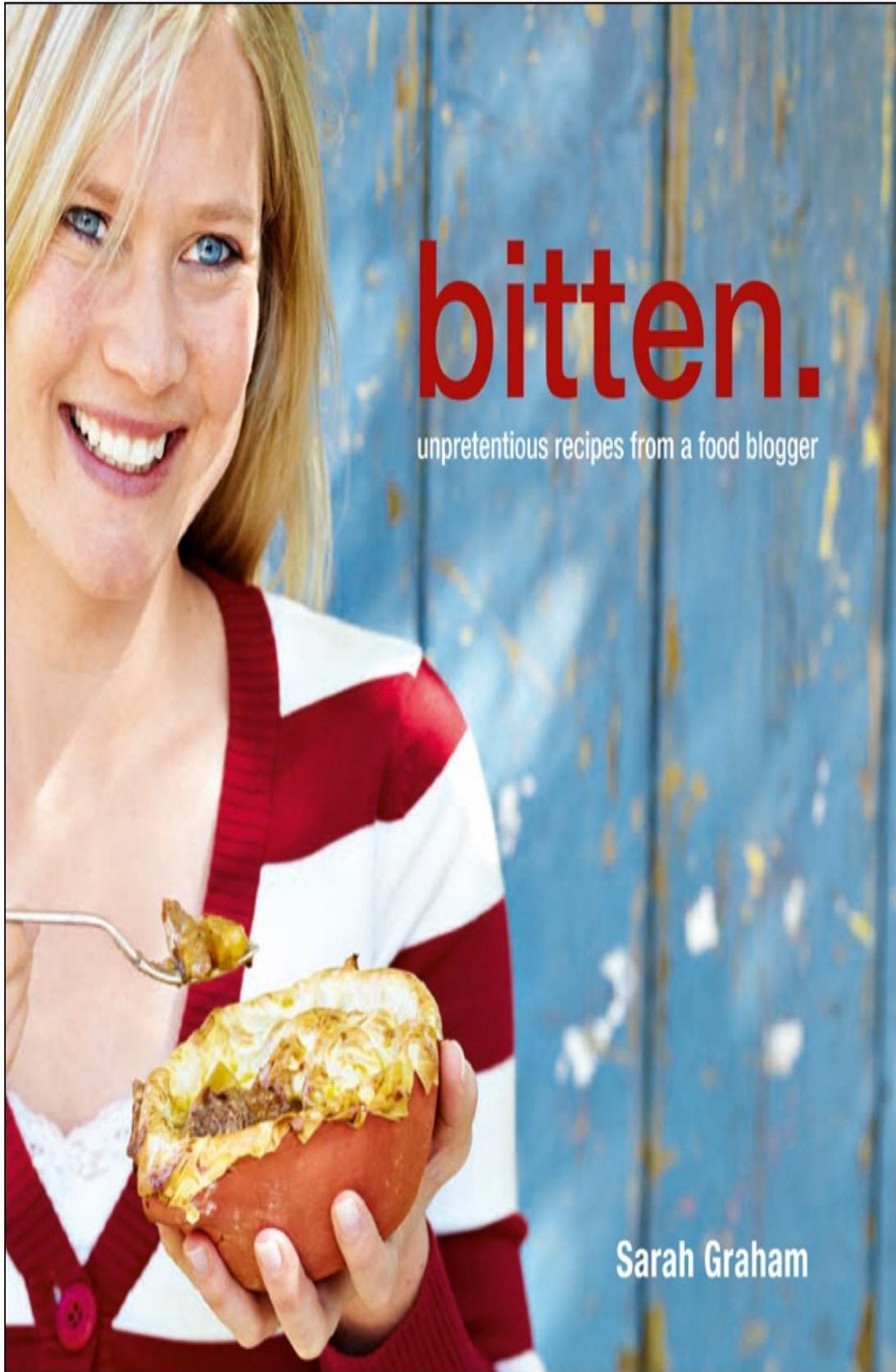




bitten.

unpretentious recipes from a food blogger

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*For Rob and Sophie, my family and friends.
Without all of you food would be a meaningless means to an end.
With you it is the canvas to countless colourful moments around full and happy tables.*

Sarah Graham

Thank you to Linda and her amazing team from Struik Lifestyle for believing in me and giving me such an incredible opportunity. Thank you to the always-inspiring Franck Dangereux for your foreword and encouragement.

