



Recipes

HELEN LAMMERS-HELPS

The art and science of cooking

Why is it some people can work magic in the kitchen while others cannot?

While it's difficult to come up with a definitive answer to this question, I thought that I could at least shed light on the subject by asking some successful professional cooks who, or what, had influenced them.

Rose Murray, the Cambridge, Ontario author of more than a dozen cookbooks, says her passion for food is rooted in her childhood growing up on a farm. "Knowing where my food came from is something that has stuck with me all my life," she says. "I try to focus on local, seasonal foods and recipes, to support local farmers as much as I can."

"Start with quality ingredients and do nothing more than showcase their intrinsic flavours. Food isn't the spice of life, food is life."

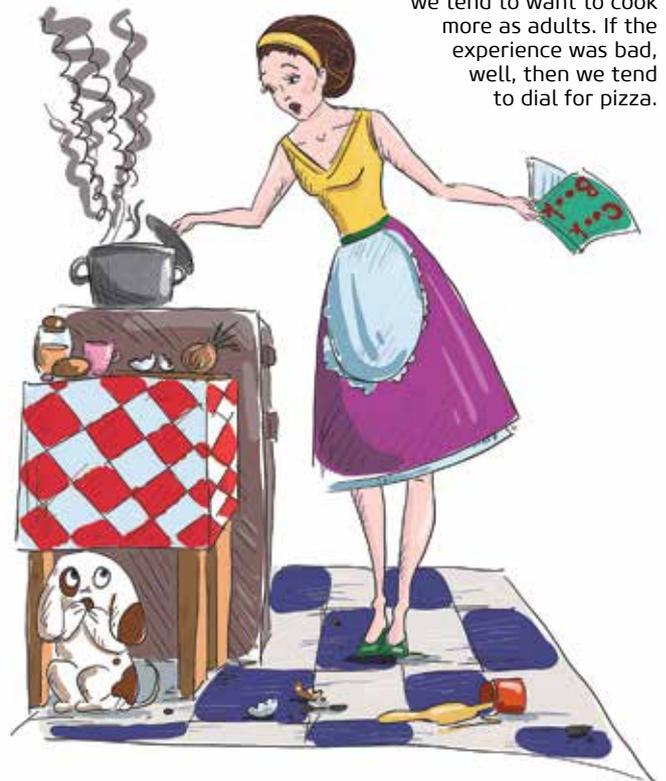
While always attempting to make sure her recipes are clear and well-tested, Rose emphasizes the importance of going beyond the science of cooking. "It's about the enjoyment of cooking, of making something and of the conversation you will have while eating it."

Guelph, Ontario recipe developer and author of *The Messy Baker*, Charmian Christie, credits her mom with instilling in her a love of cooking. Like Rose, Charmian's mom put the emphasis on the joy of cooking, of making food to share with family. Charmian says her mom "made it fun" and was "unflappable in the kitchen." If an ingredient was forgotten, her response was: "That's okay. We are going to fix it."

Charmian's mom also invited the family to rate new recipes and offer their suggestions for ways the recipes could be improved. This opportunity to be creative in the kitchen, to modify and adapt recipes, seized Charmian's imagination, she says.

Like Charmian, Donna-Marie Pye, owner of Relish Cooking Studio in Waterloo, Ontario, was captivated by the creative process of cooking. Donna-Marie says her mother loved to cook and entertain but the kitchen was very small so Donna-Marie didn't actually help out that much. Instead she learned by osmosis, by watching her mother cook and preserve produce from their large garden.

We often learn about food and cooking when we are young. If the experience was good, we tend to want to cook more as adults. If the experience was bad, well, then we tend to dial for pizza.



However, it wasn't until Donna-Marie was hired by a family friend to prepare dinner that she really got excited about cooking. She went on to study Food and Nutrition at university which led to her career as a recipe developer, cookbook author and owner of a cooking studio.

Derek Hines, chef at a Cambridge, Ontario restaurant has also experienced the magic of creating in the kitchen. "Food chose me," he says. At the age of 15, Derek began working in restaurant kitchens but by that time a deep appreciation for food had already taken hold. Derek grew up on a farm near New Hamburg, Ontario, where his mom made most meals from scratch and canned a lot of fruits and vegetables from their large garden. His grandmother was also an excellent baker. Derek says they bartered and traded with the neighbours for the things they didn't grow or raise themselves so everything they ate was from close to the source.

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"It isn't rocket science," says the self-taught chef. "Start with quality ingredients and do nothing more than showcase their intrinsic flavours. Food isn't the spice of life, food is life."

Mary Carver, Food Literacy Coordinator for the Ontario Home Economists Association, says that it's important for people to have the opportunity to practice their food preparation skills. "We take our kids to hockey practice so they get better at playing hockey but they need opportunities to practice in the kitchen too," she points out. Cooking is a skill we will use our entire lives and that impacts our health, she adds.

Busy families are increasingly relying on processed food and restaurant meals which tend to be higher in salt, fat and sugar and contain fewer servings of fruits and vegetables than home-cooked meals. There has been a parallel trend towards increased obesity, Type II Diabetes,

high blood pressure and heart disease. Not only is it important to be able to prepare healthy meals, Carver says there is a bigger picture. For example, we need to be able to plan meals, to know what staples we need to keep on-hand, to be able to adapt recipes, and to be able to use up leftovers to minimize food waste.

It all comes down to self-efficacy and self-confidence, says Dr. June Matthews, an associate professor in the Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences at Western University in London, Ontario. In the most general sense, self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations; in the context of cooking, it refers to one's confidence to prepare food using different food items and techniques. These are skills we can build on as we continue to learn throughout our lifetime, she says.

