

How to Make
**Perfect
Panini**



Catherine Atkinson
and Elizabeth Atkinson

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HOW TO MAKE PERFECT PANINI

Catherine Atkinson
and Elizabeth Atkinson



A How To Book

ROBINSON

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE
QUICK AND EASY PANINI

CHAPTER TWO
HEARTY LUNCHESS, SUBSTANTIAL SNACKS AND SUPPERS

CHAPTER THREE
FLAVOURINGS AND ENHANCERS

CHAPTER FOUR
BREADS

INDEX

INTRODUCTION

A popular choice on menus in trendy cafés, sandwich shops and busy restaurants, there's nothing quite like the flavour and aroma of freshly cooked panini hot from the press. Whether you want a quick snack, light lunch or even a main meal, a mouth-watering panini with crisp toasted bread and a hot, deliciously flavoured filling is the perfect choice.

The word 'panino' is the Italian for a small bread roll and in English we now take it to mean a hot or cold sandwich. 'Panini' is actually the plural but has become recognized as meaning a hot pressed sandwich often, but not always, with the edges unsealed, unlike a toasted sandwich. In recent years owning a panini press has become almost as commonplace as having a toaster or blender; you no longer need to dine out to enjoy delicious fresh panini. In this book you will find all manner of classic and contemporary variations, from the simplest melted cheese to more elaborate multi-layered versions. Some of the classic well-known ones you may have already enjoyed, such as Italian Grilled Cheese and Tomato Panini ([page 21](#)) and Tuna Mayo Melts ([page 26](#)); others are newer creations including Sticky Chilli Chicken ([page 30](#)) and Roasted Asparagus Panini with Gruyère ([page 74](#)).

If you've only got ten minutes or so to prepare and cook something to eat, turn to the Quick and Easy Panini chapter, which makes the most of fridge, store-cupboard and leftover ingredients such as sliced meat, cheeses and ready-prepared deli ingredients. When you've more time to spare, take a look at the selection of panini in the Hearty Lunches, Substantial Snacks and Suppers chapter. Many of these use the panini press as a grill to cook meats such as chicken breast and steak and a variety of vegetables. In addition to more than fifty savoury recipes, there is also a small selection of sweet recipes to satisfy those with a sweet tooth: try a rich and sticky Toffee Banana ([page 56](#)), Honeyed Focaccia ([page 50](#)) or Peach Pie Panini ([page 120](#)).

All of the panini in this book can be made with bought supermarket or bakery bread, but if you are feeling especially creative, you could make your own from a selection of recipes in the bread chapter. Turn to chapter four to discover how to make ciabatta, focaccia, and flatbread directly on your panini press. There are also plenty of ideas on enhancing your panini with flavoured mayonnaises, relishes, chutneys and salsas. Whatever combination of bread and filling you choose, you'll soon be making panini with flavour and flair.

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

From portable packed lunches to warm-weather picnics and dainty afternoon teas, millions of sandwiches are eaten every day. The idea is credited to John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich, who, rather than interrupting his card game to eat dinner, demanded that his meat was served between two slices of bread so that he could carry on gambling and eat at the same time without getting his hands messy. Of course, Montagu didn't actually invent the first sandwich: ordinary workers had long been taking basic meals of cheese between bread to their work in the farms and fields, but he made the sandwich socially acceptable and eventually fashionable among high society.

Sandwich toasters have been around for more than a century. At their most basic, they consist of two pieces of concave cast iron which can be clamped together and held with a long handle to toast over an open campfire. The first electric toasted sandwich maker, known as the Tostwich, was invented by Charles Champion around 1920 and was patented in 1925. It was sold to restaurants and cafés rather than advertised for domestic use, and toasted sandwiches became a popular menu item. It wasn't until 1974 that Breville, an Australian company, created their Snack 'n' Sandwich toaster, with

more than 400,000 selling in the first year alone. From the mid-1970s until the early 1980s, this was a must-have household appliance. The first models had a 'cut and seal' mechanism that cut the sandwich diagonally across the middle and sealed the sides. Usually made with bought white bread buttered on the outside to give an almost 'fried' finish, it left little space inside for the filling.