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FOREWORD.

In this age of information overload, where social networks have made it possible for people to share everything from their most banal happenings to more personal secrets, secrets that were once written in journals and kept under lock and key, the gates have opened for everyone to share their opinions. The bloggers found their voice and, to my surprise, have brought a refreshing and positive outlook on the food and restaurant scene, raving about good things and sharing tips rather than dwelling on negative bad experiences. They talk about *bien vivre* and *bien manger* and great markets.

I met Sarah. She loves to eat, loves to cook, loves to give and loves to write about it.

This is good. When a great cook who is not a professional cook embarks on a food crusade, in doing so she cuts right down to the essential: simple; in the words of Auguste Escoffier, probably his two most famous words, 'faites simple'. The Frenchman intended to say that the avoidance of all unnecessary complications is key to a soul-fulfilling dish, that the overall process of cooking must exude great care and regard to the quality of the materials, but without too much extravagance; great ingredients cooked with love in a simple way so that they taste how they should.

Sarah and I are very much alike in our food philosophies. I love food that is civilized, without being pretentious ... that is to say it has natural tastes, smells and textures, and much character ... often it looks beautiful too. What is paramount is that it is prepared with respect, savvy and love ...

Sarah's fresh approach to cooking shows us that in our kitchens we are not alone, we bring memories, moments, happy and sad and poignant ... In this, *Bitten*, allows you to FEEL the procedure of cooking and the pleasure of eating.

This book is about more than just recipes; it's an account of sorts, with heartfelt anecdotes and a certain *je ne sais quoi* that reveals how simple food without pretence is the perfect palette for creating memories with family and friends that last a lifetime.

And just as guests are welcome at my restaurant fresh off the beach, sand between their toes, kids and dogs in tow, Sarah welcomes you to her kitchen table just as you are. Her uncomplicated love for food and her chatty, self-deprecating, unpretentious approach will make you feel like you're spending time with an old friend.

In essence, *Bitten*, is the antithesis to intimidating food; you will enjoy feasting on these down-to-earth, happy-making recipes for feeding people you love.

Franck Dangereux

Franck Dangereux started La Colombe at Constantia Uitsig in 1996, annually voted one of the best restaurants in South Africa over the last six years. In 2006 he made it to 28th on the list of the world's 50 best restaurants. Franck is now chef patron of the renowned Cape Town restaurant The Foodbarn, along with his business partner Pete.

INTRODUCTION.



It all started with a blog. My blog, that is, afoodieliveshere.com. And then a book proposal, which was accepted. And then I wrote the book. Just. Like. That! (Or very obviously not.) And now here we are ...

This book is for people who love life, love food, love their friends and love to squeeze the last drop from their time and money. In its pages you'll find a no-mess no-fuss pretentious-less tribute to wholesome and simple comfort food. I think of it as a quirky cross between a food memoir and a cookbook with delicious, un-intimidating recipes.

My mom always says that there are people who eat to live, and people who live to eat ... I am delighted to say that I am undoubtedly and shamelessly the latter. I'm also delighted that my dear Mom has so lovingly archived so many of her own recipes over the years, many of which you'll find here. I have spent countless hours in the kitchen indulging this passion, and blogging about it, so this book is an extension of my delight in sharing my discoveries and my conviction that anyone can cook delicious, wholesome food.

And perhaps I'll start with a proviso ... I love food. I am not a chef. So please don't hold me accountable for any of your kitchen calamities. Just like I now scorn the chef who published the 'idiot-proof chocolate cake' recipe, because of my shame at having botched it. Totally and utterly.

