

Books



LAND OF FISH AND RICE

by Fuchsia Dunlop, Bloomsbury, £26
Aimed at: Chinese cuisine fanatics

Britain's greatest expert on Chinese cooking celebrates the Jiangnan region

Whenever Fuchsia Dunlop (below) releases a new book, there's a frisson of excitement from her fans. With wit, novel ingredients and well-crafted writing, her previous books, like *Every Grain Of Rice* and *Sichuan Cookery*, brought regional Chinese cooking to a large audience in this country for the first time.

Here, *Land Of Fish And Rice* focuses on recipes from Shanghai and the Lower Yangtze region - the area known as Jiangnan, which has the most highly respected food culture across China.

'Sichuan food has a jazzy appeal, whereas Jiangnan is much more classical,' she says. 'It's the cultural centre of China, inspiring writers, poets and musicians.'

It has fertile soil, a wonderful climate and has always been a sophisticated place.

'It's a region that prides itself on the quality of ingredients,' she adds. 'They don't like to mask the flavours of ingredients.'

This is mirrored in the book, where most recipes have fewer than 10 ingredients and often not even that many - a clear simmered chicken soup contains a chicken, ginger, onions and optional goji berries.

That doesn't mean it was quick or easy to write. Dunlop began collecting material for the book and, eight years later, *Land Of Fish And Rice* is in the shops.

'I like to immerse myself,' she laughs. 'Go there, make friends and have a connection with a place. I don't like to just churn out the recipes. Also, recipe

testing take ages.'

Fortunately for us, it means that instructions are easy to follow and really work. These are foolproof dishes, but by virtue of the novelty of the region and flavour combinations they remain exciting.

Something as simple as spicy Chinese cabbage takes on a whole new depth with a pre-salting and Sichuan peppers.

Then there are dishes that require some effort: take 'celtuce' a type of lettuce, which is the basis of a couple of starters here, and you'll probably have to order Dragon Well tea online. This is because, as ever with Dunlop, the book is an introduction to a whole new world.

Dunlop fans need not worry, this book will not disappoint. And it will win her many more fans.



On a similar theme

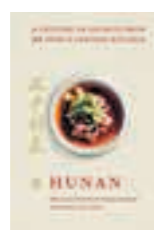
A WONG: THE COOKBOOK

by Andrew Wong, Mitchell Beazley, £25



HUNAN

by Qin Xie and Mr Peng, Preface, £25



Meet the producers 'English plums are something special'

On Michael and Christiana Bentley's fruit farm in Gloucestershire, it's the busiest time of the year so far - the peak of the plum season.

'It's manic,' says Michael Bentley (left). 'We have about 24 people picking and another 10 packing, and if the weather's right, we'll work 10-hour days. There's always a sigh of relief when they're all in.'

Just now they're picking the variety we all know and love - Victorias.

'They're the nation's favourite, and they are wonderful,' says Bentley. 'But people don't always know about the fantastic English varieties that come before and after them. We start with Hermans - ours are always the first into Waitrose - then Opals, a beautiful sweet plum, Reeves Seedling, Avalon and Jubileum.'

After the Victorias come Marjorie Seedlings and the new Crimson Drop. 'They're lovely, with pinky-crimson flesh,' says Bentley. 'They'll be available until the third week of September - quite late for English plums.'

Although the season's short, the English plum is worth waiting for, says Bentley. 'They're something special,

and there's a world of difference between them and an imported plum. I wouldn't want to denigrate imported plums, but obviously if you have to transport fruit from Spain, you've got to pick it harder. We can pick ours when they're virtually ripe, and the nearer to ripe it is, the sweeter and more flavoursome it'll be.'

Striking the perfect balance between leaving the plums on the tree for as long as possible and making sure they still have a shelf life takes care, attention and time.

'You don't get all the plums on a tree ripening at once,' says Bentley, 'so each tree has to be picked four or five times, and the pickers have to know exactly what they're looking for. But that's how you get a better plum.'

If they needed proof, the Bentleys have it - their plums get fan mail.

'Our name is on the pack,' he says, 'and people have Googled us and emailed to say thank you for such lovely plums. You can't help feeling encouraged when you get feedback like that.'