The panini press is the latest trend in sandwich makers. Starting as large commercial machines which were only sold to restaurants, smaller ones soon became available for use at home and have now become a popular kitchen appliance. Although similar in some ways to the old-fashioned sandwich maker, a hinged top grill plate makes it much more versatile. And the toasted sandwich is no longer limited to supermarket sliced bread: the press allows for all manner of breads to be grilled from the thinnest sliced bread with minimal filling, to large stuffed soft rolls. Because the edges of the sandwiches aren't sealed, you can add as much filling as you can fit into the bread.

CHOOSING A PANINI PRESS

A panini press is basically a folding appliance with two metal grill plates which are hinged together. The plates are the source of the heat and are also used to press the panini. Most panini presses have parallel ridges on the metal grill plates; these give the panini its signature grill marks. Others have a flat surface. This type will not give the browned lines that are so attractive on a panini, but will allow you to cook foods such as fried eggs and mini pancakes. Whichever you choose, look for machines that have a good-quality non-stick surface.

Panini presses are available in different sizes, colours and prices and you will need to consider these factors before you decide which type is right for you. The smallest will comfortably cook two panini, larger ones up to four, and models originally aimed at the commercial market will cook up to a dozen at a time. Most panini presses are of a sleek design in contemporary stainless steel, but you can also get them in vibrant colours or with a more traditional-looking black finish.

At the less expensive end of the market are machines intended purely for panini making, although they can easily be used for cooking other foods such as bacon, steaks and thinly sliced chicken breasts and also used for grilling vegetables. These have no controls other than a power light which indicates when the panini press is on and a ready light to show when the press has reached the correct temperature. They cook at around 180°C – perfect for toasting the outside of bread without scorching while heating through the filling. All the recipes in this book have been prepared on this type of panini press. The temperature of individual machines does vary and the cooking times given in the recipes allow for this. Check your panini after the shortest cooking time given; you can always cook it for longer if needed.

Pricier panini machines usually have temperature gauges. They won't make better panini but enable you to cook a wide range of other foods as well. The temperature can be set on maximum to sear the outside of meat but leave the inside rare, when cooking steak or fresh tuna for example, or set on a lower temperature, so that foods such as sausages can be cooked through without over-browning the outside. They will have a drip tray to catch fat and juices, either attachable or integrated, and many also have removable plates (some are even dishwasher-safe) to allow for easy cleaning. Some open out fully to allow you to use both sides as a grill and many come with a handy implement to help you clean the metal plates without scratching the non-stick surface.

CARING FOR YOUR PANINI PRESS

Your panini press will come with a leaflet or instruction booklet relevant to your particular machine. Make sure you read it! The non-stick plates are robust but can be damaged with sharp or metal

implements, so always use heat-resistant plastic, wooden or silicone kitchen utensils.

~~Always turn the machine off and unplug when cleaning.~~ In most cases, wiping with a wad of damp kitchen paper while the grill plates are still slightly warm is sufficient, but if your panini filling has leaked or you have cooked meat or vegetables directly on the press, use a damp cloth dipped in mild soapy hot water and rinse off with a cloth dipped in clean water (make sure the cloths are soft and not abrasive). Be extra thorough in cleaning when you have cooked meat or fish so that you don't transfer the smell or taste to the next panini you cook.

Sometimes you may need to wipe down the panini press partway through cooking when the machine is still very hot, for example if you have cooked a steak that you are planning to serve in a hot panini. Again, unplug the machine and be careful; it's a good idea to wear oven gloves when doing this. And remember that your panini press is an electrical appliance: never submerge it in water.

TIPS FOR PANINI SUCCESS

- Balance the type of bread used with the filling: more delicately flavoured fillings such as salmon and asparagus don't work well with rustic or big, crusty bread. Similarly, strong cheeses and hot and spicy meats are less appealing served in dainty milk bread.
- Once you have chosen your bread and filling, consider how you will construct the panini. Fillings closest to the bread will be heated for longer than those in the middle. If you are making a cheese and ham sandwich, for example, you might want to place the ham between two layers of cheese, so that the cheese is soft and melted and the ham just warmed through.
- Think about how your panini will hold together; if you layer up too much meat and salad your panini may fall apart or be difficult to eat. Be less generous with these types of fillings or add cheese, mayonnaise, chutney or relish to act like 'glue' and hold other ingredients in place. You can always serve your panini with a side salad.
- When creating panini with fillings that will melt or bubble, such as cheeses, sauces, marshmallows and chocolate, leave space around the edges of the bread to prevent them oozing out during grilling. And remember that these types of fillings may become very hot, so allow your panini to cool for a minute or two before eating.
- Always preheat your panini press before adding the sandwiches. Most machines have an indicator light to show when the correct temperature has been reached.
- Watch timings carefully, checking after the shortest length of time given in the recipes; you will soon learn whether your machine cooks quickly or takes slightly longer. Take extra care when cooking panini which are made with high-fat or sugary breads, such as brioche, or are buttered on the outside, as they will cook a lot faster.

