

the life.

MARK ROPER



WILD AT HEART

In the half-decade since chef Palisa Anderson turned her back on a corporate career to found biodynamic Boon Luck Farm in Byron Bay, she's become one of Australia's most recognised experts on sustainable farming and fare.

Anderson, here with her family's dog Frida, wears a Zimmermann dress and her own boots.



cultivating change

HER ORGANIC FARM IN BYRON BAY SUPPLIES TOP RESTAURANTS AND A-LIST CUSTOMERS, INCLUDING CHRIS HEMSWORTH, BUT CHEF **PALISA ANDERSON'S** PASSION LIES IN CREATING DELICIOUS, HEALTHY RECIPES THAT INSPIRE US TO DINE IN

by **RACHEL SHARP** photographed by **MARK ROPER** styled by **AMBER MACKAY**



Anderson worked with Landcare Australia to regenerate Boon Luck Farm's rainforest. OPPOSITE: Grilled silken eggplant and zucchini dengaku with miso and sesame dressing (recipe on p134)

Palisa Anderson has no problem letting her kids practise with knives. “The only rule is: you use it, you clean it, then sit it on the bench [sharp side] up,” she says pan-faced, with her signature dry humour. “I know that goes against every home-safety rule, but hey, you’ve got to mollycoddle your kitchen.”

For the 38-year-old mother of Soraya, 11, and Arthur, nine—who, for the record, learned to slice and dice in her entrepreneurial mother’s Chat Thai restaurant empire from age five—there’s nothing more important than teaching children the value of healthy cooking with organic ingredients. “I started to question what I was eating from a very young age because I grew up around it and had such a deep connection to the ingredients. Back then, things like wild basil were hard to find. The only place my mother could source from was people’s backyards. Now it’s stacked in Woolies in lots of little plastic sleeves, but I’d still rather grab a giant organic bouquet from a farmer’s bucket.”

That’s exactly what she does today through her certified organic Boon Luck Farm, a picturesque 43-hectare property in Byron Bay’s hinterland that supplies top restaurants (including her family’s) with ingredients. Fellow Byron locals Chris Hemsworth and Elsa Pataky are such fans that they invited her to be a sustainable eating expert on their fitness and lifestyle app, Centr. The *Avengers* actor has even been known to turn up to Boon Luck Farm after his morning surf to collect his family’s organic fare in person.



The farm looks “kinda messy and wild”, but that’s just how Anderson likes it. It’s also a nod to the fact she’s worked tirelessly with Landcare Australia to regenerate the rainforest on her property. Her surrounds are thriving despite drought issues in the area, a result Anderson pegs to much-researched biodynamic farming methods she says need very little water. In the five years since the Thai-born foodie and her New Zealand-born lawyer husband Matt moved their family north from Sydney, she’s fast become one of Australia’s most high-profile experts on sustainable farming. Last year, she was honoured at the *InStyle* and Audi Women of Style Awards, and in late 2018 she addressed 600 of the world’s best chefs and restaurateurs at René Redzepi’s sixth Copenhagen MAD symposium, after meeting the two-Michelin-starred chef when she supplied his Noma Sydney pop-up. Redzepi was blown away by her produce, expertise and commercial food philosophy.

“There are so many Asian-vegetable farmers who, unless they’re growing it to eat themselves, are just spraying it with a shitload of agricultural chemicals,” Anderson says. “It’s the same with fruit. I once went out to a top cherry [farm] where they warn you not



Mussels with nam prik pao and smoky chili jam (recipe on p134).
OPPOSITE: Observing her mother’s restaurant kitchens from a young age taught Anderson the value of quality organic produce



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Oyster sauce balances the sweet
leaves; som tum and green papaya
salad (recipe on p134); and stir-fried
angled luffa gourd, sweet leaf
with hen's egg (recipe on p134)



to touch the trees because they're sprayed with every sulfite, hormone, pesticide, insecticide and herbicide under the sun. The trees look beautiful, but the ground looks like concrete because of all the shit they put onto the soil, which is literally the opposite to organic farming. That's how mainstream agriculture orchards and vegetable farms work.

