

# Smooth operator: Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's mayonnaise recipes

Homemade mayo is not just better than the stuff you can buy in a jar, it's also completely different



**Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall**

The Guardian, Friday 7 June 2013 16.00 EDT



Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's basic mayonnaise: The base for all manner of mayonnaise variations. Photograph: Colin Campbell for the Guardian

Homemade mayonnaise is so different from anything you can buy in a jar that it's worth making at least once – even if only to see what all the fuss is about. I've got plenty of time for ready-made mayo – I keep a decent organic variety in my fridge, which I dispense freely for greedy sandwiches and impromptu sauces – but the homemade stuff is something else altogether. Try a batch and you'll see that you've made not just something better, but also something utterly different.

Shop-bought mayo has a blandness and often a slight vinegary edge that, in poor

examples, take it into salad cream territory. Because it has to be pasteurised, it'll never match the creamy delicacy of homemade, whipped up with fresh, raw free-range egg yolks, the seasoning balanced precisely to your taste. A good homemade mayo has an enticing balance of rich, blanketing velvetiness and piquancy from the seasonings. As a dressing or sauce, it brings together other ingredients, and provides that lovely lubrication by which so many foods are enhanced – lightly cooked or raw veg, say, or cold meats, fish, potatoes and eggs.

This classic sauce is a very simple thing: an emulsion of oil in a blend of egg yolk, salt, mustard and an acidic ingredient such as vinegar or lemon juice. Since it's composed mostly of oil – at least 80% – it's essential you choose the right one. You can make mayonnaise purely with extra-virgin olive oil, but this is rarely done, for two reasons: first, it makes a very unstable mayo that can separate soon after making; and, more particularly, it produces a very strong, bitter-tasting result. That much olive oil, mitigated by what is a small amount of egg and seasoning, is just too powerful in the mouth.

I've experimented with various ratios and have more or less settled on around one-third extra-virgin olive oil to two-thirds of a bland oil such as sunflower. This gives some olivey flavour without being overwhelming. You can make half-and-half olive and sunflower, but even that is a touch too much for me. I also often make a rapeseed-and-sunflower blend mayonnaise, which is delicious – a little more delicate than the olive oil version, with a slightly grassy, floral tone and lovely lemon yellow colour.

Mayonnaise has a reputation for being moody and difficult, but it shouldn't be – the hardest thing is the elbow grease required to make it, and even that's not excessive. It's a good idea to start with all the ingredients at room temperature: this helps them to emulsify speedily and easily. So take your eggs out of the fridge (if that's where you keep them) an hour before you start. Salt is crucial in mayonnaise, not only for flavour but because it aids emulsification, so always add it right at the start. I find the simplest approach is to mix the egg yolks with all the seasonings first, then slowly whisk in the oil. It's then a simple matter of adjusting the seasoning at the end.

Mayonnaise can occasionally split or curdle, but only if you start with very cold ingredients, add the oil too fast or don't whisk it properly (you need to give the yolky base a chance to absorb and envelop the growing number of oil droplets). Even if it does curdle, it can usually be saved with the addition of a little more liquid and a bit of vigorous beating. Alternatively, put a fresh egg yolk into a clean bowl and gradually whisk the curdled mayo into it to create a new, stable emulsion.

You can cut the effort almost completely by making mayo in a blender or food processor. There's no reason not to, except that you may need to increase the quantities so that the beaters or blades are immersed in yolky mix to start with. Also, mechanically made mayo can often thicken more than handmade stuff. If this happens, "let it down" by stirring in a tablespoon or two of warm water (a handy trick for any over-thickened mayonnaise).

This luscious condiment needs to be eaten quickly, because it includes raw egg, so store it in the fridge and consume within a day or two. Low temperatures can affect its stability. If, when chilled, it starts to look a little oily, let it come back to room temperature, then whisk lightly to re-emulsify, if need be adding a touch more liquid – a few drops of lemon juice or vinegar, for example – to help it along.