BREAD WINNERS

It's important to use good-quality bread when making panini. Ordinary sliced white or brown bread can be flattened under the lid of the panini press making it heavy or dry – although this type of bread is suited to some panini, such as Croque Monsieur, where the bread is buttered on the outside to give a crisp finish. The most popular types of bread for panini making are ciabatta, either sliced from a loaf or as rolls (ciabatta rolls are often labelled in the supermarket as 'panini') and focaccia. You will find recipes for several of those mentioned below in chapter four.

Italian breads

Ciabatta comes from northern Italy, around Lake Como. It is a light bread made with fruity olive oil

large air bubbles give it its characteristically porous, airy texture. Soft and slightly chewy on the inside, it has a thin crust that becomes deliciously crisp when grilled in a panini press. Traditionally ciabatta is made with a *biga*, or sourdough ‘starter’, which adds a distinct flavour. Slice loaves on the diagonal to give larger slices or use small individual rolls.

Focaccia has a lovely soft texture and crust. It is made with a generous amount of olive oil, which flavours and moistens the bread. Extra flavourings, such as fresh rosemary, garlic or sun-dried tomatoes, are often added. It rises evenly, giving the bread a flat rather than domed top that’s perfect for panini making.

French breads

Baguettes have a crisp golden crust and a chewy interior. This long thin loaf is also referred to as ‘French stick’. It contains little or no fat and is difficult to make at home as it relies on a steamy oven. Cut into shorter lengths to use in your machine; its rounded shape can make it a bit tricky to cook, so choose slightly flattened loaves if available.

Pain de campagne is a country-style loaf with a rustic texture and a thick dark crust. It contains a small proportion of bran, which gives it an off-white colour. Pair with strong-flavoured fillings such as mature cheese and heavily spiced charcuterie.

Brioche is enriched with butter, eggs and milk and has a wonderful rich soft texture. It is traditionally made in individual moulds but use slices from a loaf for panini.

British breads

Victorian milk bread is typical of the many British breads in which milk is used as some or all of the liquid, producing a softer crumb and crust. Milk bread has an almost velvety texture and is particularly good with English cheeses and as the basis of sweet panini.

Soda bread is an everyday Irish bread, traditionally cooked in a cast-iron pan over an open fire. It is made without yeast and has a cake-like texture. It is slightly crumbly, so needs careful handling when making panini.

Granary bread has a moist texture and slightly sweet, nutty taste. The flavour comes from the process of malting the wheat, where partially germinated grains are slowly toasted. The flavour works well with both savoury fillings, especially British cheeses, and sweet ones.

Northern and Eastern European breads

Rye bread is made with the flour from rye grain. Darker and denser than most bread, with a distinctive strong flavour, it has a dense texture. Pastrami on rye is a classic American-style combination.

Bagels are chubby little rings of bread with a hole in the middle, Jewish in origin. They have a uniquely chewy crust achieved through a double-cooking process – first by briefly poaching in simmering water, then baking in a hot oven.

Middle Eastern breads

Pitta bread can be round or oval, plain or flavoured, and have a pocket-like hollow in the middle. They are easily opened and filled if you warm them slightly on the panini press.

Flatbread is often used to make wraps. It can be made with flour, water and salt to produce an unleavened dough or with yeast for a lighter texture.

CONVERSION CHARTS

This book provides metric measurements for the ingredients, but those who still prefer imperial, can use these conversions.

