



Tonia George's KEDGEREE

Some classic dishes just shouldn't be tampered with – one of them is this infinitely satisfying combination of rice, eggs and smoked fish. Made the traditional way, it's the stuff of breakfast legend

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MYLES NEW FOOD STYLING BY TONIA GEORGE

Among the most depressing concoctions I've ever had the displeasure of tasting in a restaurant was a turret of kedgerree lapped by a moat of pure smoked-haddock foam. I could just about cope with my miniature fishy sandcastle, but the foam was taking it a step too far. For kedgerree is the antithesis of all that foam represents. It is comfort food built to satiate, whereas foam is like someone who peppers their conversation with redundant

long words. It dilutes something simple and pleasing into something very dull. Kedgerree was one of the first dishes I ever cooked. At the age of 12 and under the supervision of my mother's Robert Carrier book, I rustled up a particularly lurid version of the classic. Heavily scented with curry powder, the slender grains of basmati rice gleamed with butter and golden egg yolk. It delighted all who tasted it and I basked in the reflected glory. Suddenly I realised this

cooking lark was far more empowering than the dance routines that had previously put me in the spotlight. The fluorescent leotards and sweatbands were swiftly traded in. Maybe it's the same drive for glory that motivates chefs to try to revamp the humble kedgerree. Gordon's 'posh kedgerree' is accessorised with fancy quail's eggs; Nigella's sees off the smoky haddock with salmon fancified by Thai frippery, and the food writer Lindsey Bareham cloaks hers in a thick white sauce. It makes me wonder whether these esteemed recipe-writers, like pushy parents, really have this dish's best interests at heart? Or perhaps this is history repeating itself; for kedgerree started its life on the subcontinent as *khichhari*, a humble dish of rice and lentils. Then in a frenzy of Anglo-Indian mania it was promoted onto the breakfast table. Quite how fish (first fresh, then smoked) came to be involved is a matter for discussion – some argue that the dish as we know it has Scottish roots. The breakfast timing is explained by the need for fresh fish to be served early in the day in hot climates with poor refrigeration. It's ironic that chefs feel the need to dazzle us with reinventing the wheel, when a plain old kedgerree is in fact a great test of any cook's skills. It requires a range of honed techniques, from one for boiling an egg to one for cooking rice. A perfect boiled egg with a creamy, set white and a golden, barely set yolk requires patience and is quite an achievement. (The trick I have settled on is gently simmering the egg for four minutes, then leaving it in the water for another eight.) Transforming rice into fluffy, opalescent grains requires a similar approach: the grains are simmered for just five minutes before being left to steam in the residual moisture. The rice needs to be dry to absorb the aromatics. Too many kedgerree recipes see cream wilfully splashed in at the end. I don't doubt it's a crowd-pleaser, but cream is an easy disguise for an underlying deficit of flavour; it is the dead giveaway of a rushed kedgerree, just as it is when used in a bad risotto. I start my kedgerree with a buttery tangle of caramelised onions – after all, *khichhari* starts with onions cooked in ghee. I even add extra butter, as in the *mantecare* stage of risotto, at the end – I balance this with a final spritz of lemon juice and sometimes serve it with mango chutney for sweetness. So, although I empathise with the urge to impress and innovate, I also believe that some classics deserve respect. By all means tinker with the balance of spices, even try a different smoked fish, but chefs everywhere, I implore you, leave your quail's eggs and foam frothers out of this.

- SERVES 4
- PREPARATION: 15 MINUTES
- COOKING: 45 MINUTES

- 50g Butter
- 2 Large onions, thinly sliced
- 175g Rice
- 4 Eggs
- 450g Smoked haddock
- 200ml Whole milk
- 4 tsp Mild curry powder
- 8 Cardamom pods
- 3 Bay leaves
- 1½ Lemons, juice of ½, 1 cut into wedges
- 15g Curly parsley, chopped

Melt 25g butter in a casserole dish on a low heat, add the onions, stir and cover. Cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the onions are soft. Meanwhile, bring a small pan of water to the boil for the eggs. Put the rice, 250ml cold water and a pinch of salt in another pan with a tight-fitting lid. Bring to the boil, cover and turn the heat down to low for 5 minutes. Take off the heat; leave with the lid on for at least 10 minutes. Add the eggs to the boiling water; turn it down to a gentle simmer with infrequent bubbles. Leave for

4 minutes, take off the heat, cover, and leave for 8 minutes. Put the fish in a frying pan, skin-side down; pour on the milk and enough boiling water to cover. Bring to the boil, then heat without boiling for 3–4 minutes until the thickest part is not transparent. Drain; remove the skin and any bones. Drain the eggs and run under cold water. Peel, quarter, then set aside. Add the spices and bay leaves to the onion and turn up the heat. Cook for 2 minutes, stirring, until the onions are golden. Add the rice and stir well. Flake the haddock into chunks and fold into the rice with the eggs. Anoint everything with lemon juice and dot with the remaining butter. Shower with the parsley and serve with the lemon wedges.

PER SERVING 490 KCALS/20G FAT/10G SATURATED FAT/6G SALT/2.6G SUGARS

Wine This full-flavoured white with its subtle smoky flavour is just right here. **Louis Jadot Mâcon-Azé 2007 France. Bin 25055; £8.99.**

Love Your Food Use up your leftovers! See page 77 for recipe suggestions.