For Anderson, who studied a Bachelor of International Studies and Sports Biomechanics before embarking on a brief corporate career, growing and cooking her own healthy food has always been a deep-seated passion. Even while living in bustling Tokyo, New York, then later a second-floor apartment in Sydney, she filled every spare space with edible plants, in the latter case to the chagrin of the downstairs neighbour whose balcony was drenched when she watered.

Given her passion for gourmet dining, Anderson has shared some of her most moreish recipes on the following pages, with the hope they inspire you to embrace home-cooked, healthy food, too. It goes without saying she recommends using organic ingredients, but the option to enlist young helpers to slice and dice is entirely up to you.



ESPRESSO AND COCONUT GRANITA WITH COCONUT CREAM

Serves 2

1 young coconut
4 shots espresso
¼ cup tinned coconut cream
1 tsp salt

1 Drain coconut water into a deep, long loaf baking pan. **2** Pour espresso into coconut water and freeze over 2-3 hours. **3** Scrape out coconut meat and refrigerate in an airtight container. **4** When ready to serve, whisk coconut cream and salt. **5** Scrape frozen granita mixture into icy shards, then spoon into serving glasses, layering with the meat. **6** Drizzle with salted coconut cream and serve immediately.

THE RECIPES

GRILLED SILKEN EGGPLANT AND ZUCCHINI DENGAKU, WITH MISO AND SESAME DRESSING

Serves 4

- ½ cup red miso
- ¼ cup rice vinegar
- ¼ cup mirin
- 4 tbsp honey or coconut nectar
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 medium-sized Thai silken green long eggplants, halved lengthwise
- 4 green onions, thinly sliced
- 2 medium-sized zucchini, halved lengthwise
- 4 tbsp black or white sesame seeds, toasted
- sesame oil

1 Whisk together miso, rice vinegar, mirin and honey/nectar to make a sauce, then set aside. **2** Heat a large cast-iron skillet with sides until very hot, add olive oil for a minute, then place eggplant and zucchini with cut side down. **3** Grill for 5 mins, turn and cook for a further 3 mins over a medium heat. They should be golden brown with deep grill marks on the cut side. **4** Plate up vegies and pour sauce on top, sprinkle green onions and sesame seeds, and drizzle over sesame oil. Serve immediately. Keeps well in an airtight container for 3 days.

SOM TUM AND GREEN PAPAYA SALAD

Serves 2

- 150g hard green papaya
- 2 tbsp palm sugar, softened
- 3 garlic cloves
- 2 red bird's eye chillies
- handful snake beans cut into 3cm batons
- 1 tbsp dry-roasted peanuts
- 1 tbsp good-quality dried shrimp
- 4 halved organic cherry or grape tomatoes
- 2 tbsp Red Boat fish sauce
- 3 tbsp fresh organic lime juice
- 5 fresh blue butterfly pea flowers, optional

1 Using a crimp-edged vegetable peeler (I use the Kiwi brand, designed for green papaya), remove papaya's hard outer skin. Lightly shred 10cm threads into a bowl of cold water. Rinse shredded papaya until water runs clear. Drain and refrigerate. **2** Grind palm sugar, garlic and chilli with a mortar and pestle until a rough paste forms. **3** Add beans, peanuts and dried shrimp. Gently pound until slightly crushed and flattened. **4** Add halved tomatoes and gently crush until they release juice while remaining intact. Season with fish sauce and lime juice. **5** Using a large metal spoon, mix thoroughly until palm sugar has dissolved into the liquid. **6** Add shredded papaya straight from the fridge into mortar. Use spoon and pestle to lightly toss until papaya is coated with juices and pieces are equally dispersed through the salad. **7** Scoop out of mortar into a shallow rimmed plate, scatter with blue butterfly pea flower petals and serve immediately.