WEIGHT

Metric	Imperial
25g	1oz
50g	2oz
75g	3oz
100g	4oz
150g	5oz
175g	6oz
200g	7oz
225g	8oz
250g	9oz
300g	10oz
325g	11oz
350g	12oz
375g	13oz
400g	14oz
450g	1lb

LIQUID MEASURE

Metric	Imperial	US cup
5ml	1 tsp	1 tsp
15ml	1 tbsp	1 tbsp
50ml	2fl oz	3 tbsp
60ml	2½fl oz	4 tbsp
75ml	3fl oz	⅓ cup
100ml	4fl oz	scant ½ cup
125ml	4½fl oz	½ cup
150ml	5fl oz	⅔ cup
200ml	7fl oz	scant 1 cup
250ml	10fl oz	1 cup
300ml	½ pint	1¼ cups
350ml	12fl oz	1⅓ cups

450ml	$\frac{3}{4}$ pint	$1\frac{3}{4}$ cups
500ml	20fl oz	2 cups
600ml	1 pint	$2\frac{1}{2}$ cups

MEASUREMENTS

Metric	Imperial
1cm	$\frac{1}{2}$ in
2cm	$\frac{3}{4}$ in
4cm	$1\frac{1}{2}$ in
5cm	2in
10cm	4in
12cm	$4\frac{1}{2}$ in
13cm	5in
15cm	6in
18cm	7in
20cm	8in
25cm	10in
30cm	12in

CHAPTER ONE

QUICK AND EASY PANINI

Here you'll find a selection of the simplest panini, from a straightforward Italian Grilled Cheese and Tomato Panini to Chicken Tikka Panini and classic Croque Monsieur. These only take a few minutes to assemble and just a few more to cook, making use of fridge and store-cupboard ingredients such as sliced meats, cheeses, vegetables which don't need pre-cooking, like tomatoes and bottled grilled peppers, and ready-made sauces such as pesto.

This chapter has dozens of ideas for different fillings – you'll find not only the traditional but lots of unusual combinations that are destined to become new favourites. If you haven't used your panini press before, this is the place to start: these are panini that need minimal time and effort – fast food at its best.

Each recipe makes enough for two.

ITALIAN GRILLED CHEESE AND TOMATO PANINI (V)

A classic combination, here creamy mozzarella and tomatoes are enhanced with a scattering of fresh basil leaves that wilt and soften in the warmth, releasing their aromatic flavour.

2 home-made (page 161) or shop-bought ciabatta rolls

75g buffalo mozzarella cheese, cut into 1cm slices

1 beefsteak tomato, thinly sliced

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

6–8 fresh basil leaves

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Split each roll in half using a serrated knife. Arrange the mozzarella slices on the bottom half of each roll. Lay the tomato slices over the mozzarella.
3. Season with salt and pepper to taste, then scatter each with 3–4 basil leaves (tear into smaller pieces if the leaves are large). Add the top halves of the ciabatta rolls.
4. Put the sandwiches on the press, pull the top down and cook until the rolls are browned and crisp and the cheese is melted – 4–6 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is.
5. Carefully remove from the press and allow to cool for a minute or two before serving.

COOK'S TIPS

Instead of basil leaves, you could drizzle the tomatoes with a little basil oil (page 125) or spread thinly with 1–2 teaspoons of pesto (page 133).

Mozzarella is an Italian unripened cheese, traditionally made from water buffalo's milk but now more commonly from cow's milk. Because it has no rind, it's packed in plastic bags surrounded by water to keep it fresh. Open carefully, tipping the milky water into a small container or bowl, so that you can keep any unused mozzarella. Cover with a lid or cling film and it will keep for four to five days in the fridge.

BRIE, PEAR AND PEPPERED SALAMI PANINI

Creamy Brie is an excellent melting cheese in panini and fresh pears are the perfect contrast. Combined with a peppery salami to add lots of flavour; Italian Milano is a good choice.

- 4 slices home-made (page 156) or shop-bought ciabatta, about 1cm thick, cut on the diagonal**
- 75g Brie, thinly sliced**
- ½ firm ripe pear, quartered, cored, peeled and thinly sliced**
- 6 thin slices (about 25g) peppered salami**

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Put the bread on a chopping board and arrange the Brie on two of the slices. Top with slices of pear, followed by the salami (there's no need to season with salt or pepper as there is already plenty in the cheese and salami).
3. Top with the remaining bread slices.
4. Put the sandwiches on the press, pull the top down and cook until the panini are browned and crisp and the cheese is melted – 4–6 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is.
5. Carefully remove from the press and allow to cool for a minute or two before serving.

