

## Cold starters and hors d'oeuvres

*Some sections of Salads, page 78, are also relevant to cold starters and hors d'oeuvres.*

A cold starter usually means no soup pan. This is good news if the top of the cooker is small and there are several large pans of vegetables needing the space. A cold starter also means cold plates, and these are easier to carry than bowls of hot soup.

Attractive starters and hors d'oeuvres make an impressive beginning to a special meal, but even if most of the preparation has been done in advance, they usually require a certain amount of last minute work. When large numbers are involved, it can be quite stressful trying to get all the starters prepared and ready on time.

In a hot kitchen, the starters and any salad garnish can soon dry out. When the kitchen is very busy, it can also be difficult to find sufficient space to prepare, assemble and garnish all the starters. It is a great help if most of the work can be done ahead. The kitchen will be cooler, there will be more free space to work in and less time pressure. Also, any problems concerning the quantity or quality of the produce are usually found during the initial preparation. If it is done in advance you will probably still have time to put things right before the meal.

Any high risk food, ie high protein moist food, that has been prepared in advance must be kept under refrigeration until shortly before the meal, to minimise the risk of food poisoning.

### **Preparing salad garnish**

Salad garnish that has been prepared in advance must be stored carefully to keep it fresh. Plastic boxes, casserole dishes with lids, or even saucepans, are all suitable as storage containers. Ideally, the containers of prepared salad should be kept in the refrigerator. If there is not enough space and they have to stay in a warm place, covering the containers with cold, wet tea towels will help to keep them cool.

**Celery** – trim the ends, wash, then slice or chop. If leaving the stalks whole, just trim the ends and wash. Long stalks can be wrapped in cling film for temporary storage.

**Cress** – cut with scissors, put in a sieve, wash under cold running water and shake well to drain.

**Cucumber** – wash and preferably leave whole as sliced cucumber dries out very quickly. If you do have to slice it in advance, push the slices together and wrap the sliced cucumber in cling film. Put the wrapped cucumber in a sealed container which has been rinsed out with cold water. This will help to prevent the cucumber from drying out.

**Lettuce** – wash, then remove excess water with a salad spinner, or by patting with a clean tea towel. Cut or tear the leaves as you need them.

**Orange and lemon slices (or wedges)** – wash the whole fruit, slice it, and remove the pips.

**Parsley** – trim, put in a sieve, wash gently under cold running water, shake well to drain.

**Radishes** – trim and wash. If they are sliced in advance, be sure to keep them well covered, as they quickly dry out.

**Spring onions** – trim, wash and slice.

**Tomatoes** – these tend to fall apart if they are cut up in advance, so it is usually preferable to just wash them and then leave them to drain.

**Watercress** – trim, wash and leave in a little water in a covered container. Put it on the plates at the last minute, as it quickly dries out.

### **Garnishing starters**

The garnish of a cold starter is usually part of the dish itself, adding substance to the main food item, while at the same time making it look more appetising. With seafood dishes, it is usual to include a lemon slice or wedge.

The garnish should complement the food in terms of taste and colour. For example, a slice of liver pâté would look well served with lettuce, cucumber and parsley, with a few slices of red tomato to brighten it up, and a sprinkle of cress over the top. This garnish would also provide a pleasant contrast to the richness of the pâté.

A more delicate starter, like a prawn cocktail, can be easily overwhelmed by too much garnish. A starter of this type needs only a simple decoration with a subtle use of colour.

### **‘Plating up’ (arranging food on the plates)**

It is helpful to have one starter prepared ahead of the rest, to use as a model for the others. This should ensure that all the dishes look the same, and no pieces of garnish are omitted.

Plating up a large number of starters is a time consuming task, especially if they contain a substantial salad garnish. It is quicker if they can be done in a special preparation area.

This preparation area should include a chopping board, a selection of knives, and several small bowls containing the relevant food items. These bowls can be replenished from the main storage containers. The preparation area should also have an empty bowl to use as a table top waste bin.

Rather than assembling each starter individually from beginning to end, it is quicker to use a production line system. If there are enough trays to take all the starter dishes it makes the task of plating up much quicker and easier.

