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IN FULL COLOUR

Bryan Miller

Former New York Times restaurant critic

Marie Rama

Food writer



Cooking Basics

FOR

DUMMIES®

Cooking Basics
FOR
DUMMIES®

by Bryan Miller and Marie Rama
Adapted by Alison Yates

 **WILEY**

A John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, Publication

Cooking Basics For Dummies®

Published by
John Wiley & Sons, Ltd
The Atrium
Southern Gate
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 8SQ
England

E-mail (for orders and customer service enquires): cs-books@wiley.co.uk

Visit our Home Page on www.wiley.com

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester, West Sussex

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data: A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-470-74258-7

Printed and bound in China by SNP Leefung

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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Publisher's Acknowledgements

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our Dummies online registration form located at www.dummies.com/register/.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

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Salmon with béarnaise sauce, tabbouleh, peppered steak, portobello mushrooms, roasted root vegetables, salsa, omelette © Getty

















Chicken breasts, coq au vin, leg of lamb, quiche lorraine, French onion soup, penne, ratatouille, shepherd's pie, apple-pear crumble, chocolate brownies, lime ice cream © Alamy

Seafood stew, beefburger, loin of pork, fillet of beef, tuna with nicoise dressing, mushroom-cheese frittata, French potato salad, paella, peach-blackberry cobbler © Jupiter





















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Introduction



Whether you fancy yourself a hotshot home cook or someone who wouldn't know a whisk from a weasel, *Cooking Basics For Dummies* can help you. For the novice, our technique-oriented approach puts the tools in your hands and the knowledge in your head so that you can read a recipe and say to yourself, 'Okay, I can do this'. Even more experienced cooks may want to hone their basic skills, and the recipes in this book offer plenty of food for thought.

Unlike most cookbooks, this one is more than a compilation of tasty recipes. We also focus on cooking techniques like grilling, steaming, stewing, and roasting. After you master these techniques, you're no longer a slave to recipes. Once again, you can cook with imagination and creativity – and that's the sign of a skilled cook.

The best part about discovering how to cook this way is that, while you're practising your techniques, you have all kinds of delicious food to eat. Sure beats trumpet lessons.

Most of all, you actually have fun as you explore the endless pleasures of cooking. And that, after all, is what food is all about.

The food revolution that began in the latter years of the 20th century has made available to home cooks products that they had never dreamed of: truffles, flavoured vinegar, exotic seafood, goat's cheese, and countless types of olive oil, to name just a few. At the same time, the technology of cooking equipment has narrowed the gap between home and professional kitchens.

Of course, new products and technology don't make a good cook. The requirements of a refined cook haven't changed since the 17th century: a sensitive palate, an understanding of cooking techniques and products, strong knife skills, and patience. These are skills we want to help you develop.

About This Book

We start at the very beginning: your kitchen and your equipment. What basic tools do you need? How do you use these things? We help you stock your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer with basic staples so you know what to have on hand. Then we move on to cooking techniques to get you up and running as soon as possible. Doing simple things well offers great personal satisfaction, as you will see.

Depending on your needs and cooking skills, you can start at the beginning of the book and work your way through, or go straight to the chapters that interest you most (the table of contents and index point you in the right direction).

Conventions Used in This Book

Here are some non-recipe conventions you should keep in mind to get the most out of this guidebook:

- ✓ *Italic* is used for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms that are defined.
- ✓ **Boldfaced** text is used to indicate the action part of numbered steps.
- ✓ `Monofont` is used for web addresses.

Before charging ahead to make any of the recipes in this book, you should know a few things about the ingredients and instructions:

- ✓ **Milk is always whole.** You can substitute with semi- or skimmed milk, but these products give soups and sauces a thinner, less creamy consistency.
- ✓ **Use unsalted butter so that you can control the amount of salt in a dish.** We don't recommend substituting margarine, which has just as many calories per tablespoon (100) as butter. Margarine's flavour is inferior to butter as well.
- ✓ **Unless otherwise noted, all eggs are large.**
- ✓ **All salt is common table salt, and pepper is freshly ground.** We seldom specify measured amounts of salt and pepper because every cook has a different palate. Sample the recipe several times during preparation to taste for seasoning and add salt and pepper to taste when we instruct you to do so.

- ✔ **Quantities are in metric with imperial measurements in brackets.**
- ✔ **Oven temperatures are given in Centigrade.** But just to cover all bases we also give you the temperature in Fahrenheit and provide the Gas Mark.

And keep the following general tips in mind:

- ✔ Read through each recipe at least once to make sure that you have all the necessary ingredients and utensils, understand all the steps, and have enough preparation time. (We begin each recipe by listing the cooking utensils you need as well as the preparation and cooking times.)
- ✔ Be sure to use the proper size pan when a measurement is given.
- ✔ Preheat your oven at least 15 minutes before cooking begins. Place all food on the middle rack of the oven unless the recipe says otherwise.
- ✔ Most of the recipes in this book serve four people. You can reduce by half or double many of them to satisfy two or eight people.
- 🍅 If you're looking for vegetarian recipes, you can easily find them in the Recipes in This Chapter list, located at the beginning of every chapter. Vegetarian recipes are marked by the tomato bullet shown here, instead of the usual triangle.

