



An Honest Kitchen

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Lazy Cooking

Kathryn's perspective

It might surprise you to read this, but I'm a pretty lazy cook. I love eating out and watching chefs in action, but I can rarely be bothered to do that at home. There are lots of things I don't cook – too much hassle for what is essentially *just food*. As soon as I read the words “béchamel” or “roux”, I turn the page and most of the time the idea of cooking something with multiple processes and complex ingredients leaves me glassy-eyed.

However, I do love cooking. For me it's the alchemy that occurs in the pan, as you stir, sauté and add ingredients, which fascinates. However, most of the time, and particularly during the week I want something that tastes great and is healthy, but I also want a meal that comes together simply, without too much primping or fussing.

In my clinic I see lots of people who are afraid of cooking. Who can't make a recipe unless they have *all* the ingredients. People who devour food magazines and yet rarely cook from them. People who end up getting take-away because they believe it's too hard to cook. While I enjoy cooking shows and am rarely happier than when I have a new cookery book in my hands, there are many aspects of the celebrity chef phenomenon that disturb me. Instead of bringing us closer to food and cooking, I wonder if we are becoming more distanced. Instead of de-mystifying and simplifying food, I suspect food now seems like harder work. Much of the current chef phenomenon seems to make food more difficult, mystical and unobtainable. **What they call simple is not my version of simple.** Through telling us that something *has* to be cooked in a certain way; that the only good stock is one you make yourself; that something is “quick and easy” while they demonstrate a process that is actually lengthy and complicated, celebrity chefs only serve to make many people feel inadequate and make cooking seem harder than it is.

But here at *An Honest Kitchen*, we think most of that is poppycock. Instead, we rarely believe there is only one way to cook something and most of the time we like to have dinner on the table as quickly as possible. As we've said before *An Honest Kitchen* is not restaurant food. It's not the product of great chefs and it's not the product of people who have limitless time for cooking.

It's not fashionable to say this, some will think it almost sacrilege, but to be honest mid-week I usually make compromises with my meal prep in order to get the dinner on the table at a reasonable hour. If it's a choice between spending hours cooking something and take-away, then I'd be ordering take-away as well. But that isn't the only choice. It is possible to make a good, satisfying and healthy meal, without spending hours in the kitchen. This emphasis on practical simplicity is why I rarely use stock; frequently add spice blends to my food; it's why in *An Honest Kitchen* we give variations and encourage you to make use of what you've got, rather than buying new ingredients; it's also why we eschew recipes that use lots of ingredients or rare cooking equipment. Almost everything in *An Honest Kitchen* can be changed and adapted to suit your tastes and your pantry.

In this issue, we've also separated some of the meals out. So you can either make the whole meal as we suggest, or just make part of it and pair with different vegetables, meat or salad. Where we think dishes go extra specially well together, we've grouped them. For example the *Avocado, potato and watercress salad*, is located right next to the *Chilli chicken skewers* because it's a fabulous combination. However there's no reason why you have to make these two together.

We are proud of the way *An Honest Kitchen* looks. We want it to be a beautiful thing. But we don't want it to remain as just that. Instead we want you to use it, try out the recipes, adapt them to suit your tastes, incorporate them into your weekly cooking routine. Make them your own.

Ignore all those people telling you that cooking is difficult or complex. Or that recipes have to be done in one way, instead exercise your food prep muscles and get cooking.

Kathryn

Lucy's thoughts

There was a time in my life when I was a slave to recipes. Upon arriving home, late, mostly tired, I would roll up my sleeves and get down to some serious recipe-led cooking. The food was always good, but it often took hours to get to the table, by which time, as you might well imagine, no-one really appreciated how marvellous the pastry was or how silky the slowly-cooked onions were. In fact, no-one, cook included, actually cared. Many cooks I admired managed to just throw something together, to cook great food fast, all done with a sense of ease and calm. Their food was always delicious. How did they do it?

Thing is, these cooks were the kind that had learned that eating at a sensible hour makes for better eating *full-stop*. Cooking played but a small part of their lives, an enjoyable part, but they were realistic. They cooked with what was to hand and made use of produce they found seasonally available. I watched and learned. At home, I too began cooking with the seasons, with what was available, omitting and substituting along the way. It was liberating. Kathryn calls this style of cooking 'Lazy Cooking' and, as a confirmed Lazy Cook, I heartily agree. Professional chefs cook the way they do and write the complicated recipes they do because it is their job; at home, the cook has many other roles to fulfil. Feeding yourself, your family or friends is but one part of life.