Begin by putting a tray of starter dishes down on the preparation area. Then, working evenly across the dishes, gradually assemble the starters from the food items taken in turn from the small bowls. For example, to plate up a tray of seafood starters, you might begin by placing some lettuce on each dish, then the fish, then maybe a slice of lemon, continuing like this, until all the starters on the tray are finished.

If the starters contain high risk food items, like cold meat, fish or egg, the finished trays of dishes should be put in a refrigerator until it is time to serve the meal. If the shelves in the refrigerator have enough space between them, you might be able to stand tins or small containers on some of them to support extra trays. If there is not sufficient space for all the trays, the plating up of the high risk items should be left until just before the meal.

### **Mixed hors d'oeuvres**

A variety of interesting hors d'oeuvres can be made by combining two or more food items with an attractive salad garnish. If time is short, there are plenty of ready prepared foods available in jars or tins, or at the delicatessen counter.

In these mixed hors d'oeuvres, it is important to choose the food items carefully. It is usually better not to mix fish and meat, or two very moist foods on the same plate. The whole arrangement should be pleasing to look at, with flavours and textures that complement each other.

Some of the more substantial items on the following list could also be served on their own, as a single hors d'oeuvre.

**Suggestions for mixed hors d'oeuvres**

Thinly sliced beef, turkey, chicken or ham  
 Sliced salami and smoked sausage  
 Fresh, tinned or smoked salmon  
 Tinned sardines and tuna fish  
 Smoked trout or mackerel  
 Pickled herrings  
 Anchovy fillets  
 Prawns, whole and shelled  
 Cockles and mussels  
 Crab and lobster meat  
 Stuffed eggs\*  
 Hard boiled eggs, in halves or quarters  
 Cottage cheese  
 Firm cheese, diced or grated  
 Filled tomatoes\*  
 Party mushrooms\*  
 Celery boats filled with cream cheese\*

\*The recipes for these dishes can be found at the end of this chapter.

**Suggested salad garnish for one mixed hors d'oeuvre**

1 large or 2 small lettuce leaves  
 3 wedges of tomato  
 3 slices of cucumber  
 parsley sprig  
 cress to sprinkle  
 1 slice or wedge of lemon (for a seafood hors d'oeuvre)

**Suggested salad garnish for 10 mixed hors d'oeuvres**

1 round lettuce  
 350g / 12oz tomatoes  
 ½ a cucumber  
 few sprigs of parsley  
 1 tub cress  
 2 lemons (for seafood hors d'oeuvres)

**Suggested salad garnish for 50 mixed hors d'oeuvres**

5/6 round lettuces (approx 1.25kg / 2lb 12oz total weight)  
 1.7kg / 3lb 12oz tomatoes  
 2 long cucumbers  
 50g / 2oz parsley  
 5 tubs cress  
 7 lemons (for seafood hors d'oeuvres)

**Mixed hors d'oeuvre platters**

Mixed hors d'oeuvre platters make an interesting change from traditional starters. Guests are given an empty plate each and help themselves from platters on the table. These mixed hors d'oeuvre platters look most attractive, and at dinners they help to break the ice as people talk to each other while they pass them round the table. If there is not enough room on the dining table for all the platters, the mixed hors d'oeuvres can be served from a side table, like a buffet.

The platters should provide plenty of choice and allow for personal preferences, offering a good selection of food, including meat, fish, eggs or cheese and one or two interesting salads. Because people are helping themselves, you can include some more unusual items amongst the hors d'oeuvres. A row of salad garnish across a platter can separate the different types of food.

**Checking quantities**

If the hors d'oeuvres are served on platters it can be difficult to calculate how much to prepare. For the first course at a dinner, a selection of about six hors d'oeuvres should provide enough variety. Each person should be able to take a little of everything, without completely emptying the platters. Obviously, some items will be more popular than others.

One way of doing a quick check on portion sizes is to pretend you are a guest. Take a plate, and help yourself to a little of each hors d'oeuvre including one or two salad items and some garnish. The portion on the plate should be roughly the same as a generous sized starter.

