

# Lack cooking instincts? Don't worry, you can learn

By BEN MIMS

Los Angeles Times

In his first cookbook, Andy Baraghani instructs cooks on how to trust their instincts.

Cooking by instinct is often heralded as the secret to becoming a better home cook, but not everyone is born with a cooking intuition. It can be taught, however, and there's no better teacher than Andy Baraghani. I've been friends with Baraghani for over 10 years now, and he's one of the few people I know whose cooking I would eat with no question — and that's because he has a great cook's knack for knowing just how to create simple but revelatory dishes.

In his first cookbook, called "The Cook You Want To Be," the Bay Area native and former Bon Appétit food editor and video star not only shows readers how he cooks — with luxuriously vibrant photos of his colorful, enticing dishes — but how they can hone that instinct for themselves in their own everyday cooking.

In a crunchy salad of sliced fennel, he walks you through possible substitutes so that if you don't have one of the requisite ingredients he calls for, you definitely have some analog that will bring the salty, fatty, spicy flavors he calls for to make the fennel pop. And in a lush braise of lamb shoulder, a bath of chiles, rosemary, orange peel and wine imbues the meat with bold flavors that are lightened by a tangy yogurt flavored with lemon, raisins and pistachios.

Influenced by stints at Chez Panisse and top restaurants in New York, as well as his own Persian heritage, Baraghani's cooking is simple, bold and inviting, and he shows a keen maneuvering of spices and herbs that brings otherwise simple vegetables or meats to life in a way that many other cooks can't. And while all that may seem intimidating, don't worry. He arms you with all the same skills he's learned over the years so you can execute intrinsically lush and lively dishes just like him.

## FENNEL SALAD WITH SPICY GREEN OLIVES AND CRUSHED PISTACHIOS

By Andy Baraghani

Time: 30 minutes

Yields: Serves 4

This fennel salad is slightly over the top. Do I really need the nuts and the cheese? (Yes, but it's up to you if you keep them.) Is this salad gonna be good if you don't



Lorena Jones Books

"The Cook You Want to Be," by Andy Baraghani.

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have mint? Yep. Swap Planters cocktail peanuts you found in your pantry for the pistachios? Sure. What if you just use ground pepper and skip the red? OK. The important step is eating this salad as soon as you dress the fennel. You want that full crunch experience. The crushed green olives should be big and fleshy, like a chunky relish to contrast the icy bite of the fennel. It's baroque and bright and briny. All that acidity in the salad begs to be paired with juicy pork chops or a steak.

**1 cup green olives, such as Castelvetrano or Picholine**  
**1/3 cup toasted pistachios, finely chopped**  
**1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling**  
**1/4 teaspoon crushed red chile flakes**  
**1 lemon**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**2 fennel bulbs, woody stalks and fronds trimmed**  
**1/2 cup mint leaves, torn if large**  
**2 ounces Parmesan, thinly sliced (about 1 cup)**  
**2 tablespoons white wine vinegar**

1. Using the side of a chef's knife or the bottom of a mug, crush the olives. Tear out the pits, leaving the olives a little craggy. Scoop them into a small bowl and add the pistachios, olive oil and red chile flakes. Using a Microplane, finely grate the zest of half of the lemon over the olive mixture, season with salt and ground pepper and set aside. It should look like a chunky relish.

2. If you see brown jagged streaks on the fennel, remove an outer layer. Trim and discard about 1/2 inch from the root end of both fennel bulbs. Thinly slice the fennel bulb crosswise, starting from the base. It doesn't need to be paper-thin. You're going for about 1/4-inch-thick slices. (This would be a good time to use the mandoline you bought.)

3. In a large bowl, combine the fennel, mint, cheese and vinegar. Finely grate the zest of the remaining half of the lemon over the fennel salad. Halve the lemon and squeeze the juice into the bowl, catching any seeds with your other hand. Drizzle the salad with a little olive oil and season with salt. Toss until every piece of fennel is nicely coated. I like my fennel salad tangy, but you can add another tablespoon of oil if you want it less tart.