And then there's Rob.

He's my legendary husband. A regular bloke (well, way above regular in many ways, that's why I married him) in the sense that he loves food, rugby, fishing, beer, wine ... all that blokey stuff. And he's my resident taster. He's super fun to feed as he'll honestly try anything. He's also brutally honest about the results of my culinary creations and has his own repertoire of recipes that would blow your socks off.

In our kitchen we are never alone; we have memories, happy and sad. My love for food is inextricably bound to the pleasures of friendship and great company.

Sarah Graham

FELLOW FOODIE BLOGGERS.

Blogging is interactive. Well, mostly. Bloggers are usually interested in other bloggers and we all chat away in the blogosphere of our choice. In this case, it's the ever-growing foodie one. I wouldn't be anywhere without my foodie-blogger friends and gurus, and so I thought it only fitting to showcase a few other South African food-blogging talents here. I've chosen five of my favourite bloggers and have included one recipe from each of them in the book. Without them, I honestly think this book would be two-dimensional.

And so let me introduce you, in no particular order ...

SARAH DUFF, VEGGIE DELISH

<http://www.veggiedelish.com>

"I love food – thinking about it, cooking it, reading about it and photographing it. I'm a pescatarian (I eat fish and dairy, but no meat) but I cook mostly vegetarian food, and that's what my blog is focused on. Although I love spending time in the kitchen, I don't have the patience for time-consuming complicated cooking, so I choose recipes and adapt them to make them as easy and unfussy as possible. I'm always conscious of eating the right things, and I try to make my cooking healthy without sacrificing taste.

I try to buy seasonally as much as possible, because it's better for the environment and the produce is tastier and healthier. The same goes for organic food, where possible (there isn't a huge range in South Africa yet)."

Sarah's day job is working for the South African *Getaway* magazine.

ANDY FENNER, JAMIE WHO

<http://aficionado.co.za/jamiewho>

"In his short career as a food writer, Andy – writing under the pseudonym of Jamie Who – has been featured in/written for *Men's Health*, *Women's Health*, *Food&Home*, *WINE*, *House&Leisure*, *Eat Out*, and the *Eat Out* and *Eat In* newsletters.

He was recently named one of the '200 Young South Africans you must take for lunch' by the *Mail & Guardian* and he says he is expecting your invitation!

He is a true foodie, with a strong emphasis on ethical farming and eating. He believes people should pay more attention to where the food on their plate comes from, but at the same time believes 'anybody can cook'. As a result, his tone is deliberately laid back and informal."

JANE-ANNE HOBBS-RAYNER, SCRUMPTIOUS

<http://whatsforsupper-juno.blogspot.com>

"I'm a freelance journalist, editor and author, a cook, food writer and recipe developer, and a mother of three. I've lived in Johannesburg for the past 17 years, and have recently moved, with my family, to Hout Bay, which is about half an hour's drive from the centre of Cape Town, South Africa.

I've been cooking since I was nine or so, but it's only in the last 12 years that cookery has turned from a hobby into something of an obsession. And no, I'm not going to say, like those annoying TV cooks, that I am 'passionate' about food, fresh local ingredients and punchy flavours. (Duh! Doesn't every cook feel that way?) I'm enthusiastic, yes, but I think the word 'passion' should be reserved for activities that involve reading books or removing your knickers.

I can say that I do love food, especially simple home cooking that warms your heart and makes your tastebuds sing. All I want from a plate of food is that it tastes really good, feels lovely on your tongue and fills your stomach with joy."

ALIDA RYDER, SIMPLY DELICIOUS

<http://simply-delicious.co.za/>

"I am a 24-year-old mother of twins, Aidan and Abigail. They are absolutely the most important little things in my life (after my husband) and without them my life would be a whole lot more boring ... I'm married to my soul mate (yes, I do believe in soul mates), whom I met when I was 17.