**Ideas for salad and garnish on mixed hors d'oeuvre platters**

Potato salad  
Rice salad  
Coleslaw  
Sweetcorn kernels  
Asparagus spears  
Lettuce (different varieties)  
Red, yellow and green peppers  
Celery  
Tomatoes  
Cucumber  
Radishes  
Spring onions  
Gherkins  
Parsley and cress  
Lemon slices or wedges (to accompany seafood hors d'oeuvres)  
Black or green stoned olives  
Pickled onions and walnuts

## **Prawn cocktail**

*This popular starter is easy to prepare, looks special and is suitable for any occasion.*

Serves 20.

1.4 kg / 3lb 2oz shelled prawns (if using frozen prawns, this is the thawed and drained weight)  
800g / 1lb 12oz iceberg lettuce  
600ml / just over 1pt prawn cocktail sauce

Suggested garnish

3 lemons

20 whole prawns in their shells

2 tubs cress

### **Method**

Slice or tear the lettuce into small pieces and put some into each prawn cocktail dish.

Divide the shelled prawns between the dishes, piling them up on top of the lettuce.

Spoon about 30ml / 2 tablespoons of sauce over the prawns in each dish.

Both the following sauces make a good topping for prawn cocktail. They are milder than most shop bought sauces, and will not mask the delicate flavour of the prawns. If the sauce is too thick, add a small quantity of thin cream or milk.

### **Prawn cocktail sauce (1)**

Mix together:

425ml /  $\frac{3}{4}$ pt shop bought prawn cocktail sauce

175ml / 6fl oz mayonnaise

### **Prawn cocktail sauce (2)**

Put 425ml /  $\frac{3}{4}$ pt of mayonnaise into a measuring jug.

Keep adding small amounts of tomato ketchup, cream (single or double) and extra mayonnaise until there is 600ml / just over 1pt in the jug, and you feel that the flavour and consistency are correct.

Garnish the top of each prawn cocktail with a wedge or slice of lemon, a whole prawn and a sprinkle of cress.

### **Notes on the recipe**

If frozen prawns are used, they need adequate time to thaw out. Prawns that are allowed to thaw slowly have a better flavour than those thawed quickly in water. Either way, the prawns must be drained well before use.

Iceberg lettuce is a good variety for prawn cocktail as it stays crisp for quite a while under the prawns and sauce. The suggested quantity of lettuce might be more than you need, depending on the size of the dishes.

The lettuce and prawns can be portioned into the dishes an hour or so before the meal, if there is room in the refrigerator for all the dishes. The sauce can be made ahead, covered and refrigerated. Prawn cocktail can be easily changed to seafood cocktail by substituting other shellfish, or small pieces of cooked salmon for some of the prawns.

## Liver pâté

*This is an excellent pâté, and although it takes a while to prepare, it can be made a day or two ahead, and kept under refrigeration until needed. It also freezes well.*

Serves about 24.

Use 2 x 2lb loaf tins, (22cm x 12cm x 6cm). Grease the sides and bottom of each tin with a little margarine and cover the bottom with greaseproof paper.

100g / 3½oz margarine  
225g / 8oz chopped pork sausage meat  
600g / 1lb 5oz chopped pigs liver  
375g / 13oz chopped streaky bacon  
170g / 6oz soft white breadcrumbs  
280ml / ½pt red wine  
15ml to 30ml (1 to 2 tablespoons) brandy  
225g / 8oz roughly chopped onions  
4 crushed cloves garlic  
2 large beaten eggs  
1 level teaspoon mixed herbs  
½ teaspoon mixed spice  
pinch of salt and pepper

Suggested garnish  
2 to 3 round lettuces  
850g / 1lb 14oz tomatoes  
1 cucumber  
50g / 2oz parsley  
2 to 3 tubs cress

Before making the pâté, if time permits, cover the liver with cold milk and leave it in a refrigerator for 48 hours. Then rinse it well. The milk will give the pâté a more subtle flavour.

### Method

Melt the margarine in a pan and gently fry the onion, garlic, bacon, liver and sausage meat for 10 min, stirring occasionally.