4. Spoon the olive relish onto a platter or plates and scatter the dressed fennel over it, trying to make it as architectural as you want (it's OK to play with your food). Serve immediately.

—Reprinted from "The Cook You Want To Be" (Lorena Jones, 2022) by Andy Baraghani.

**Make Ahead:** Go ahead and toast your nuts, pit your olives, and slice your cheese a few hours ahead—but don't assemble this salad until you're ready to serve it. The fennel will lose its crucial crispness if you dress it in advance.

## CRUSHED ORANGE AND ROSEMARY-BRAISED LAMB WITH CRUNCHY PISTACHIO YOGURT

By Andy Baraghani

Time: 5 hours 30 minutes

Yields: Serves 8

This is the big, showy piece of meat you've been waiting for. The green garlic, citrus and yogurt contrast with the rich, heavy lamb, lending freshness to live up the deep, braised flavor. And although any large cut of meat can seem intimidating to prepare, most of the work happens in the oven. The result is lamb so tender it's almost jelly-soft.

You can either go bold and serve it on the bone or let it cool and tear it into shreddy shards, then toss those back into the braising liquid to warm. Important announcement: Crisp up any leftovers in a pan with neutral oil (or use the rendered lamb fat to fry a couple eggs and pop them on top) and add a crunchy salad for next night's dinner.

### BRAISED LAMB

**1 bone-in lamb shoulder (6-to 7-pound)**  
**Kosher salt**  
**1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**2 red onions, quartered through the root end**  
**6 green garlic stalks, coarsely chopped, or 2 garlic heads, sliced crosswise**  
**4 strips (2-inch) orange peel**  
**1 handful rosemary or thyme sprigs and/or bay leaves**  
**2 dried chiles de árbol, or 1/2 teaspoon crushed red chile flakes**  
**1 tablespoon fennel seeds**  
**2 cups dry white wine**  
**1 quart good store-bought chicken stock or water**

### CRUNCHY PISTACHIO YOGURT

**2 tablespoons raisins, chopped**  
**1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice**  
**1 garlic clove, finely grated**  
**3 cups full-fat Greek yogurt**  
**1/3 cup toasted pistachios, coarsely chopped**  
**Kosher salt**

### Extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling

1. To make the braised lamb: Pat the meat dry with paper towels and then season all over with salt. (If you can do this a day ahead and chill the lamb, great. If not, carry on.) Heat the oven to 325 degrees Fahrenheit.

2. Pour 1/4 cup of the olive oil into a heavy ovenproof pot, large enough to hold the lamb comfortably, and place it over medium-high heat. Add the lamb and sear all over, waiting until the underside has become deeply brown and caramelized before turning, 4 to 6 minutes per side (15 to 20 minutes total). You want the lamb to caramelize while rendering some of its fat. Using tongs, lift and transfer the lamb to a plate and set aside. Carefully tilt the fat out of the pot into a small bowl

and save for another use, such as for cooking bitter greens or adding richness to a pot of brothy beans.

3. Return the pot to medium heat and pour in the remaining 1/4 cup olive oil. Add the onions and green garlic and give them a stir so they get nicely coated in the oil. Cook, stirring occasionally, until they have taken on a golden brown color in spots (they won't be soft, but that's OK), 4 to 6 minutes.

4. Crush the orange peels and rosemary sprigs in your hands and scatter them over the onions and green garlic, along with the chiles and fennel seeds. Warm them a bit to release their aromas, 10 to 15 seconds, remove the pot from the stove and place the lamb back into the pot. Pour in the wine and chicken broth; the liquid should come just slightly above the halfway point on the side of the meat. If you need more, just add more broth, if you have it, or water.

5. Place the pot in the oven, uncovered, and braise the lamb, flipping it every 45 minutes or so to make sure it's cooking evenly, until the liquid has slightly reduced and the meat is begging to pull away from the bone, 3 1/2 to 4 hours. Using tongs, transfer the lamb to a cutting board and let rest for 20 to 30 minutes.