Foolish Assumptions

We wrote this cookbook with some thoughts about you in mind. Here's what we assume about you, our reader:

- ✔ You love the *idea* of cooking. You're a crackerjack at boiling water. But you just aren't quite sure how to actually organise a meal, make lots of things at once, or combine foods or flavour meals in ways that make your family members sigh with satisfaction after they put down their forks.
- ✔ You've cooked before. Sometimes it was pretty darn good. Sometimes you were glad you didn't have company. Sometimes the fire brigade had to be called. But really, sometimes it *was* pretty blooming good! You're pretty sure you have potential.
- ✔ You sometimes daydream about going to cooking school or impressing people with the way you chop garlic with your very expensive chef's knife. But you don't yet own a very expensive chef's knife.
- ✔ You have basic kitchen equipment on hand, including pots and pans and measuring cups, but you aren't sure whether you have all the right things you need for efficient cooking, and you probably don't know what all those different pots and pans are called.

- ✔ You love to eat at restaurants, and you often wonder if you could make that stuff at home.
- ✔ You bought this cookbook for yourself so you can finally gain the skills you need to earn the title of Really Great Cook.
- ✔ Somebody gave you this cookbook as a gift, and you assume that it was a hint somehow related to that interesting casserole-type thing you attempted last week.

Foolish of us, maybe, but we assume that you trusted us to do our very best when writing this cookbook so that every time you open it, you'll enjoy reading it. Even more, we want you to enjoy the meals you make from our recipes. Our promise to you is that if you read this book and try the recipes here, you will indeed master some very important cooking skills, and you'll have a great time doing it, too.

How This Book Is Organised

This book is organised around cooking techniques. Major sections are called parts. Within each part are chapters that address specific subjects. Following is a rundown of each part and what you can read about there.

Part I: Go On In – It's Only the Kitchen

What is this strange room? It's the most popular room in the house, where friends hang out as they help themselves to your food and drinks, where parties inevitably gravitate, and where couples have their best arguments. This part is designed to help you get over your fear of cooking. It touches on kitchen organisation, helping you to arrange your appliances, kitchen space, worktop, and cabinets for maximum efficiency. It also covers in detail necessary equipment like pots, pans, knives, and all kinds of gadgets. Plus, you find out which basic supplies you need to stock up on.

Part II: Know Your Techniques

Part II is where the fun begins. Each chapter includes recipes that illustrate an essential cooking technique: braising, sautéing, roasting, grilling, and more. From that starting point, we take you through a number of recipe variations that show you how to improvise with confidence and skill.

Part III: Expand Your Repertoire

Part III looks at pasta, eggs, and larger categories of dishes like soups, salads, desserts, and one-pot meals. Here, you can read about how to make the perfect omelette, how to mix a balanced vinaigrette, and how to use seasonal fruits to create delectable desserts. Also included are illustrations and charts – like the one identifying different types of pastas so that you know tagliatelle from linguine – and, of course, dozens of delicious recipes.

Part IV: The Part of Tens

Just when you thought that we'd covered everything, we give you more! These quick lists include herbs and spices that can add an extra something to your cooking.

We round out the book with a helpful appendix. Here, you can find the meaning of many common cooking terms.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons are those nifty little pictures in the margin of this book. They each grab your attention for a different reason, and we explain those reasons here.



We hope that you remember every valuable piece of information in this book, but if your brain can hold only so much, make sure that you hang on to the tidbits marked by this icon.



When there's an easier way to do something, a step you can take to save money, or a shortcut to get you to the dinner table faster, we let you know by marking the tip with this icon.



The kitchen can be a dangerous place. This icon, like a flashing yellow light, steers you clear of potentially dangerous mishaps.

Where to Go from Here

You'll notice how easy it is to jump from chapter to chapter in our book without feeling lost. That's intentional, so you can start enjoying *Cooking Basics For Dummies* with any chapter you like. Even if you know your way around a kitchen pretty well, we recommend that you start by reading two key chapters – Chapter 2, just to be sure you really do have all the equipment to cook the recipes in this book, and Chapter 3, which talks about all the basic ingredients every well-stocked kitchen pantry, freezer, and refrigerator should contain.

If you're in the process of buying a house, refurbishing a kitchen, or just dreaming about your perfect kitchen, check out Chapter 1. Wary about safety? Check out the end of Chapter 1. Or, maybe you just want to start cooking. In that case, check out any of the other chapters in this book. They are arranged around techniques, such as boiling or grilling or sautéing, with recipes to help you practise and are chock-full of delicious recipes with simple instructions.