Add the wine, brandy, herbs, mixed spice and seasoning.

Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 30 min.

Leave to cool for about 30 min.

Add the beaten eggs.

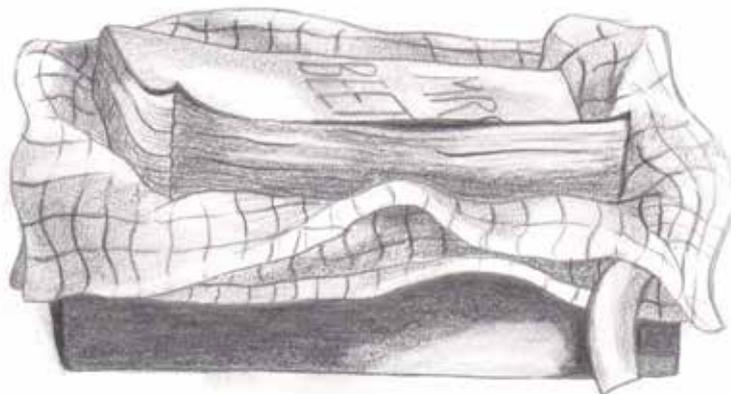
Purée in a liquidiser until smooth.

Return to the pan and stir in the breadcrumbs.

Place inside the loaf tins.

Cover them with foil and stand them in an ovenproof dish or tin. Pour enough water into the dish to bring it about 2.5cm / 1in up the sides of the loaf tins. Cook at 190°C, 375°F, gas mark 5 for 1 hr.

After cooking, push the foil down and put a weight on top to press down on the pâté until it is cold. A folded tea towel under a heavy book makes a suitable weight.



*Using a heavy book to press down the pâté*

To turn out the pâté, run a knife round the inside of the tin to loosen it, and invert it onto a board.

Peel off the greaseproof paper and cut the pâté into neat slices.

Garnish each portion with lettuce, three wedges of tomato, three slices of cucumber, a parsley sprig and a sprinkling of cress.

Pâté is usually served with a few slices of melba toast. If using bought melba toast, allow about 20g per person, plus some extra in reserve.

## **Fruit cocktail**

*This is a delicious fresh tasting starter which, if possible, should be served chilled in small glass dishes.*

Fruit cocktail can be made from a combination of any of the following: oranges, grapefruit, melon, pineapple and grapes.

For 10 servings allow approx 1.4kg / 3lb 2oz of prepared fruit, and 140ml / ¼pt of fruit juice.

### **Preparing the fruit**

**Oranges and grapefruit** – cut across to give two halves and remove the flesh with a grapefruit knife, discarding any white pith.

**Melon** – cut in half and discard the seeds. Either make melon balls from the flesh, or cut it into chunks with a knife.

**Pineapple** – remove the skin and cut the fruit into neat chunks, discarding the core.

**Grapes** – wash the grapes. Small seedless ones can be left whole. Cut large grapes in half and remove any pips.

The fruit can be prepared a few hours in advance, and then stored in separate covered containers until needed. Fruit cocktail is more refreshing if served cold, so if possible the prepared fruit should be kept in a refrigerator. If there is not enough space, draping the containers with cold, wet tea towels will help to keep them cool.

### **Dishing up fruit cocktail**

Drain the fruit and pour the juices into a measuring jug to use later. Take a container of fruit and portion a little into each dish, until it is all used up. Do the same with the fruit in the other containers, so that all the dishes have the same variety of fruit, in similar proportions. Give each fruit cocktail a stir to mix up the fruit.

It is unlikely there will be enough fresh juice for all the cocktails, so you may need to add some orange, pineapple or grapefruit juice from a carton. It is worth making up about 10% more juice than you expect to need, so there is plenty for all the cocktails. Pour about 15ml / 1 tablespoon of juice over each fruit cocktail.

If you are short of suitable dishes, try using grapefruit skins. They are unbreakable and disposable - ideal for outdoor catering! For an attractive effect, cut the grapefruit round the middle with a zig-zag line. Remove the flesh and refill each half with fruit cocktail. Grapefruit skins often leak a little juice, so it is best to stand them on a small dish, and not add the juice until the last minute. Each half grapefruit will hold about 120g / 4oz of fruit cocktail.

