

## Seasonal cook



Photo: Quentin Jones

# Take the cake

A dish that began as a way to use leftovers is now a star in its own right, writes **STEVE MANFREDI**.

Some dishes travelled the world in the saddlebags and suitcases of migrants, explorers and merchants as they made their way across foreign lands and cultures. The omelet, for instance, appears to have started in ancient Mesopotamia and branched out from there, adopted and adapted along the way. But there are other dishes that have sprung up quite independently. Take the fish cake. Wherever there were streams, lakes or rivers, fish and crustaceans were mixed together in patties and cakes of various sizes and fried, boiled or steamed. In Portugal and Spain, air-dried cod is mixed with cooked potato, parsley and egg then deep-fried as a snack. The Thai version is made from fish pounded with coriander root, ginger and garlic, which is then deep-fried. It was often necessary to put leftovers to good use. For most of human history, throwing away food hasn't been an option.

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## FISH CAKES WITH BRAISED CAULIFLOWER

1 onion, finely sliced  
200g firm-fleshed fish fillets, such as blue eye, whiting or snapper  
200g prawn meat  
60g day-old bread, crust removed  
1/2 cup clear fish broth (or water)  
2 eggs, beaten  
2 tbsp finely chopped parsley  
Salt and pepper  
Plain flour  
Breadcrumbs, for coating  
Extra virgin olive oil, for frying

### FOR THE BRAISED CAULIFLOWER:

1 small onion, finely diced  
1 clove garlic, minced  
3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
300g cauliflower florets  
200ml tomato puree  
Salt and pepper

Chop sliced onion, fish and prawn meat together until fine. Don't use food processor. Wet bread a little in fish broth (or water) and mix together with fish mixture, eggs and parsley. Season to taste. Form into little cakes about 5cm in diameter. Coat lightly with flour and then press gently in breadcrumbs. Heat olive oil in a pan at a depth of 2cm and fry fish cakes until golden brown, turning once. For the braised cauliflower, lightly fry onion and garlic in olive oil until soft. Add cauliflower and tomato puree. Season and simmer until cauliflower is soft. Serve with fish cakes.

**Serves 6 as a first course, (pictured)**

**Wine** Riesling or verdicchio

## MALUKU FISH CAKES

This is a recipe from the Maluku Islands adapted from Sri Owen's *Indonesia Regional Food and Cookery*.

450g mackerel, mahi-mahi or snapper fillet, skin removed, cut into 5mm cubes  
1 egg white, lightly beaten  
2 tsp lemongrass, finely chopped  
110g blanched almonds, ground to a paste  
1 tsp salt  
2 tbsp lime juice  
6-8 tbsp vegetable or peanut oil for frying

### FOR THE SPICE MIXTURE:

2 tsp coriander seeds, roasted  
1 tsp cumin seeds, roasted  
1 small dried chilli  
3 eschalots, finely sliced  
3 cloves garlic, finely sliced  
1 tsp chopped ginger  
1 tsp chopped galangal

Mix all ingredients for spice mixture in a glass bowl with fish cubes. Marinate overnight in refrigerator. When ready to make fish cakes, place contents of glass bowl in a blender or food processor with egg white, lemongrass, ground almonds, salt and lime juice and blend for a few seconds. Test 1 tsp of mixture for seasoning by frying in oil. Add more salt if necessary. Form mixture into 6 round cakes and shallow fry in oil for about 3 minutes. Turn them over and fry for 3-4 minutes. Drain on absorbent paper. Alternatively, shape into 24 small patties and fry accordingly. Serve immediately with chilli dipping sauce and salad.

**Serves 6 as a first course**

**Wine** Traminer or semillon