



Sabrina opens her STORECUPBOARD

“I love experimenting with new flavour combinations, but the core of my cooking is shaped around a few Middle Eastern storecupboard staples which, I’m glad to say, are now relatively easy to get hold of. Here are my top six, each of which adds a new dimension to recipes.”

HARISSA

WHAT IS IT? A paste of pounded chillies, sometimes with added garlic and spices or rose petals. A North African staple.

WHAT MAKES IT GREAT You can use it in everything from marinades to sauces, on meat, poultry and vegetables as well as in bread doughs and on salads.

WHAT IT GOES WELL WITH A small amount adds warmth to stews. Mix with yogurt to make an excellent marinade for meat and fish.

I BUY... Belazu’s rose harissa is the best in the UK and is sold in most supermarkets.

POMEGRANATE MOLASSES

WHAT IS IT? The ones worth buying are made mainly from pomegranate juice, reduced to a syrupy consistency.

WHAT MAKES IT GREAT A wonderfully complex flavour – sweet yet pleasantly sour.

WHAT IT GOES WELL WITH My favourite use for it is as a salad dressing, drizzled onto tomatoes with a little salt or on a mixed leaf salad.

I BUY... Al-Rabih, a superior quality Lebanese brand, which is sold in some supermarkets (Sainsbury’s and Tesco) and has a good consistency.

PRESERVED LEMONS

WHAT ARE THEY? Small ‘beldi’ lemons that have been packed in salt and preserved until the skin softens and the inside takes on an almost gelatinous consistency.

WHAT MAKES THEM GREAT They have the most vibrant citrus flavour and their sharpness contrasts beautifully with sweet ingredients such as dried fruit.

WHAT THEY GO WELL WITH Chop them and add to salads, halve them and throw into stews, or purée them with harissa to make a marinade for

poultry. I slice them thinly and add them to sandwiches too, as something unexpected.

I BUY... Again, Belazu is my favourite brand as the quality is consistent. They’re sold in most supermarkets.

PUL BIBER

WHAT IS IT? Dried Turkish chilli flakes, often called aleppo pepper or aleppo chilli, which are milder than most chilli flakes sold here.

WHAT MAKES IT GREAT Because aleppo chilli isn’t too fiery, it’s more versatile.

WHAT IT GOES WELL WITH Spice rubs, meatball/burger mixes, salads, sauces, stir-fries and dressings. I use it whenever I need a hint of chilli in a recipe or I add it abundantly if I want the flavour to pack a real punch.

I USE... Any brand is fine. You’ll need to go to a Turkish or Middle Eastern supermarket or order it online from sous-chef.co.uk or ottolenghi.co.uk.

SAFFRON

WHAT IS IT? A spice made from the dried stigmas of a variety of crocus flower. It’s the most expensive spice in the world by weight but a little goes a long way.

WHAT MAKES IT GREAT

Saffron gives a beautiful colour to dishes, as well as a unique, much-revered taste and aroma.

GOES WELL WITH Wonderful in rice dishes – the traditional Iranian way to use it.

Saffron works well in seafood and poultry stews too, and it’s good in baking.

I BUY... Iranian saffron, the most expensive but with a much higher potency so it’s better value for money. It should cost no more than £5-£7 per gram. Larger supermarkets sell good Iranian saffron in the world food section.

ZA’ATAR

WHAT IS IT? A blend of dried herbs with a base of wild thyme, often combined with marjoram, oregano and toasted sesame seeds. Some blends have cumin and sumac.

WHAT MAKES IT GREAT It’s aromatic yet gentle enough to be a background flavour.

WHAT IT GOES WELL WITH I make a paste with za’atar and a little olive oil, which I then rub onto butternut squash, fish, halloumi cheese and red meat. You can also sprinkle za’atar into salads, onto breads, over olives and cheese and into marinades.

I BUY... Zaytoun Palestinian Za’atar is the best I’ve found here – available in delis and supermarkets, Oxfam, Whole Foods or online at zaytoun.org.

