



"I propose a toast..."

Our heritage food contributor, Karen Dudley of Woodstock's The Kitchen, contemplates her gratitude and deep affection for the many loaves that have seen her through life.

By the time she had laid out my whole-wheat toast with avo and tea, my housemate and friend Andrea had already exercised, had her own (much healthier) breakfast and (no doubt) already organised her day and studies.

Our digs in Observatory, Cape Town was pretty respectable as far as digs go, but I was in a bad way: my chef/proprietor future as yet unimagined, my loving friend was holding my falling-apart student career together with toast.

"Right Duds, you have a tutorial at 11 o'clock and you need to hand in your psychology essay tomorrow," she would remind me, encouragingly. And being on the brink of resignation, I leaned into her kindness and savoured the toast she had made me as if it were manna. This liberally buttered creamy-crispy offering steadied me. Call me brittle but toast has, over the course of my life, always been a grounding presence.

The truth is that all I ever really want is toast. There's little it cannot fix. Toast offers succour, comfort and (often snatched) sustenance. A little catch-up with a friend at the kitchen counter? Toast. A little celebration? Toast. Tough day at work? Toast. Hungry after school? Toast. A difficult conversation? Toast.

When I consider all the toast I've eaten in my life – loaves and loaves and loaves of crisp! – I realise that it's the most personal of foods. For one, I eat it daily. It is my breakfast of choice. It is one of the few things I make for myself every day. And who can fathom the peculiarities of how I would like my toast at any particular time, so great are the variables of choice: rye or wholewheat, thinly sliced, with cheddar? Or just barely toasted ciabatta with a generous dollop of melting butter? Or a shop-toaster slice heavy with toppings? It is an intensely private business.

And what about the French toast, toasted sandwiches or *braai broodjies* in our collective food memory! The toasting devices, loved or hated, and the distinct smell of burnt toast reminding you that where there is a toaster, there is very likely a home...

As a child, I spent hours marvelling at my grandmother's round, four-door, manual rotation toaster. In my family home, the toaster was always central. It had to be near the breakfast table. Why get up constantly to get toast when it should be right at hand? When I opened my shop, this sentiment was a guiding consideration. We had two toasters right at the tables, should anyone have forgotten to eat their breakfast. It was a kitchen, after all!

To this day, along with the toaster we still have a tray of spreads – themselves reflecting the seasons of our lives: Bovril, Peanut Butter, Nutella, Apricot Jam, Marmalade, Creamed Honey, Peck's Anchovette, *Konfyt*, good cheese and always, of course, butter.

My mother and I are also big believers in the Toast Rack – you definitely don't want your toast lying down and getting soggy. And we discovered another essential toast tool: bamboo tongs. These are indispensable for unsticking a piece of toast or the wedged hot cross bun from the toaster.

Toast affirms two other fundamental things. Firstly, redemption: taking a slightly or downright stale piece of bread and transforming it into something simply heavenly. And also thankfulness: a daily reminder of providence – food to eat and the assurance that more might come tomorrow.

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Karen's favourite!

Anchovy toast

Dress a slice of toast with a little garlic vinaigrette, sliced tomatoes and anchovy fillets then grill and finish with your best olive oil, salt and black pepper, and some torn basil leaves.

Mushroom toast

Fry sliced mushrooms in butter, adding salt and white pepper when the mushrooms are nearly done. You want buttery not watery mushrooms!

Avo toast

Butter, beautiful avocado slices, a drizzle of olive oil, salt and black pepper.

Mediterranean magic

Experiment with salami, roasted aubergine slices, soft Danish feta, rocket and olive oil or your favourite vinaigrette for a winning combination.

Bananas in pyjamas

Try rye toast with cream cheese, sliced bananas, honey and gomashio (sesame and salt toasted in a pan and roughly ground together). Yum!

To roast aubergine slices: brush with vegetable oil, arrange in a single layer on a baking sheet lined with baking paper and blast roast at 220°C for 10–15 minutes. Turn the slices over and roast for another 6–10 minutes. 📌

Salami, roasted aubergine slices, soft Danish feta, rocket and olive oil