### **Dishing up fruit cocktail**

How the fruit cocktails are decorated will depend on the type of fruit and the shape of the dishes. A decoration to give height and a contrast of colour is often the most suitable.

When calculating the proportions of fruit for the cocktail, you need to take into account any fruit being used as a decoration. For example, an orange and melon cocktail that is decorated with a twist of orange, needs to be made with a higher proportion of melon than orange, or it could seem rather 'orange heavy'.

If there is space in the refrigerator for the dishes, the fruit can be portioned out several hours before the meal, saving time later on.

Tinned pineapple chunks in natural juice make an acceptable substitute for fresh pineapple, especially if used as part of a mixed fruit cocktail. Putting the tins in the refrigerator the day before they are needed will ensure the pineapple, and its juice, is chilled ready for use.

## Melon boats

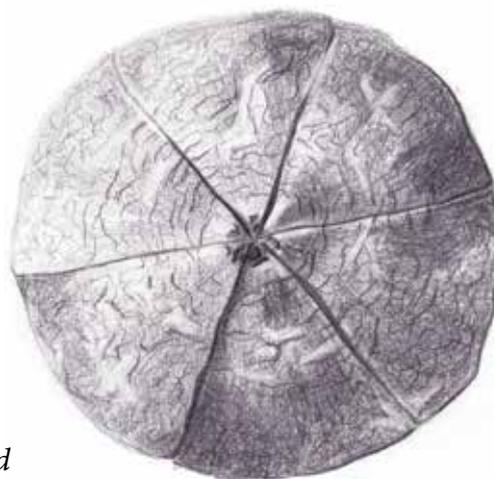
*This starter is fun to design and make and is ideal for a summer dinner or wedding.*

Whole melons weighing about 1.5kg / 3lb 6oz will make 6 boats.

Whole melons weighing about 900g / 2lb will make 4 boats.

### To make the melon boats

It is easier to cut the melon into even sized wedges if you score one end of it first, as a guide.

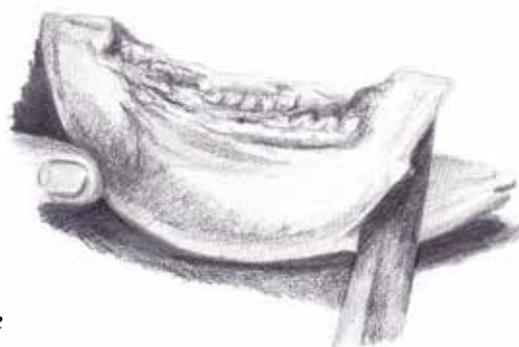


*Score the melon at one end*

Cut the melon into long wedges, and remove the pips.

If a wedge is wobbly, remove a small piece of skin from underneath, so it does not tip over.

Cut between the skin and the fruit of each wedge, to detach the fruit, but leave it in place.



*Detach the fruit but leave it in place*

Make cuts across the wedge, about 1cm / ½in apart, all the way from one end to the other.

If the melon wedge is a suitable shape, these narrow strips of melon can be pushed out sideways, alternating the sides, to give the impression of oars.

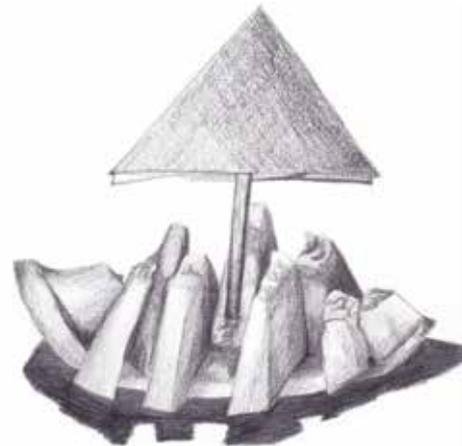
To make an edible sail, push a cocktail stick through opposite edges of an orange slice. Put a glacé cherry onto one end of the stick, and push the other end of the stick into the melon boat.

