



RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

**Annabel Karmel's Complete Family
Meal Planner**
by Annabel Karmel

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Annabel's Apricot Cookies

This fabulous and rather unusual combination of dried apricots and white chocolate makes irresistible cookies. Once you have sampled these you will probably want to double the quantities second time around.

Makes 26 cookies
Suitable for freezing

100 g (4 oz) unsalted butter
100 g (4 oz) cream cheese
100 g (4 oz) caster sugar
75 g (3 oz) plain flour
50 g (2 oz) chopped dried apricots
65 g (2 1/2 oz) white chocolate chips or chopped white chocolate

Pre-heat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas 4. In a large mixing bowl, cream together the butter and cream cheese. Add the sugar and beat until fluffy. Gradually add the flour, then fold in the apricots and chocolate. The dough will be quite soft – don't worry! Drop the mixture by heaped teaspoons on to baking sheets lined with non-stick baking paper and bake in the oven for 15 minutes or until lightly golden. Allow to cool and harden for a few minutes before removing them from the baking sheet.

Cucumber Crocodile

This looks amazing, it's great for parties and it also makes a fabulous prop for your own children's healthy snacks. I like to use a variety of cheeses, but cubes of ham or chicken also work well on in place of the cheese.

Serves 4–6

1 1/4 cucumbers
mixture of cheeses
1 carrot (optional)
fresh pineapple or 1 small can of pineapple chunks
cocktail sticks
2 cherry tomatoes

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Cut a long strip from a carrot using a vegetable peeler. Cut this into a strip about 1 1/2 cm/1/2 inch wide and cut along one side to form a serrated edge. These are the crocodile's teeth. Cut the quarter cucumber into two 3 cm-/1 inch wide slices, cut these in half and then shape into feet with a triangular shape cut out of them. Attach these to the whole cucumber using cocktail sticks cut in half. Chop the cheese and pineapple into cubes. Thread cheese and pineapple cubes onto each cocktail stick and spear the sticks into the cucumber. Cut a cocktail stick in half and use the two halves to attach the cherry tomatoes to form the crocodile's eyes.

Perfect Baked Potatoes

The best potatoes to choose are floury varieties like Desirée, King Edward or Maris Piper. You can also make mini baked potatoes by using normal size potatoes, in which case the cooking time will be shorter. You could also try making baked sweet potatoes and serve these with butter and a little freshly ground black pepper.

Makes 4 portions

4 large baking potatoes
olive oil (optional)
salt and freshly ground black pepper
100 g (4 oz) cold butter

Pre-heat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas 6. Wash and dry the potatoes and prick the skins a few times with a fork. If you want extra crisp skins then rub the skins with a few drops of olive oil and sprinkle with a little salt before baking. Place on the centre shelf in the oven for 1 to 1 1/2 hours (the cooking time will depend on the size of the potatoes). To check if the potatoes are cooked, squeeze gently to see if they feel soft. Alternatively, cook in the microwave (see below).

Cut a cross in the top of each potato and squeeze the sides to open them up. Sprinkle with a little salt and freshly ground black pepper and top with butter. Alternatively, cut each of the potatoes in half lengthways and scoop out the flesh and mash with a little milk, butter and seasoning.

Other good toppings
Sour cream and chives
Plain or curried baked beans
Tuna, mayonnaise and sweetcorn
Bacon cooked until crisp and then crumbled
Vegetables such as broccoli and carrots in a cheese sauce
Smoked ham, grated Cheddar cheese, crème fraîche or chives

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