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## Basic mayonnaise

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Serve this classic with cold meats and vegetables, hard-boiled eggs or crudités; or use it for dipping homemade chips into; or in a generous ham and salad sandwich; or as the base for all manner of mayonnaise variations (see below). These quantities make enough for six to eight people.

**½ small clove garlic, peeled**

**Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**2 large, free-range egg yolks**

**½ tsp English mustard**

**1 tsp cider vinegar**

**175ml sunflower oil**

**75ml extra-virgin olive oil (or rapeseed oil)**

Crush the garlic to a paste with a good pinch of salt, then thoroughly combine in a bowl with the egg yolks, mustard, vinegar and some pepper.

Combine the oils in a jug, then slowly start whisking into the egg mix, a few drops at a time to start with, then in small dashes, whisking in each addition so it is properly amalgamated, before adding the next. By the time you've added all the oil, you should have a thick, glossy, wobbly mayonnaise that holds its shape. Taste and add more salt, pepper, mustard or vinegar if you like. If the mayonnaise seems too thick, stir in a tablespoon or two of warm water to let it down.

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## Cheaty rouille

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Hugh Fearnley-

Whittingstall's cheaty rouille: Excellent, even without breadcrumbs. Photograph: Colin Campbell for the Guardian

An authentic French rouille includes breadcrumbs, but this version is excellent even without them. It's flavoured with lots of garlic and chilli, and stained with paprika and tomato (rouille means "rust" in French). Rouille is traditionally served on fish soups and stews such as bouillabaisse, but it also makes a great dip. Serves six to eight.

**2 medium-hot red chillies**

**2 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed or finely grated**

**About 1 tsp thyme leaves**

**2 anchovy fillets (optional)**

**1 tsp tomato puree**

**½ tsp sweet smoked paprika**

**½ tsp English mustard**

**1 lemon, zest finely grated, plus the juice from half the lemon**

**A pinch of sugar**

**2 large, free-range egg yolks**

**Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**175ml sunflower oil**

**75ml extra-virgin olive oil**

Cook the chillies under a hot grill, turning a few times, until the skins are blistered but not black. Transfer to a small bowl, cover with clingfilm and, when cool enough to handle, peel them, and discard the seeds and stalks. Tear each chilli into a few pieces, place in the bowl of a food processor with all the other ingredients except the oils, and whizz to a rough purée.

Combine the oils. With the motor running, slowly trickle in the oil until you have a thick emulsion. Taste and add more salt, pepper or lemon juice if needed. If the rouille seems too thick, stir in a tablespoon or two of warm water to let it down. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

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## Mayonnaise variations

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- Aioli is a pungently garlicky Provençal take on mayonnaise that goes wonderfully with crunchy crudités, new potatoes or chips. To make it, increase the crushed garlic in the basic recipe to two cloves – or more, if you prefer.
- Tartare sauce is a great favourite of mine, and delicious with fish. To whip some up, start with two good tablespoons of mayonnaise and add one or two chopped hard-boiled eggs, a tablespoon of chopped parsley, a teaspoon of chopped dill (optional), two or three finely chopped gherkins, two teaspoons of finely chopped capers and a squeeze of lemon juice.
- Anchovy and caper mayonnaise is a real winner on asparagus or with crudités. To the basic mayo, add four to six drained, finely chopped anchovies and a tablespoon of chopped capers. Season with plenty of black pepper and lemon juice.
- Saffron mayonnaise is great with fish or shellfish. Use it as you would rouille, or bring it out at barbecue time. Make the basic mayo with an extra shot of garlic (perhaps one to one and a half cloves). Infuse a good pinch of saffron strands in a tablespoon of boiling water for 10 minutes, then stir both the saffron and its soaking water into the mayo. Finally, adjust the seasoning to taste.
- Delicate and delicious tarragon mayonnaise works a treat with cold chicken, cold new potatoes or hard-boiled eggs. – just add two tablespoons of the finely chopped herb to the basic mayo recipe.
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