We do eat out some nights, but I feel better when I've cooked something, however basic or quick myself. At home, I can control the preparation, the flavouring, the fat (I still go heavy on the olive oil – but I'm learning!). So, play. It's *the* best piece of kitchen advice. If a recipe seems too complicated, ditch it in favour of one that may taste a little less spectacular, a little less 'restaurant-quality', but that feeds and nourishes and pleases nonetheless.

That is the secret to good eating.

Lucy

Practical tips for Home Cooks

Know your end product:

Knowing what to expect a dish should taste and look like, and reading an unfamiliar recipe through at least twice before you begin is hugely advantageous to the cook. Once made, think about how you'd make it next time: what steps could you leave out? Which ingredients worked/didn't work for you? Could you use less fat next time? Once you know what to expect, it doesn't matter how you get there.

Watch and learn:

Do you know someone who cooks great food effortlessly? Ask if you can watch, take notes and see what tips you can pick up.

Don't be afraid to substitute:

If you don't have all the ingredients, then try to find something similar. Think about the ingredient you are missing, the meal you are making and what you have in the pantry. Do you have an ingredient that is similar? Is the missing ingredient vital to the final dish? Rather than rushing out to the shops late at night or giving up, use something else instead.

Eat your mistakes:

This is one of the best pieces of cooking advice I've ever received. While it can be easy to get demoralised when your dinner doesn't work out, don't fall into the trap of thinking cooking is too hard and something you "can't do". Instead accept you are going to make mistakes, they're a normal part of learning. Instead, if your dinner hasn't turned out as expected, ask yourself what went wrong? Is the meal over- or under-cooked? Is there too much of one ingredient? Is it the recipe, or the way it was cooked? By asking yourself these questions you can work out how to improve the dish next time and become a better cook.





Gingery beef with spinach

Serves 2

This is a simple and flavoursome dish that is cooked in one frying pan. Serve it with some rice and you have a hearty and satisfying meal.

200g rump or sirloin steak, sliced into 5mm thick slices
Chunk of fresh ginger, about 2cm, shredded (*see Cooking & Storage Notes*)
3 garlic cloves, crushed
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
2 teaspoons olive oil
1 onion, cut into thin-ish half moons
½ cup crushed tomatoes (from a tin)
½ cup cooked/tinned chickpeas
½ bunch fresh English spinach, washed and very roughly chopped
½ cup fresh or frozen peas
1 tablespoon shoyu
1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
½ bunch fresh coriander, roughly chopped

To serve: cooked basmati or brown rice

“Marinate” the meat: Place the steak, ginger, garlic and black pepper in a bowl. Gently mix together with your hands so the spices are rubbed into the meat and it's thoroughly coated. Put this aside for 10 minutes, while you prep the rest of the ingredients.

Brown the meat: Place a large non-stick frying pan (with a lid) over a medium-high heat. Pour in the olive oil and when hot add the beef. Cook the strips for 1 – 2 minutes on each side, until they're browned and just cooked through. Do this in two batches. Remove the beef to a plate and put to one side.

Cook the vegetables: Place the same frying pan back on the heat. Add the onions and any leftover marinade. Stir and cover with a lid. Cook on a medium heat for 8- 10 minutes, stirring regularly, until the onions are golden brown. Add the tomatoes, give the dish a stir and then replace the lid. Lower the heat slightly and leave this to cook for 3 minutes, until the tomatoes have thickened and the onions are cooked through. Add the beef, chickpeas, spinach and peas to the pan. This may look slightly unwieldy, in the saucepan, but the spinach wilts down. Place the lid back on the pan and cook for 1 minute. Take the lid off and give the dish a good stir. Continue cooking gently for another couple of minutes, until the chickpeas are heated through. Add the shoyu, vinegar and coriander and stir through.

Cooking & Storage:

Shredding ginger can be quite difficult. I've tried this dish with both thinly sliced and chopped ginger, but it just isn't as good, so shredding it is. If you have a ginger grater use that, otherwise I've found the most effective way is to put the ginger in a plastic bag (with the garlic) and bash it with a rolling pin. Then you just scrape this mixture out into a bowl.

It's pretty hard to measure out black pepper, if like me, you're grinding it from a pepper mill – so the amount listed above is an *estimation only*. I used about 30 grinds from my pepper meal, enough to really cover the meat, but not make the dish too hot.

Variations:

You can make a **vegetarian version** of this dish by using paneer cheese, instead of the beef. Cut the paneer into cubes and brown it off in the frying pan. Put this to one side and then cook the ginger and garlic in with the onions. Finish the recipe off, as above, adding the browned paneer back into the pan towards the end.

Lucy's Notes:

So good. So, so good. So good in fact that this is - hands down—my favourite recipe of the bunch this time. The beef is excellent, but I urge you to try the vegetarian paneer version too. It's *unbelievable*.