Now the part that most of you are interested in. My relationship with food. It started when I was very young, maybe five or six, when I used to BEG my gran to bake cookies with me. My gran was so incredibly patient with me; the kitchen is a magical place where a whole lot can be forgiven. She had the same passion for food as I have. Her whole life was spent either owning a hotel and running the kitchen or running a catering business. Sunday lunches at her house were filled with tables creaking under the immense amount of food piled on top of them and people bustling to get to them. Memories that I will ALWAYS savour."

Voted Best South African Food & Wine Blog 2010 and Best South African New Food Blog 2010.

NINA TIMM, MY EASY COOKING

<http://www.my-easy-cooking.com>

"Growing up as a country girl in a huge Afrikaner family, my passion for food is so deeply rooted, that it has become an all-consuming hobby/career. To socialise with friends and family without good food being part of the celebration is almost unthinkable. I grew up with wholesome food with tons of flavour and to this day bland food will not be honoured with a place on my plate."

Nina has been a featured publisher on Foodbuzz and her website has been referred to in the Woolworths *TASTE* magazine. Nina has also been nominated twice for the South African Food Blogger of the Year award. She was a guest speaker at the first South African Food Bloggers Conference in 2010 and again in 2011, and was a special guest at the South African Eat In and Eat Out Awards in 2010. Proof of Nina's Cape Town roots is her most-read post for breyani, which had in excess of 27 000 hits over 48 hours.

CONVERSION TABLE

Metric	US cups	Imperial
5 ml	1 tsp	1 tsp
15 ml	1 Tbsp	1 Tbsp
60 ml	4 Tbsp (¼ cup)	2 fl oz
80 ml	½ cup	2¾ fl oz
125 ml	½ cup	4½ fl oz
160 ml	¾ cup	5½ fl oz
200 ml	¾ cup	7 fl oz
250 ml	1 cup	9 fl oz

A FEW TIPS TO SEND YOU ON YOUR MERRY WAY.

KEEP IT TIDY

Clean up as you go along; this means you won't get to the end of the cooking process and your kitchen looks like a bomb went off. I usually keep the bin in the middle of the kitchen floor when I'm cooking, so I can just discard things quickly and easily as I go along.

THINK AHEAD

If we are having people round, I always lay the table before I start cooking; this means that on the odd occasion when you are still enshrouded in steamy kitchen chaos and hear their knock at the door, it still looks like you're ready for them.

WELL-LOVED FOOD

Wherever possible I encourage you to explore where the food you are buying comes from, and to opt for well-loved ingredients.

THINK THIN(NER)

All cottage cheese, cream cheese and yoghurt are fat-free or low-fat unless otherwise stated.

THANK ME LATER

I have thought through each and every recipe included here and given you a 'meals for a month' plan (see page [172](#)). This includes speedy suppers for week nights and lazy weekend food.

'TIL THE LAST BITE

Always make sure you read the recipe the whole way through before you start cooking. I am a classic culprit for always wanting to get right to the good stuff and have learned this the hard way!

GET THE GEAR

Being efficient in the kitchen is a whole world easier when you have what you need at your fingertips – you'll be more likely to cook and you'll save money by not eating out as often. That said, you can improvise in a lot of areas, so don't be put off if you don't have some of these things or can't afford them at this stage. Check out my kitchen and baking starter kits on page [11](#) for the basics.

BASIC COOKING TERMS.

WHAT IS AL DENTE?

An understanding of this term is vital if you're ever going to have anything to do with pasta, ever. Here's how Adam Roberts, one of my favourite American food bloggers, describes it: 'You want it to be al dente – which means to the tooth. You want to feel the bite, but you don't want it to be raw. Keep tasting and checking and you'll know: when the spaghetti tastes like how you'd want spaghetti to taste – resilient and snappy, not spongy or wormy.' www.amateurgourmet.com

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PUFF PASTRY AND PHYLLO PASTRY?

Puff pastry is a thick, rich, flaky, buttery pastry, the type that croissants are made of. Phyllo pastry, also spelled filo, is tissue-thin pastry dough usually used in a variety of sweet and savoury Greek and Middle Eastern dishes.

