



beginner's

GRUB

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summersdale *cookery*

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START HERE . . .

Start Here . . .

If this book has been bought for you in the hope of encouraging you towards the kitchen for reasons other than to retrieve a cool beer or ice for a gin and tonic, I trust that you will take the time to read it. You might be pleasantly surprised to discover a world beyond microwave meals and fish and chips. On the other hand, there is a chance that you have bought this book for yourself because you have a desire to learn how to cook. Or maybe you've got a hot date and all you can cook is fish fingers with chilli sauce. Perhaps your loved one has given you an ultimatum – either you start to help with the cooking or you do your own laundry. The book won't guarantee that you get your dream partner or manage to hold on to the one you've got, but it will teach you how to cook!

There are an awful lot of people out there who are struggling to get through the baked bean barrier. Fear not, help is at hand. Although this book will not turn you into the next 'super chef', it will teach you how to cook a variety of meals ranging from simple dishes, such as scrambled eggs, to others that are more elaborate.

Cooking is regarded by many as a chore, its purpose being purely to sustain life with as little effort as possible. Perhaps you rarely cook for yourself, preferring to rely on others or on takeaways or ready-to-cook meals. If you are one such person then it's time to change. Being able to cook is not solely a useful social skill. It should provide enjoyment and entertainment. Not only is it nice to cook *for* a partner but cooking together can be

START HERE . . .

fun too. Another benefit from being able to cook is that, more often than not, it gets you out of doing the washing-up.

As you learn more about cooking you will begin to learn more about food. Most chefs are as passionate about the ingredients as they are about cooking them; inferior ingredients will normally result in an inferior meal. Cooking combines creativity, skill, timing and knowledge and the bonus is that you can eat the end result, which is one up on an oil painting! Alternatively you might not give a damn about how it looks provided it tastes good and there is plenty of it; each to their own. The intent of this book is simply to get you cooking, not to preach about etiquette and cuisine politics.

After a little use, you may notice the heavy influence of French Cuisine upon this book. There is a particular bias towards recipes from the Provençal region, where I have spent a great deal of time over the last 13 years. I have been fortunate enough to meet people who share my passion for food and who have taken the trouble to impart knowledge, enthusiasm and guidance on many of the famous dishes from the region. There is always something new to learn, and I continue my quest with an open mind and an open mouth prepared for my next culinary adventure.

The Rudiments

Being a good cook does not mean that you have to be able to create dazzling masterpieces every time you enter a kitchen. Learning how to cook is a gradual process that takes time and patience. Even the most experienced chefs have disasters. Remember that cooking is an art not a science. You will find that even when you follow a recipe word for word it does not always turn out the way it should. There are many factors that affect the final result and you have to be aware of this. If you repeat a recipe several times over it is unlikely that it will ever taste or look exactly the same. With experience you will learn how to adapt recipes to your own tastes and skills.

One of the best ways of improving your cooking is to watch other cooks. This is where you pick up the little tricks and secrets that will enable you to increase your knowledge and skill. Half the fun of cooking is in experimenting, using old skills and recipes and combining them with new ideas.

Kitchen Equipment

Any craftsman will have a set of tools that is essential to his trade. The same principle applies to the chef. There is a plethora of gadgets and gizmos on the market and it is very easy to believe that they are all essential. Only when you see your cupboards bursting with juicers, sandwich makers, blenders, steamers, yoghurt-makers etc that you realise you have little room left for the food. Although some gadgets can aid the chef – speeding up laborious tasks such as chopping vegetables – others are dispensable and will soon find their way to the back of the cupboard after the novelty has worn off. As a rule, it is far better

THE RUDIMENTS

to buy a few quality items than a number of inferior products. A frying pan that bends under the weight of a couple of sausages is going to be useless. Quality in cooking equipment often equates to weight, a pan should have a thick bottom and a sturdy handle. However this does not mean that a saucepan so heavy that you need to start body-building before you can pick it up, is necessarily going to be the best.

Kitchen Knives

Investing in a quality set of knives is essential. Very few people have adequate kitchen knives, often relying on blunt flimsy instruments that are potentially dangerous. When choosing knives bear in mind for which job they are intended. It is sensible to have a selection of different sizes; it is not easy using a 10-inch blade for peeling fruit. I generally use just two sizes, a small cook's knife with a 3-inch blade, and a large 7-inch knife. It is also useful to have a serrated knife for cutting fruit. If you have the choice between buying a cheap set of knives or a couple of high quality knives, go for the latter.

Freezer

If you are low on food or have an unexpected guest then don't panic; there should hopefully be something in the freezer that you can use. Or perhaps not. Do you actually know what is in your freezer and, perhaps more importantly, how long it has been there? It amazes me how many people's freezer contents lack any type of a labelling. It is often case of lucky dip and then trying to guess by touch what has been so carefully wrapped up, which is no easy task when the items are frozen. I have heard these mystery items referred to as UFO's (unidentified frozen objects).

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So it is essential that your freezer is organised: this will save you time and money. Start by labelling and dating all the items in your freezer. It is also handy to keep a separate list on the outside of the freezer door which you can update every time you add or remove something. Bare in mind also that freezers run more efficiently when they are full, so try to keep your freezer well stocked even if it is half full of bread.

If you are going to make full use of your freezer then it is worth investing in a specific book that provides information on the different methods of preparing food for the freezer as well as telling you what can be frozen and for how long. Don't think that just because it is frozen you can retrieve a steak and kidney pie that your mother made for you in 1995.