Decorate around the base of the mast with sliced fruit, for example, pieces of kiwi fruit, strawberry and pineapple.

To give the melon a more interesting flavour, you could slide some very thin slices of stem ginger between the 'oars'.



*An edible sail*



*Using a napkin as a sail*

### **Notes on the recipe**

The cutting of the melons can be done in advance. The sails can also be made ahead and secured onto the masts. After cutting, cover the melon wedges and orange sails with cling film to keep them moist.

A medium sized orange will give six or seven slices suitable for sails.

There are about 20 glacé cherries in 1 x 100g tub.

A sail for a melon boat can also be made from a small but good quality paper napkin. Cut a napkin into four quarters, and fold each piece twice, to give a triangular sail. These paper sails will need longer masts, which can be made from wooden skewers or spills, trimmed to a suitable length. The sails can be secured onto the masts with a dab of glue.

For Christmas, or a special celebration like a wedding, it can be fun to make the sails to suit the occasion.

## Egg mayonnaise

*Egg mayonnaise is a popular starter, and looks very attractive if it is well presented.*

Serves 20.

20 eggs, hard boiled and shelled

2 round lettuces

500g / 1lb 2oz mayonnaise

50g / 2oz salad cream

50ml / 2fl oz milk

Suggested garnish

700g / 1lb 8oz tomatoes

1 cucumber

40g / 1½oz parsley

2 tubs cress

paprika (very little is needed, 15g / ½oz is enough for nearly 100 eggs)

### Method

Thoroughly mix together the mayonnaise, salad cream and milk to make a sauce.

Put a leaf or two of lettuce on each plate, slightly to one side.

Cut each egg in half lengthways.

Place two halves, side by side, cut sides down, in the middle of each plate.

Using a dessert spoon, carefully pour a spoonful of sauce over each egg half, so that it forms a smooth coating.

If the sauce is too thick, add a little more milk.

Garnish each portion around the sides with three wedges of tomato, three slices of cucumber, a parsley sprig and a sprinkling of cress.

Just before serving, sprinkle the paprika over the egg.

If using a tub of paprika with a perforated top, sprinkle it straight from the tub.

Otherwise put about ½ teaspoon of paprika into a tiny, fine meshed sieve which is supported over a cup. Hold the sieve over the egg and gently tap it on one side to release a fine sprinkling of paprika.

### Notes on the recipe

Some of the eggs may crack open during cooking, so it is a good idea to boil about 10% more than you need. They will be difficult to shell unless they are cooled quickly after boiling, and with a large number of eggs, this can be a problem. One way is to tip them straight into a large container of very cold water, and keep changing the water as it warms up. Or you can tip them out of the pan into a large colander, and run cold water over them until they are cold. It will help if you can crack their shells as they go into cold water.

The eggs can be hard boiled and shelled several hours in advance, and put in the refrigerator. The sauce can also be made ahead, covered and refrigerated. The paprika should be sprinkled on shortly before service. If done earlier, it will run into the sauce and look most unattractive.

Because of the amount of work that has to be done shortly before service, egg mayonnaise is not the easiest starter to make in large numbers.

## Smoked mackerel mousse

*This recipe is easy to make, and although the mousse is quite rich, the flavour is pleasant without being too strong. This recipe can be made in fairy cake tins, or muffin tins, instead of special moulds. It can also be served as a pâté to spread on melba toast.*

Serves about 30.

700g / 1lb 8oz skinned smoked mackerel fillets  
4 eggs, hard boiled and shelled  
300g / 10½oz mayonnaise  
25g / 1oz gelatine powder\*  
140ml / ¼pt vegetable stock  
140ml / ¼pt double cream  
50g / 2oz margarine  
50g / 2oz flour (plain or self raising)  
550ml / 1pt milk  
pinch of salt, pepper and mace

\* If using a different type of gelatine, you need enough to set 2pt of liquid.

