixed crops and vineyards, remind me of a way of life that has all but disappeared in many places. I wanted to see more, and to write about what I found.

Since then, I've travelled for weeks at a time through most of Georgia, collecting stories, recipes and wines and taking photographs. Unlike in Italy, where thousands of cookbooks exist, Georgia's food is still largely unknown. I love the Georgian way of eating, with multiple dishes arranged on the table at once, known as a *supra*. It's both an ancient and a modern way to eat, dominated by fresh vegetable cookery with aromatic herbs, nuts and delicate spices that make the flavours distinctive. If the cooking techniques are mainly simple, complexity is attained by combining diverse dishes at one meal, as shown with these delicious recipes.



Georgian cooking focuses on fresh vegetables and herbs

## ABOUT CARLA

Carla Capalbo is an award-winning food and wine writer and photographer. She was born in New York, brought up in Paris and London and has lived extensively in Italy. She now divides her time between London, Georgia and Italy. She has written 14 books about food and wine, the most recent of which – *Collio: Fine Wines and Foods from Italy's North-east* – won the prestigious André Simon Award for best wine book. Carla has worked with top chefs – including Albert Adrià and René Redzepi – as co-organiser of Cook it Raw and writes regularly for *Decanter*, *ZesterDaily* and *Cook\_inc* about all aspects of food and wine culture.



The distinctive domed bathhouses in Tbilisi



Traditional bread is baked in a woodfired clay oven



TOMATOES STUFFED WITH MUSHROOMS

PHOTOGRAPHY: CARLA CAPALBO

## Tomatoes stuffed with mushrooms

These tomatoes are stuffed with a delicious combination of mushrooms and herbs before baking. Use oyster mushrooms or a mix of domesticated and wild mushrooms – like chanterelles or porcini. Serve one per person at a *supra*.

**Serves 7 | Prep 20 mins**

**Cook 1 hr 10 mins**

- 7 firm, medium tomatoes (about 900g)
- 3 tbsp sunflower or groundnut oil
- 150g white onion, finely sliced
- ¼ tsp ground fenugreek
- ¼ tsp coriander seeds, crushed
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

- 400g mushrooms, cleaned and sliced
- 20g butter
- 1 tbsp plain flour
- 100ml water
- 10g coriander, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp finely chopped parsley
- 2 tbsp finely chopped dill
- ½ tsp salt
- black pepper
- 60g sliced or grated vegetarian mozzarella

**For the sauce:**

- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 tbsp chopped opal or green basil
- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

**1** Slice the top fifth off the tomatoes. Carefully scoop their insides out, turning the seeds and cores into a bowl. Arrange the

tomato shells in a shallow baking or pie dish.

**2** In a medium frying pan, heat the oil. Stir in the onion, fenugreek and coriander seeds and cook slowly for 5 minutes. Add the garlic and continue to cook until the onions are pale gold, 7–8 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until the mushroom water starts to dry out and the mushrooms begin to sauté, about 15 minutes. Remove from the heat.

**3** In a small saucepan, melt the butter. When it's frothing, add the flour, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon or whisk for 2 minutes. Add the water and cook for 2–3 minutes more, or until the mixture starts to thicken. Remove from the heat and stir into the mushrooms. Fold in the chopped herbs and season with salt and black pepper.



*'I soon discovered that Georgia's unique food and hospitality are as exciting as its wine'*

**4** Preheat the oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4. Using a hand blender, purée the tomato cores and seeds, garlic and basil together. Add the olive oil and blend again. Pour the mixture into a strainer, pushing the juices through with a spoon. Season with salt and pepper.

**5** Fill each tomato to the top with the mushroom mixture. Top each tomato with a slice or sprinkling of cheese. Pour the tomato sauce into the dish around the tomatoes. Bake for 30–35 minutes, or until the tomatoes are cooked. Serve hot or warm.

■ PER SERVING 161 cal, fat 12g, sat fat 4g, carbs 7g, sugars 5g, protein 4g, salt 0.45g, fibre 2g

## Tarragon and egg pie

Tarragon is the star of this fragrant pie, cooked for me by Niki Antadze, one of Georgia's most important *qvevri* wine producers. It highlights the importance of this herb in Georgian cooking and adds a lovely aromatic component to a *supra* table. Here a richer dough works well but you could also use a shortcrust pastry instead. Prepare all the ingredients before you start the pastry as the vegetables take time to prepare.

**Serves 12 | Prep 30 mins + proving  
Cook 45 mins**

**For the dough:**  
375g plain flour  
½ tsp salt  
¾ tsp quick-acting yeast  
1 free-range egg, at room temperature  
115g butter, melted and cooled to warm  
150ml milk, warmed

**For the filling:**  
450g spring onions  
2 tbsp sunflower oil  
150g onion, chopped  
60g fresh tarragon leaves  
1 tsp salt  
5 hard-boiled free-range eggs,  
roughly chopped  
60g butter  
black pepper  
1 free-range egg yolk, for glazing

**1** Make the dough. Mix the flour, salt and yeast in the bowl of a food processor or large bowl. Beat the egg and butter into the warm milk. Pour them into the dry ingredients and mix or process well until the dough begins to form a ball. Knead or process for 2 minutes. Cover the bowl with a clean tea towel and leave to rise for 30 minutes at room temperature.