COOK'S TIPS

Don't be tempted to butter or oil the bread as there is plenty of fat in the salami which will moisten the panini as it warms through.

VARIATION

For a vegetarian version, use a handful of rocket leaves lightly drizzled with good olive oil instead of the salami. It will give the panini a lovely peppery flavour.

MELTING MOZZARELLA AND CRISPY BACON

Buying ready-cooked bacon rashers means that you can prepare and serve this panini in minutes. You can, of course, cook your own bacon on your panini press first ([page 100](#)). This sandwich is especially good with shop-bought tomato chutney or home-made Cherry Tomato Salsa ([page 145](#)).

2 x 18cm lengths of baguette

3 tbsp tomato chutney

100g mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced

Freshly ground black pepper

6 rashers cooked streaky bacon

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Cut the baguettes in half lengthways using a serrated knife. Spread the chutney on the bottom halves of the baguettes.
3. Arrange half the mozzarella slices over the chutney and season to taste with freshly ground black pepper.
4. Top with the bacon, then the remaining mozzarella. Finish each sandwich with the top halves of each baguette.
5. Put the sandwiches on the press, pull the top down and cook until the baguettes are browned and crisp and the cheese is melted – 4–6 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is.
6. Carefully remove from the press and leave to cool for a minute or two before serving.

COOK'S TIP

Vacuum-packed part-baked baguettes are a useful store-cupboard standby as they usually keep for about a month after purchase and can also be frozen. If using, remove from the freezer and leave at room temperature for half an hour in advance, and allow an extra minute or two of cooking time to ensure the bread is cooked through and crisp.

CLASSIC CROQUE MONSIEUR

This iconic Parisian café snack is usually fried in butter rather than plainly toasted and sometimes includes a layer of thick bubbling béchamel sauce. It's always made with *pain de mie*, a tin-baked white bread, similar to a traditional thick-sliced British loaf. The name comes from *croquer*, meaning 'to crunch', so make sure your panini press is very hot before cooking to make the outside crisp.

4 thick slices white bread, crusts removed if preferred

25g unsalted butter, softened

1–2 tsp Dijon mustard (depending on heat of mustard and your personal preference)

100g grated Gruyère or Emmental cheese (or four thin slices from a packet)

2 thin slices good-quality ham

Freshly grated nutmeg or ground black pepper

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Lay the bread on a chopping board and thinly spread one side of each slice with butter. Turn over and thinly spread the unbuttered sides of two of the slices with mustard, then top each with a thick sprinkling of grated cheese or a slice of cheese.
3. Top each with a slice of ham, trimming and arranging it to fit the shape of the bread if necessary, then sprinkle with the remaining cheese or another slice of cheese (so that the ham is sandwiched between two layers of cheese), nutmeg and pepper. Finish with the remaining pieces of bread, buttered sides up.
4. Put the sandwiches on the press, pull the top down and cook until browned and crisp and the cheese is melted – 4–5 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is.
5. Carefully remove from the press and allow to cool for a minute or two. Cut each sandwich into two triangles before serving.

VARIATION

For a Croque Madame, also known as a Croque-à-Cheval in Normandy, serve poached or fried eggs on top. For poached eggs, pour about 4cm boiling water into a frying pan and add 1 tablespoon vinegar. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat so that the water is bubbling gently. Crack an egg into a cup, then gently tip into the bubbling water. Repeat with a second egg. Cook the eggs gently for 1 minute undisturbed, then gently spoon over a little water to cook the yolks. When cooked to your liking, lift out of the water with a slotted spoon, draining off excess water.

For fried eggs, heat 1–2 tablespoons oil in a heavy-based frying pan (use just a few drops of oil in a non-stick pan). Crack the eggs into the pan one at a time. After 1 minute, spoon a little hot oil over the yolk and cook for a further minute or until the white is opaque. For a firm yolk, cook for a little longer. Use a fish slice to lift the eggs out of the pan, draining off any oil. Place one egg on top of each sandwich.

GOAT'S CHEESE, CHORIZO AND ROCKET PANINI

Use your favourite goat's cheese for this panini – soft or firm in texture, delicate or pungent – and match it to a similarly flavoured chorizo – hot and spicy or more delicately flavoured with smoked paprika. Fresh-tasting rocket, slightly wilted in the warmth, adds a final flourish.