Suggested garnish  
3 round lettuces  
1kg / 2lb 4oz tomatoes  
1½ small cucumbers, or 1 long cucumber  
50g / 2oz parsley  
3 tubs cress  
4 lemons

### Method

Grease the required number of small moulds.  
Make a white sauce from the margarine, flour and milk, leave to cool.  
Flake the fish, discarding any small bones.  
Chop the hard boiled eggs, then mash well into the fish.  
Add the white sauce, mayonnaise and seasoning, stirring well.  
Thoroughly dissolve the gelatine in the stock and stir into the mixture.  
Lightly whip the cream and fold it in.  
Spoon the fish mousse into the moulds, smoothing the top of the mixture.  
Leave to set in a refrigerator.

To turn out the mousse, first run a flexible knife blade around the inside of the mould to loosen the mixture.

Then ease the mousse out of its mould, or invert the mould over a board, and shake well. If the mousse does not come out, dip the bottom of the mould briefly in very hot water.

Once the mousse has been removed from the mould, it can be smoothed over with a knife dipped in hot water.

Garnish each portion with lettuce, three wedges of tomato, three slices of cucumber, a lemon wedge or slice, a parsley sprig and a sprinkling of cress.

**Notes on the recipe**

Smoked mackerel mousse can be made a day or two ahead and refrigerated, and it also freezes well, either in its moulds, or after turning out. If it is frozen in its moulds, it is easier to turn out while still partly frozen. Leave it to finish thawing on a board or plate.

**Stuffed eggs**

Makes about 20.

**Method**

Hard boil and shell 10 eggs.

Cut them in half lengthways.

Remove the yolks, put them in a bowl with any whites that have broken, and add about 50g / 2oz of salad cream or mayonnaise.

Mash them together.

Keep adding a little more salad cream or mayonnaise until the mixture is very smooth, and of a piping consistency.

Using a large star nozzle, pipe the mixture back into the empty egg whites.

**Notes on the recipe**

If there is not enough mixture to fill all the egg whites, empty ones can be filled with something different, for example prawns or grated cheese.

If several egg whites break, you may end up with too much filling. It can be used to fill tomato halves, celery boats, or sandwiches.

If numbers are critical, it is worth boiling some extra eggs to allow for wastage. There are tips on hard boiling a large number of eggs on page 50.

**Filled tomatoes**

Makes 20, using 10 firm, red tomatoes, weighing about 70g / 2½oz each.

**Method**

With a thin serrated knife, cut a zig-zag round the centre of each tomato and pull the two halves apart. Scoop out the flesh and pips, and fill with something of a contrasting colour, for example:

**Prawns in mayonnaise** – 280g / 10oz of shelled prawns (if using frozen prawns, this is the thawed and drained weight) mixed with 140g / 5oz of mayonnaise.

**Cottage cheese** – 425g / 15oz.

**Sweetcorn kernels** – 250g / 9oz drained weight.

## Party mushrooms

Makes 25.

25 firm mushrooms, about 5cm / 2in across  
850ml / 1½pt vegetable stock (approx)  
200g / 7oz soft cream cheese  
small amount of mayonnaise or double cream (if needed)  
pinch of salt and pepper

### Method

Remove the mushroom stalks as close to the caps as possible.

Put both caps and stalks in a pan and cover with stock.

Bring to the boil and simmer for 10 min.

Lift them out and leave to drain on a wire rack.

When cool, put the mushroom caps upside down on a board or plate.

Mix the cream cheese with the seasoning, and if necessary add a little mayonnaise or double cream to give a piping consistency.

Using a large star nozzle, pipe a swirl of cheese where each stalk came from.

Push the stalks back in, and serve as upside down mushrooms.

## Celery boats filled with cream cheese

Makes 25.

5 sticks of celery  
200g / 7oz cream cheese  
small amount of mayonnaise

### Method

Trim and wash the celery.

Slice a thin strip off the underside of each stalk, from one end to the other, so the boats will sit firmly without rolling about.

Mix the cream cheese with the seasoning, and if necessary add a little mayonnaise or double cream to give a piping consistency.

Using a large star nozzle, pipe the cheese into the celery, either straight along the groove of the stalk, or in a zig zag pattern from side to side.

Cut each stalk into five pieces.

Either leave the stalks plain or decorate them with a sprinkling of paprika or finely chopped parsley.