WHAT DOES SAUTÉ MEAN?

Ah, zee French! This one means 'fry quickly in a little bit of hot oil'. Oh, and it also means 'to jump'. I guess you could say you make things jump around in the hot pan and oil? Quite a cute picture.

WHAT DOES COULIS MEAN?

The word originates from the French verb meaning 'to strain' and is a form of thick sauce made from puréed and often strained vegetables or fruits. Coulis can be sweet or savoury, for example sweet berry coulis to drizzle over ice cream, mini pavlovas or pancakes.

QUANTITIES OF FRESH VS DRIED HERBS

You'll notice that I use a LOT of fresh herbs in my recipes. That doesn't mean that you need to come undone if you don't have them, you can usually get away by substituting a third of the fresh herbs for dried herbs, as dried herbs usually have a more intense flavour than fresh.

RESTING MEAT

The difference it makes to any meat if you give it a chance to rest for 5–10 minutes, covered loosely with clingfilm or tin foil, is significant. This ensures the meat remains tender, moist and juicy. Also remember it carries on cooking a little after removing from the heat and during resting, so, for example, if you would like your meat medium-rare, take it off slightly sooner and by the time it's finished resting it should be just right.

BASIC BAKING TIPS.

BAKING AT SEA LEVEL

Each and every oven is different, and it takes a little time to get to know yours, as does figuring out your oven's behaviour at sea level. A basic rule of thumb is to add slightly more raising agent and cook on a slightly lower temperature if you are having any issues with basic recipes. All the recipes in this book have been tested at sea level.

GREASING TINS

The easiest method is to take a small square of greaseproof baking paper and a small dollop of butter and work your way around the tin using the paper to hold the butter and smother the surface of the tin gently. I also regularly use non-stick cooking spray.

WHAT DOES CREAMING BUTTER AND SUGAR MEAN?

This means beating them together in a mixing bowl with an electric hand or stand mixer, adding in the sugar a little at a time until well blended, fluffy, smooth and creamy.

BASIC BUTTER-CREAM ICING

This can be easily made using a ratio of about 3:1 of sifted icing sugar to butter, for example 1 cup icing sugar to $\frac{1}{3}$ cup butter. Blend by adding about 1 Tbsp hot water and flavour as you like with vanilla essence, lemon juice and zest, etc.

WHAT DOES WHISKING MEAN?

Whisking is used to blend ingredients together or to incorporate air into a mixture using a whisk – a cooking utensil with a narrow handle and a series of wire loops joined at the end.

WHAT ON EARTH IS BLIND BAKING?

Blind baking means baking a pie or tart crust without the filling so that it firms up and doesn't go soggy when you add the filling. As pastry usually shrinks when blind baking, be generous with your pastry, and then either prick it a good few times with a fork before baking or line with baking paper and a layer of lentils or small pebbles to prevent shrinkage. I usually go for the fork method.

TYPES OF FLOUR

Cake flour is the same as regular flour. For cake flour to have the same raising capacity as self-raising, add 1 tsp baking powder to every 100 g cake flour. Self-raising flour has extra raising agents included already.

CAKE TESTING

A cake is usually done when you insert a skewer or sharp knife into the middle and it comes out clean, or if you gently push the top with your finger and it 'pops' back out.

KITCHEN STARTER KIT.

This section is a little companion of convenience as you learn to meander your way through all manner of kitchen idiosyncrasies. All of these should be easily available at your local supermarket or homeware stores.