STIR-FRIED ANGLED LUFFA GOURD, SWEET LEAF WITH HEN'S EGG

Serves 2

- 3 tbsp macadamia or olive oil
- 5 cloves organic garlic, minced roughly
- 1 medium-sized organic angled luffa gourd (available at specialty Asian grocers)
- 2 packed cups leafy greens, like spinach
- 2 tbsp oyster sauce
- 1 tbsp fish sauce
- 1 tbsp rice vinegar or mirin
- ¼ tbsp white pepper, freshly ground
- 1-2 organic eggs, beaten

1 Heat oil in a seasoned wok on the highest heat element. When it starts to ripple, add garlic and stir until golden. **2** Place gourd, leafy greens, sauces, vinegar/mirin and pepper into the searing hot wok. Toss and turn for 1 min, then add eggs and agitate with a wooden spoon or spatula to break-up the egg so it's a scrambled consistency. **3** Remove from heat when gourds have softened and the egg is cooked to a scrambled consistency. Serve immediately.

TIP: "Pick a gourd with skin that hasn't fully hardened. Remove any tough skin with a potato peeler, then cut into uneven pieces."

MUSSELS WITH NAM PRIK PAO AND SMOKY CHILLI JAM

Serves 2

- 100g nam prik pao (smoked chilli jam)
- 2 tbsp macadamia oil
- 1 stem lemongrass, finely chopped
- 1kg green-lipped mussels, cleaned
- 4 tbsp fish sauce
- 4 tbsp mirin
- 2 long red chillies, finely sliced on angle
- 10 sprigs Thai basil leaves to garnish, stalks removed and leaves whole
- 8 kaffir (or makrut) lime leaves, roughly torn

1 Mix nam prik pao and macadamia oil in a frypan with the lid off on the highest heat element. Add lemongrass and fry for 2 mins, then add mussels, fish sauce and mirin, then cover with lid. **2** Count to 20 slowly, then remove lid when mussels have all opened. Add chillies, Thai basil and lime leaves. Serve and eat immediately.

PAVLOVA WITH PASSIONFRUIT CURD MASCARPONE, GRILLED BANANA AND FRESH MANGO

Serves 8-10

PASSIONFRUIT CURD

- 1 cup passionfruit pulp
- ¾ cup cultured butter
- ¼ cup sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- 1 tsp sea salt
- ¾ cup mascarpone

1 Whisk all but mascarpone over a bain-marie until set and jammy, then store in fridge. **2** When ready to serve, whisk in mascarpone, then layer over pavlova meringue.

PAVLOVA

- 1½ cup raw caster sugar
- 4½ tsp corn starch
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise and scraped
- 6 egg whites, room temperature
- ½ tsp cream of tartar
- ½ tsp salt

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C. **2** Whisk together sugar, corn starch and scraped vanilla seeds, then put aside. **3** In another bowl, place egg whites, cream of tartar and salt. Whisk on a low speed for 5 mins, slowly stream in the sugar mixture then crank up the speed of your electric beaters. Stop the process periodically to scrape sugar mixture down from the side of the bowl into the meringue. The time from streaming sugar to finishing beating should be 6-8 mins. The mixture should be glossy and stiff. **4** Spoon into a lined 25cm cake tin. Bake for 25 mins then turn 180 degrees and bake for another 25-30 mins until meringue is completely dry. **5** Cool and set aside at room temperature until ready to assemble.

TOPPING

- 4 small ripe bananas
- 4 mango cheeks

1 Split bananas lengthwise. Grill 4-5 mins over a medium to high heat on an iron skillet until you have brown grill marks. Flip gently to grill other side, taking care not to break bananas, then refrigerate. **2** When ready to assemble, cut mango cheeks into slices. **3** Place pavlova on your serving platter or cake stand, spoon over cold passionfruit and mascarpone mixture, then decorate with cold grilled bananas and fresh mango slices. Serve immediately.

TIP: "This one requires a time commitment. You'll need to prepare the pavlova and curd a day before, so everything's cold when assembling. But the effort's well worth it."

Pavlova with passionfruit curd, mascarpone, grilled banana and fresh mango, garnished with pineapple sage flowers from Boon Luck Farm