2 squares (12 x 12cm) home-made (page 152) or shop-bought focaccia, plain or seeded

4 tsp home-made (page 140) or shop-bought tapenade

100g goat's cheese

Handful of fresh rocket leaves

8 thin slices (about 30g) chorizo

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Split the bread in half horizontally using a serrated knife. Spread the bottom half of each with 2 teaspoons tapenade.
3. Top with thin slices of firm goat's cheese, or teaspoonfuls of soft goat's cheese, then add a generous amount of rocket leaves. Arrange the chorizo slices on top.
4. Place the top halves of the bread on the chorizo.
5. Put the sandwiches on the press, pull the top down and cook until the goat's cheese has melted and the bread is golden – 3–4 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is.
6. Carefully remove from the press and leave to cool for a minute before serving.

COOK'S TIPS

Don't season with salt if you are using a black olive tapenade (which will be salty already). You may wish to add a little ground black pepper, depending on the seasoning of the chorizo used.

Shop-bought focaccia often contains extra flavouring ingredients such as rosemary or red onions, which would both work well with this panini.

If using seeded focaccia, shorten the cooking time a little as the seeds on the outside of the bread brown quickly.

PLOUGHMAN'S PANINI (V)

Crusty country bread, a wedge of mature cheese, traditionally Cheddar, a dollop of chutney and pickled onions make a classic Ploughman's. Originally eaten as a cold lunch by the ploughmen working in the fields, this combination is also delicious toasted and served hot.

100g mature Cheddar, roughly cut into small cubes (about 1cm)

4 tbsp tomato chutney or cherry tomato salsa ([page 145](#))

1 medium pickled onion, or 2 trimmed spring onions, finely chopped

Freshly ground black pepper

4 thick slices crusty white bread

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Put the cheese, chutney and chopped pickled or spring onions in a bowl. Season with a little freshly ground black pepper, then mix well.
3. Divide the cheese mixture between two slices of bread. Top with the other two slices.
4. Put the sandwiches on the press, pull the top down and cook until the panini are browned and the cheese has melted – 4–5 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is.
5. Carefully remove from the press and allow to cool for a minute or two before serving.

COOK'S TIPS

Although you can slice the cheese and layer up the filling ingredients if you prefer, mixing them together makes the cooked panini much easier to hold and eat.

Any type of hard English cheese works well in this panini. Try Red Leicestershire or Lancashire cheese combined with an apple or fruity chutney.

FALAFEL PANINI POCKET (V)

Here, ready-made falafel are grilled on the panini press, then used to fill a pitta ‘pocket’ along with creamy avocado and a minted yogurt sauce, which both add moistness. You’ll need to halve the falafels after cooking or the pitta bread may split in the final toasting.

6 falafel, defrosted if frozen

1 tsp mint sauce

2 tbsp Greek-style yogurt

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 small ripe avocado, peeled and thinly sliced

2 pitta breads (white, wholemeal or seeded)

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
2. Add the falafel, pull the top down and cook for 1½–2 minutes or until browned and heated through.
3. While the falafels are heating, stir the mint sauce into the Greek-style yogurt and season to taste with salt and pepper. Stir in the avocado slices.
4. Remove the falafels and add the pitta breads to the press. Warm them for about 45 seconds (this will make them easy to open into pockets).
5. Remove the pittas from the press and slice an opening at one end of each, then carefully open them up into pockets. Cut the falafels in half and insert them in the pittas together with the avocado and yogurt mixture.
6. Put the pittas on the press, pull the top down and cook for 2–3 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is, until the pittas are lightly toasted.
7. Carefully remove from the press and serve straight away.

COOK’S TIP

There are several different types of falafel available. Most contain Middle Eastern spices such as cumin and coriander, but you can also get a Moroccan variety with paprika, cinnamon and ginger, and Mediterranean ones containing lots of fresh herbs as well as spices.

ROASTED RED PEPPER AND HUMMUS PANINI (V)

Roasting red peppers enhances their sweetness and adds a delicious subtle smoky flavour. You can do this yourself (see tip below) if time allows, or simply use ready-roasted peppers from a jar. Hummus is rich in protein, vitamins and minerals, making this panini a great choice for vegetarians.