Sensibility

The recipes in this book are created with simplicity in mind, both in terms of implements and cooking skills required. Cooking can be a very sensual experience with influences from both artistic and scientific domains. But don't forget that the element of common sense is the most important of all. I don't want to be held responsible for a person who ends up in the hospital burns department for having misunderstood the instruction 'stand in boiling water for 20 minutes'!

Another important point to remember is that all cooking times and temperatures are approximate. Not all ovens will take the same amount of time to cook a meal. If, for example, it is fan-assisted you will have to allow for the extra efficiency. Cooking is ultimately intuitive and no amount of instructions can replace this. Before you try any recipe read through it first to make sure you have all the ingredients and equipment as well as the time to prepare it.

The Kitchen

Just as a well-organised garage has a wide selection of high-quality tools and adequate working space, the same applies to the kitchen. The purpose of a kitchen is to prepare food, therefore the element of hygiene must not be ignored. If you are single then it is perfectly understandable to want to show your independence by being as messy as possible. However once you reach the stage of the overflowing bin surrounded by empty takeaway boxes you know it is time to consider clearing up.

The three main areas are organisation, safety, and hygiene.

Organisation and Safety:

- Keep heavy items in the lower cupboards.
- Never use a stool to stand on whilst trying to reach an object. Even a chair can be unstable. So ideally you should have a small kitchen step ladder.
- The kitchen should be well ventilated so that fumes and heat are removed quickly.
- There should be plenty of light, natural or artificial.
- A fire blanket and extinguisher should be kept handy.
- Keep cupboards tidy.
- Take care with the positioning of pans whilst cooking. Remember to keep the handles from protruding over the edge of the cooker.
- Make sure that handles on pots and pans are not loose.
- Keep an eye out for damaged flexes on electrical appliances such as toasters and kettles.
- Use caution when using electrical gadgets such as blenders and food processors.
- Keep matches and sharp knives out of the reach of children.

SENSIBILTY

- Knives should be kept sharp, as a blunt knife can slip when cutting and cause an accident.
- Kitchen knives should be kept in a knife block. Keeping them in a drawer not only causes the knives to lose their sharpness, it also makes it easier to cut oneself.
- Never learn to juggle using kitchen knives. Old socks filled with rice make a safer alternative. Any type of rice will do, except egg-fried rice.

Fat Fires:

If you should experience a pan of fat igniting then remain calm and follow these rules.

- Never throw water on top of the oil – this will make it worse.
- Turn off the gas or electric hob if you can safely do so, otherwise wait until the fire has been extinguished.
- The most effective way to put out a fat fire is to get a dampened tea towel and place it over the top of the pan. Do not remove it for at least five minutes after the flames have subsided.
- If the fire is out of control, call the fire brigade and leave the house.

If you have children make sure they understand the kitchen is not an extension of the playground.

Hygiene:

Not wishing to get into the gory details, being violently sick is usually a consequence of bad hygiene. Harmful bacteria can spread quickly in the right conditions, so here are a few guidelines.

- All surfaces such as worktops, floors and cookers should be cleaned regularly, preferably every day.
- Never let your kitchen surfaces get cluttered. Clean up as you go along. This makes food preparation easier as well as reducing the burden of washing-up at the end of the process.
- Clean the door seals on fridges and freezers on a regular basis.
- Keep cooking utensils clean.
- Don't leave meat or fish out of the fridge for any lengthy period, especially if it has been cooked.
- Throw away food that is past its 'use by' date.
- Wash all fruit and vegetables.
- Make sure meat is sufficiently cooked. If you are having your meat rare, it must be as fresh as possible.
- Allow large pieces of frozen meat to defrost completely before cooking.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Weights and Measures

There are certain things that indicate our age. Comments such as 'during the war' and 'I remember when you could get a couple of lamb chops for a shilling', are a real giveaway. You might be asking what a couple of lamb chops and 'The War' have to do with food? Well not a lot, but somewhere in the mists of time the country went metric. Those imperial days are now long gone, but many people still prefer to think in imperial weights and measures, as I do myself. Hence the need to be able to convert metric to imperial and vice versa. Other amounts are referred to in spoons or cups which are self-explanatory.

The following abbreviations are used:

tbs = Tablespoon

tsp = Teaspoon

If you don't possess a set of kitchen weighing scales then it is possible to convert certain ingredients into spoon measures. Obviously the weights of all ingredients will vary, but here are some rough ideas . . .

1 tbs = 1 oz (25g) of . . . syrup, jam, honey

2 tbs = 1 oz (25g) of . . . butter, margarine, sugar

3 tbs = 1 oz (25g) of . . . cornflour, cocoa, flour

4 tbs = 1 oz (25g) of . . . grated cheese, porridge oats

All spoon measures refer to level spoons, not heaped.

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1 tsp = 5ml

1 tbs = 15 ml

1 mug of rice weighs roughly 8 oz (225g)

The approximations used for conversion between metric and imperial in this book are as follows . . .

1 oz = 25g

3 oz = 75g

6 oz = 150g

1 lb = 500g

2 oz = 50g

4 oz = 100g

8 oz = 225g

$\frac{1}{4}$ pint = 150ml

1 pint = 600ml

$\frac{1}{2}$ pint = 300ml

2 pints = 1 litre

Gas Mark	°C	°F
1	140	275
2	150	300
3	170	325
4	180	350
5	200	400
6	225	425
7	230	450
8	240	475
9	250	500