We know you'll enjoy cooking with us. Cooking doesn't have to be complicated, as long as you know the basics. So come on in to the kitchen, grab a pot (we tell you which one), and get cooking. We're getting hungry just thinking about it!

Part I

Go On In – It's Only the Kitchen



In this part . . .

There's no doubt about it, if you want to learn to cook, you have to go into the kitchen. But never fear! The kitchen may seem like it's full of strange appliances, oddly shaped tools, and bottles and jars and packages of ingredients you know nothing about, but as a beginner cook, this is where the fun begins! We help you navigate, use, and even enjoy your kitchen with organisational strategies and supply lists.

Chapter 1

Cooking with Confidence

In This Chapter

- ▶ Taking a good look at your kitchen
 - ▶ Familiarising yourself with some basic cooking techniques
 - ▶ Figuring out your menus
 - ▶ Making your kitchen safe and user-friendly
-

So you want to find out how to cook? Good for you! Cooking is fun, relaxing, exciting, and even therapeutic. It enables you to eat for less money than ordering take-aways or dining in a restaurant every night, and it allows you to know exactly what you're eating and to make conscious, healthy food choices. Cooking lets you easily adapt your meals to suit your own nutritional and gastronomic preferences, whether you're eating low-carb or vegetarian, or you're determined to immerse yourself in classic French cuisine. Plus, cooking the food you eat puts you in closer touch to the process of nourishing your own body, and that can make you feel better about yourself, your health, your body, and your life. Yes, cooking can be that powerful!

In this chapter, we give you a broad overview of what you need to know to be an effective cook. We talk about how to set up your cooking space, introduce you to the major kitchen appliances, and give you a glimpse of some basic cooking techniques. Then we discuss menu planning and kitchen safety.

Warming Up to Your Kitchen

There it is: the kitchen. Maybe you don't go in there very much, or maybe you like to hang around watching other people cook. Or maybe you cook dinner in there every night, but you don't enjoy it very much. Never fear. Your kitchen can easily become a place you *love* to cook in and be in. It's all a matter of organisation.

Setting up your cooking space

You don't need a fabulous kitchen to prepare fabulous food. But a well-designed workplace sure makes cooking much easier and more pleasurable. Ideally, you should be able to move from your worktop space to the hob and the refrigerator in a smooth, unobstructed fashion. This working space actually has a name: the *kitchen triangle* (see Figure 1-1). If a table, plant, or small child is blocking the way, move it! Even if you can't design your kitchen space, you can arrange what you need in a way that works for you. Here's how to do that.

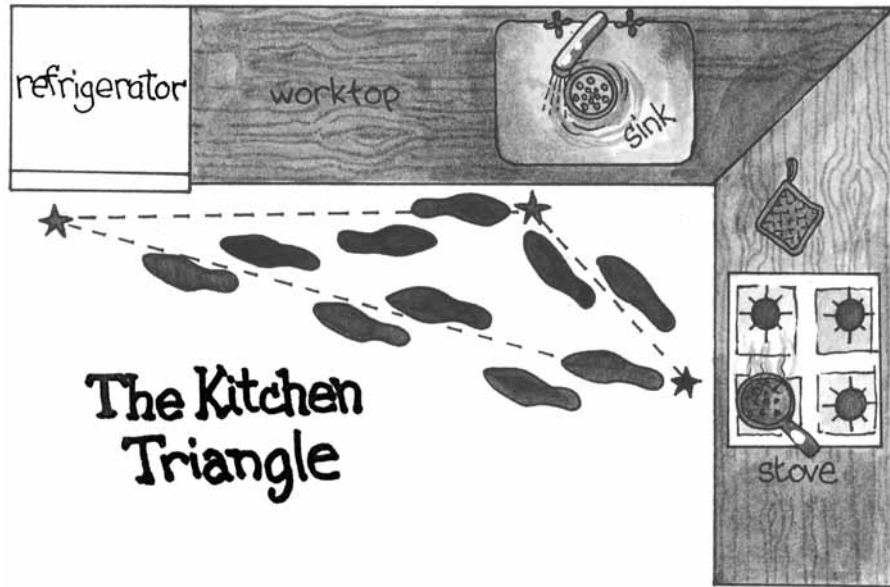


Figure 1-1:
An efficient
kitchen
triangle.

Decluttering your worktop

The most important key for organising your worktop space is to keep it clear of most stuff. Unless you use an appliance at least several times a week – the kettle, toaster, and blender, for example – put it away. That's precious work space you're filling up with all that stuff! Also remember that a kitchen worktop is not a magazine rack, plant holder, wine rack, or phone book shelf, so try not to use it for these purposes if you actually want to cook!

In addition to keeping your worktop clutter free, take steps to care for them. Use chopping boards for cutting and trivets for hot pots and pans, and wipe up spills quickly to prevent stains.