Equipment: hand/stick blender; electric hand or standing beater; round and square baking tins, loaf tin and 12-hole muffin tin; kitchen scale, preferably electric; grater and small fine grater, used for zesting; set of measuring spoons and cups; 1-litre glass microwave-proof measuring jug; rolling pin; pastry brush; whisk; kitchen scissors; assortment of sharp knives, especially paring and carving knives; wire sieve; colander – generally used for draining vegetables and pasta when cooked; good-quality vegetable peeler; good-quality potato masher; array of wooden spoons, spatulas and a good ladle

INGREDIENTS

In your spice cupboard: dried chilli flakes | coriander | cumin | masala | turmeric | curry powder | cinnamon | nutmeg | dried mixed herbs | black peppercorns | coarse salt

Around and about: fresh garlic | fresh ginger | lemons | limes

Oils and sauces: olive oil | sesame oil | thai fish sauce | green curry paste | soy sauce | thai sweet chilli sauce

Vinegars: white and red wine vinegar | balsamic vinegar

In the freezer: Frozen peas | phyllo pastry | puff pastry

BAKING STARTER KIT.

If you'd like to give baking a bash, here are a few things you'll find useful.

Apron: because you just wouldn't be a bona fide cook without one, now would you?!

Flours and whites: self-raising flour | regular all-purpose flour (i.e. cake flour) | baking powder | bicarbonate of soda | gelatine powder | yeast sachets

Sugars: light brown sugar | castor sugar | icing sugar | old-fashioned brown or muscovado sugar

Essences: vanilla essence | almond essence

Dried fruit: cranberries | apricots | raisins

Chocolate: good-quality dark and milk chocolate (2 large slabs of each)

Dairy: eggs | unsalted butter (never cook with margarine; it's just not done) | fat-free plain yoghurt | cream | buttermilk (you can make your own buttermilk by adding 1 Tbsp white vinegar or lemon juice to 1 litre milk and let it stand for 10 minutes) | fat-free cream cheese | fat-free smooth cottage cheese | mascarpone cheese | assorted cheeses

Nuts and seeds: slivered almonds | whole almonds (unsalted) | walnuts (unsalted) | pecan nuts (unsalted) | cashew nuts (unsalted) | poppy seeds | sesame seeds | sunflower seeds | pumpkin seeds

Other: greaseproof baking paper | clingfilm | tin foil | muffin papers | cupcake cases

BRUNCH.



baked 'faux' FRENCH TOAST.

This is a handy twist on traditional French toast, and you can watch it bake instead of slaving over the stove. You will then have no trouble scoffing the spoils of your un-arduous labour, trust me. If you prefer baking in individual ramekins, just layer the bread roughly.

Serves 4 | Preparation time 10–15 minutes | Cooking time 30 minutes



WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- ½–⅔ loaf sliced bread (I use wholewheat, but white will also do)
- 3 cups milk
- 3 eggs
- 3 Tbsp light brown sugar
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon + extra for sprinkling
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp vanilla essence or extract
- ¼ cup slivered almonds

WHAT TO DO

1. Generously grease or line a large, shallow ovenproof baking dish (20 x 30 cm) with baking paper and preheat the oven to 200 °C.
2. Cut the crusts off the bread slices and halve each slice diagonally into a triangle.

3. Layer the bread in the dish, left to right and top to bottom, with the base of one triangle just under the point of the one below, so that they are slightly raised at the point.
4. Combine the milk, eggs, sugar, cinnamon, salt and vanilla essence, and pour over the bread. Sprinkle the top with more cinnamon and scatter over the almonds.
5. Bake for 30 minutes, turning over the slices halfway, until fluffy, slightly crispy and golden.
6. Serve with syrup, fresh berries, crème fraîche or mascarpone.

FROZEN FRUIT SKEWERS

with honey yoghurt.

Serves 4 | Preparation time 5 minutes

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

1 cup grapes
1 cup cubed watermelon
½ cup halved strawberries
½ cup raspberries
16 bamboo skewers, the thinnest you can find
½ cup plain yoghurt
1 Tbsp honey

WHAT TO DO

1. Skewer the fruit, alternating between the different types. Once each skewer is full, cut it in half with kitchen scissors.
2. Place in a Tupperware container and freeze for a minimum of 1 hour, or even overnight or a couple of days in advance.
3. When ready to serve, mix the yoghurt and honey, and tip into a small dish. Layer the skewers on a serving platter and serve with the honey yoghurt for drizzling over.