Waitrose British Plums, £2.20/550g or **3 FOR 2** (offer ends 20 September)

Photography: Phil Boorman

Decoder

A device capable of converting food terms into ordinary language

What is kissing garlic?

Is it the name of a new Bond girl? As in: Pussy Galore, Honey Ryder and Kissing Garlic?
Not quite.
Okay, so I'm guessing this is a type of garlic.
Yes, you're right.



Is it newfangled garlic, which doesn't make your breath smell? Scientists are so clever.
Actually, it dates back to ancient Roman times. It's a giant variety of Italian garlic called aglione and hasn't been produced in large quantities for 40 years. It's milder in flavour, odourless and easier to digest than the everyday variety.
So why are you telling me about it now?
Because a pair of Roman entrepreneurs, Alessandro Guagni and

Lorenzo Bianchi, have spent three years starting production again.
Who are they?
Guagni came across a huge garlic bulb at a Tuscan farmers' market. He loved it, but couldn't find the same type again. Finally he discovered it was aglione and found seeds. After rave restaurateurs reviews, he and his pal decided to produce it. Their organic farm is idyllic, just a small field with ducks doing all the weeding around the plants.

So can I try some?
Probably not this year as they've only grown 30,000 plants, but they expect to increase production. They've even got plans for other uses, including a soap.
Garlic soap?
That's right. Even if it's odourless, it's still a bit odd. They're also looking into other ancient Italian foods that could be resurrected.
Let's hope there was once a hangover-free wine somewhere.
We can dream.

WHAT'S HOT

Waitrose Sweetcorn Kebabs, £1.55/4s

Sweetcorn is the surprise barbecue hit of the summer, with sales up six per cent. Harvesting the British crop started earlier in the summer on Sefton Farm, West Sussex, and right now all fresh sweetcorn sold in Waitrose is 100% homegrown.



Diana Henry Table talk



A dollop of tahini can transform any recipe - savoury or sweet - and has become a kitchen staple

I bought my first jar of tahini when I was at university, and, from there, two or three jars were always lurking in cupboards (I never remembered where, so I kept buying new ones). It was seen as exotic but also slightly worthy - it was brown and sludgy, after all - and nobody, back then really knew what to do with it. It is now a kitchen essential. If you make your own houmous - what did we snack on before houmous? - you need it, but it's important to know just how useful it can be beyond the chickpea.

Tahini is a fantastic base for sauces and dressings. My own repertoire ran to adding crushed garlic and olives to it and thinning it with lemon and water or Greek yogurt. This can do a lot for griddled lamb chops or a lamb kebab. Then I started whizzing it with coriander, parsley or mint, adding honey and throwing in roasted peppers or chillies. I'd even started to drizzle it - thinned and mixed with crushed garlic - over roast veg or lamb and then dribbling date syrup on top (the combination of slightly bitter sesame and sweet date syrup is irresistible - try them together on toasted sourdough). I was pretty pleased with my tahini creativity. Then I bought a book on Israeli cooking called *Zahav*. There

'I bought my first jar of tahini at university... it was seen as exotic but also slightly worthy - nobody really knew what to do with it'

isn't much the chef and author Michael Solomonov doesn't do with tahini. He calls it 'the Israeli mother sauce', adding: 'On the first day, God created tehina'. Solomonov drizzles roasted aubergines with tahini and carob molasses, tosses sautéed mushrooms in it and even uses it in shortbread.

Tahini has been around in the Middle East, the Med and North Africa for centuries, but different brands have different thicknesses (so you have to judge and taste any recipe that calls for tahini as you use it). Plain tahini is made of hulled sesame kernels. These are roasted and crushed, producing a gloop that, when sitting in the jar, separates into a thick paste with oil on top (just vigorously whisk it before using it). Whole tahini comes from unhulled sesame kernels (or at least some of them haven't been hulled). The seeds might be toasted too. It can be gritty, but it has more texture (although some find it a little too bitter) than the plain stuff.

The popularity of Middle Eastern cooking - and books by Yotam Ottolenghi and the Honey & Co duo, Itamar Srulovich and Sarit Packer - means there's no shortage of instruction or inspiration to draw on. Don't leave that jar of tahini languishing in the cupboard. Not only does it have massive flavour potential, it's also very easy to use.

Diana Henry is The Sunday Telegraph's food writer dianahenry.co.uk