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Student Grub



**man about
the kitchen**

recipes for the reluctant chef

summersdale *cookery*

MAN ABOUT THE KITCHEN

Recipes for the
Reluctant Chef

ALASTAIR WILLIAMS

summersdale

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To Charlotte

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Start Here ...

There are an awful lot of men out there who are struggling to get through the burger and 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 dishes ranging from simple stir-fries to mouthwatering cakes.

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 takeaways or ready-to-eat 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 it is also something that can be enjoyed together. Another benefit from being able to cook is that it might get you out of the washing-up if you have prepared the meal.

Cooking combines creativity, skill, timing and knowledge, plus at the end of it you can eat what you have created, which is one up on an oil painting! You might not give a stuff about how the meal 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 as quickly and easily as possible.

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. 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. It is sensible to keep a small notebook so that you can jot down ideas and tips that you come across. 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 cook. There is a plethora of gadgets and gizmos on the market for cooks. It is very easy to believe that they are all essential; it is only when you see your cupboards bursting with juicers, toasted sandwich-makers, blenders, steamers,

and yogurt-makers that you realise you have little room left for the food. Although some gadgets can aid the chef, speeding up laborious tasks such as grating cheese, 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 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, a saucepan that is so heavy that you need to start body-building before you can pick it up is not necessarily going to be the best one for you.

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 the job for which they are intended; it is difficult to use a 10-inch blade to peel 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 and a couple of high-quality knives, go for the latter.

The Freezer

The main advantage of having a freezer is that large quantities of food can be stored and used as and when required. If you arrive home late and are feeling too tired to cook it is a joy to be able to go to the freezer and take out a ready-prepared meal. They can also save you time

and money as food can be bought and prepared in bulk. When cooking a pasta sauce why not make double the amount and freeze what is unused? A freezer is also useful for storing seasonal fruit and vegetables, so you can enjoy them any time of year.

To aid fast freezing, do not place large quantities of unfrozen food into the freezer at one go. This raises the temperature of the freezer and slows down the freezing process. Food that has been cooked should always be cold before being placed in the freezer.

If you are low on food or have an unexpected guest then there should ideally be something in the freezer that you can use. This is where the problem begins: do you 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 labelling. If your freezer is organised you will save both time and money.

- Label and date all the items in your freezer. It is also a good idea to keep a separate list on the outside of the freezer door that you can update every time you add or remove something from the freezer.
- 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 want to make full use of your freezer, then it is worth investing in a book that provides information on

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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 1979.

Common Sense and the Kitchen

Cooking requires a degree of common sense. The recipes in this book are created with simplicity in mind, both in terms of implements and cooking skills required. However, I don't want to be held responsible for a person who ends up in Casualty 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 length of time to cook a meal. If, for example, your oven is fan assisted, you will have to allow for the extra efficiency. Cooking is ultimately intuitive and no number of instructions can replace this. Before you try any recipe read through it first to make sure you have the ingredients and 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 a bachelor, 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 to consider 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 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 on your cooker, and remember to keep the handles from protruding over the edge.
- Make sure that handles on pots and pans are not loose.

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- 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 reach of children.
- 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, but also makes it easy to cut oneself.

Fat Fires

If a pan of fat ignites, 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.