**2** Slice the spring onions crosswise into 1cm pieces, separating the whites and greens. Heat the oil in a large frying pan and sauté the onion over medium-low heat until



translucent, 3–4 minutes. Stir in the whites of the spring onion and cook for 3 minutes. Add the greens of the spring onion and the tarragon leaves and cook for 3–4 minutes. Remove from the heat, sprinkle with the salt and set aside.

**3** Place a heavy flat baking tray in the centre of the oven and preheat to 190C/fan 170C/gas 5. Punch down the dough, knead for 2 minutes and divide it into two equal balls. Allow them to rest for 10 minutes on a floured board, covered with the tea towel.

**4** On the floured board, roll the first ball into a circle large enough to fit a 28–30cm flat pizza or baking tin. Roll the dough onto the rolling pin and unroll it over the tin. Press the dough evenly into the tin, leaving a slight overhang around the edges. Spread the onion and tarragon mixture evenly over it, leaving a 2cm border of dough around the edges. Sprinkle the chopped eggs on top and dot with the butter. Grind with black pepper.

TARRAGON AND EGG PIE



**5** Roll out the second dough big enough to reach the tin's edges. Transfer it onto the pie, lightly wet the dough edges and crimp the pastry to seal, using your fingers or a fork, trimming off any excess dough. Beat the egg yolk with a little water and brush the top of the pie. Prick the top a few times with a fork. Bake on the preheated oven tray until the pastry is golden brown, 30-35 minutes.

■ PER SERVING 304 cals, fat 18g, sat fat 9g, carbs 27g, sugars 3g, protein 8g, salt 0.74g, fibre 2g

## Vegetable medley

This very colourful vegetable stew cooked by chef Gia Rokashvili of Pheasant's Tears Winery in Signaghi resembles ratatouille but combines root and summer vegetables but has no courgettes. The vegetables cook together: cut them into good-sized chunks so they retain their flavours and bite. You can adapt this dish to whatever vegetables you have available. What makes it so Georgian is the quantity of fresh herbs that bring it to life. The original recipe calls for a whole head of garlic, but I find that's too much unless you have fragrant fresh garlic to hand, so just use as much as you like. This is as good served cold as it is hot or warm.

**Serves 12 | Prep 25 mins | Cook 45 mins**

**500g potatoes**  
**300g carrots**  
**30g butter**  
**6 tbsp sunflower oil**  
**¼ tsp dried summer savory or wild thyme**  
**675g small aubergines, sliced crosswise**  
**2 red peppers, deseeded and cut into bite-size chunks**  
**115g smaller, pale green peppers, deseeded and quartered**  
**450g tomatoes, peeled and sliced**  
**400g onions, chopped**  
**8 cloves garlic, or to taste, roughly chopped**  
**fresh green chilli, to taste**  
**freshly ground black pepper**  
**20g opal and/or green basil, chopped**  
**20g coriander, chopped**  
**10g parsley, chopped**  
**2 tbsp chopped fresh dill**  
**sea salt**

**1** Peel and chop the potatoes and carrots into large, bite-sized pieces. Heat the butter and oil with the summer savory or thyme in a large heavy saucepan. Add the potato and carrot, cover, and cook them over medium heat for 10-15 minutes, or until they start to soften. Stir occasionally.

**2** Add the aubergine to the pan, stirring well. Cover and cook for 10 minutes. Add



VEGETABLE MEDLEY

the red and green pepper, tomatoes, onion, garlic, chilli and 1 teaspoon of salt and stir well. Cover. Cook over medium heat until the vegetables give up their juices, about 15 minutes. Stir occasionally to prevent sticking.

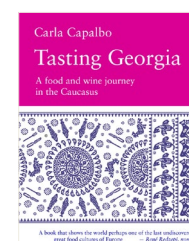
**3** Test the aubergine and potato for doneness. When they are tender, and the other vegetables seem cooked too, add the herbs. Stir them into the vegetables and cook for 5 minutes more.

**4** Remove from the heat. Allow the dish to stand for at least 5 minutes before serving hot or at room temperature.

■ PER SERVING 156 cals, fat 8g, sat fat 2g, carbs 16g, sugars 8g, protein 2g, salt 0.03g, fibre 5g

## govegan

**V** Use just the sunflower oil to fry the vegetables, adding a little extra if needed.



Recipes adapted from *Tasting Georgia: A Food and Wine Journey in the Caucasus* by Carla Capalbo (Pallas Athene Books, £30). Published on 6 June 2017. Photographs by Carla Capalbo.