2 x 20cm flour tortillas or flatbreads (page 171)

100g home-made (page 135) or shop-bought hummus

2 roasted red pepper halves, sliced

2 tbsp Greek-style yogurt

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Spoon onto and spread the hummus over one half of each tortilla or flatbread, leaving a border of about 2cm around the edge to prevent the filling oozing out during cooking.
3. Arrange the sliced peppers on top of the hummus, then dot half teaspoons of Greek yogurt over the top, dividing evenly between the two tortillas. Grind a little black pepper over the top. Fold the uncovered half of the tortilla over the filling to enclose it.
4. Put the sandwiches on the press, pull the top down and cook until they are lightly browned and crisp – 3–5 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is.
5. Carefully remove from the press and serve straight away.

COOK'S TIPS

To roast a red pepper, preheat a grill to the hottest setting. Cut the pepper in half lengthways and remove the seeds and white pith. Lightly brush the inside of the pepper with olive oil. Put the pepper halves, skin-side down, on the grill and cook for 2 minutes, then turn over and cook for a further 4–6 minutes, until the skin is charred. Place the pepper halves in a polythene bag and leave for 15 minutes or until cool enough to handle. Peel off the charred skin. Alternatively, slice the pepper and cook on the panini press (page 70).

Try a flavoured hummus rather than plain in this recipe: lemon and coriander works particularly well here. You could also use chargrilled sun-dried aubergines in oil instead of roasted red pepper, if you prefer.

GUACAMOLE, TOMATO AND BABY SPINACH BAGUETTE (V)

Guacamole is a vibrant, green-coloured spreadable dip made from avocados. Its rich flavour goes well with fresh tomatoes and spinach in this vegetarian panini.

2 x 18cm lengths of baguette

2 tbsp chilli or basil oil (page 124–5) or extra virgin olive oil

100g home-made (page 137) or shop-bought guacamole

6 baby plum tomatoes, halved lengthways

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Small handful (about 10g) baby spinach leaves, long stems removed

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Cut the baguettes in half lengthways using a serrated knife and brush the cut sides with flavoured oil or plain olive oil. Spoon the guacamole over the bottom halves of the baguettes.
3. Arrange the baby plum tomatoes on top, gently pushing them into the guacamole, then season with a little salt and pepper.
4. Scatter with baby spinach leaves, then replace the top halves of each baguette.
5. Put the sandwiches on the press, pull the top down and cook until the baguettes are lightly browned and crisp – 3–5 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is.
6. Carefully remove from the press and serve straight away.

COOK'S TIP

Don't overcook these panini; the bread should be lightly browned and the filling just warmed with barely wilted spinach. If the centres get too hot the spinach will give out too much moisture and make the panini soggy.

PRAWN AND AVOCADO CROISSANTS

Prawn and avocado is a classic combination and here it is served with a simple seafood sauce. Grilling croissants on a panini press is a great way to warm them while retaining a crisp outer texture. Once filled they will only need to be grilled on the press for a minute or two; when served the filling should be at room temperature or the sauce will soak into the croissants.

2 large butter croissants

2 tbsp mayonnaise

2 tsp tomato ketchup

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

100g prawns, defrosted if frozen and drained on kitchen paper

1 medium ripe avocado, peeled and thinly sliced

1 tsp lemon or lime juice

1. Heat the panini press according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Split the croissants in half using a serrated knife, cutting almost but not quite all the way through so that the croissants are still hinged, then open up.
3. Put the croissants, cut sides down, onto the panini grill, but do not close the press. Cook for about 1 minute, or until the cut sides are lightly toasted. Remove and leave to cool for a few minutes.
4. Meanwhile, mix the mayonnaise, ketchup, salt and pepper together in a bowl. Add the prawns and mix well. Toss the avocado slices in the lemon or lime juice.
5. Spoon the prawns onto the bottom halves of the croissants, top with avocado slices then close the croissants.
6. Put the croissants on the press, pull the top down and cook for 1–2 minutes, depending on how hot your machine is, until the croissants are slightly browner and crisp.
7. Carefully remove from the press and serve straight away.

VARIATION

For chicken and avocado mayo croissants, use 150g sliced cooked chicken instead of the prawns and mix the mayonnaise with 1 teaspoon of wholegrain mustard instead of tomato ketchup.

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