6. Strain the braising liquid into a medium saucepan, picking out and tasting a jammy onion or garlic clove that has been cooked to death but is still somehow satisfying. Give the braising liquid a taste; it will be on the oily side. The lamb will have rendered quite a bit of fat that you'll want to skim mostly but not completely off. Although fat is flavor, too much fat can prevent you from tasting the other ingredients. At this point, you have a few options and I advise you to apply this technique with any braise you do. Serve the braising liquid on the side as a sauce for the lamb (as instructed here), save it for another meal or use it as a base for a soup or stew. Find your match. I tend to reduce the braising liquid over medium heat until it just barely coats the back of a spoon (10 to 15 minutes) but you can reduce it further, by half or more. Just remember, as the liquid reduces, the broth becomes richer and more concentrated in flavor and will go from barely coating the back of the spoon to clinging onto it for dear life. Pour the reduced liquid into small pitcher for serving.

7. To make the pistachio yogurt: In a medium bowl, stir together the raisins, lemon juice and garlic. Let sit for 5 minutes to soften the raisins. Add the yogurt and pistachios and then season with salt. Give it all a stir.

8. When the lamb is cool enough to handle, pull or carve the meat into big shardy pieces and arrange them on a platter. Or, if you feel especially comfortable with your crowd, just put a knife and fork on the platter and let people tear into it. Pass the warm braising liquid to spoon over the lamb and the pistachio yogurt to dollop on top.

## DAIRY

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fortified soy milk.

The recommended amount of calcium needed for children and adults varies. An adult usually needs 1,000-1,300 milligrams per day, though this depends on age and gender according to the National Institutes of Health. A child 9-18 years of age needs 1,300 milligrams per day. Women who are pregnant

or breastfeeding may need 1,200-1,300 milligrams per day. To put this in context, 8 ounces of plain, low-fat yogurt contains 415 milligrams of calcium, 1 cup of 100% orange juice, fortified with calcium, has 349 milligrams. An ounce of parmesan cheese has 331 milligrams of calcium, and a cup of fresh cooked kale has 94 milligrams.

Calcium is an important nutrient as it helps muscles contract, including the heart muscle and it transmits sig-

nals to nerves in the body.

For those who are lactose intolerant (the inability to digest dairy foods), or who choose not to consume dairy products (vegans), there are options for calcium consumption. Fortified orange juice or leafy green vegetables, such as broccoli or kale are examples of foods, which are nondairy but contain calcium. Almonds are another source of calcium. If you think you are not getting enough calcium in your

diet, consult your primary care provider to see if they recommend a supplement.

For more information and recipes using dairy products visit [www.food-hero.org](http://www.food-hero.org), or call the Oregon State University Extension Service office at 541-426-3143.

■ Ann Bloom has worked for the OSU Extension Service for 15 years as a nutrition educator. She studied journalism and education at Washington State University. She lives in Enterprise.

## SPICE

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Preheat one side of your gas grill to medium-high heat for 10-15 minutes, 400°F to 450°F, or push hot coals to one side of a charcoal grill. The chicken will be transferred to the unheated side of the grill to finish cooking without direct heat.

Place chicken thighs, skin side down, on the oiled grates over the lit side of the grill. Close cover and grill for 3 to 5 minutes, or until you see good grill marks form. Flip the thighs and grill over direct

heat again, an additional 3 to 5 minutes.

Move the chicken to the cool side of the grill, skin side up, brush with more paste, and close the lid.

After 10 minutes, brush the thighs with more paste. Using an instant-read thermometer, check the temperature of the chicken. It should read between 150-155 degrees.

Close lid and continue cooking until the thighs reach 165-170 degrees, 10 to 15 minutes more.

When done, remove chicken thighs from grill, brush with more paste and let rest for 10 minutes before serving.

While chicken is resting, prepare cucumber salad: In small bowl, stir together soy sauce, vinegar and sugar. Add cucumber slices, and toss to combine. Add chili powder and sesame seeds, and toss again; taste and season with additional chili powder as desired. Add chopped onion, and toss again.

Place chicken on a platter and garnish with chopped chives, sliced scallions and toasted sesame seeds. Serve immediately with steamed rice and cucumber salad on the side.

Serves 4.

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