



Cook with Jamie: My Guide to Making You a Better Cook

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Extract

Dear possibly great cook! Welcome to my seventh book, *Cook with Jamie*. In a funny sort of way I feel this should have been my first cookbook, where I take you on a journey through the basics of food, shopping and cooking with great ingredients, a bit like the Fifteen students when they start on day one of their course.

As I've been writing this book, we've taken on more students at our Fifteen restaurants in London and Amsterdam, opened a restaurant in Cornwall and are about to open another one in Melbourne. Over the last five years we've concentrated on breaking down cheffy procedures into something that the students – most of whom have never, ever cooked before they turn up on their first day – can get stuck into: butchery, fishmongery, making fresh pasta. Whether you've cooked before, or you're cooking for the first time, I wanted to give you a smidgeon of our Fifteen cookery course.

Over the years, I've been amazed to hear of all the different types of people who have started to cook for the first time – you'd think it would mostly be twenty-year-olds at university, but that's absolutely not the case. It's kids, teenagers, middle-aged people, OAPs, men, women, singles, marrieds, working-class and posh people – all sorts, who come across cooking for whatever reason. And the one thing that I hear over and over again when it comes to those who've discovered cooking after, say, the age of thirty, is that they wish they'd started earlier. Well, here's your chance!

In this book I'm going to be brutally frank at times and tell you how I think it is – and I do have some pretty strong opinions about how we should buy and cook food! I've included recipes that are going to be easy to buy ingredients for, and you'll notice that in every chapter I've given you some really nice and simple recipes to show you the importance of getting the basic cooking bit right and to show you how just one or two ingredients can make a dish work. For instance, if you take a beautiful brisket of beef and cook it slowly in a pot with a lid on for seven or eight hours, or overnight, in the morning the meat will be a little crisp on top and beautifully soft underneath, rich in intense flavour, really gorgeous. That's simply the quality of the meat speaking and the benefit of patient, slow cooking – and that's before you've even added any other ingredients.

Things were so different fifty-odd years ago, when the general public had a good knowledge of cooking. In actual fact, I wouldn't need to be writing this book if we were all as well informed as people were back then, but our priorities about food have changed. It always amazes me how these days people can be totally up-to-speed and knowledgeable about so many different things – computers, music, fashion – but they don't give a toss about what they put in their mouths every day. If it's meat, they don't care where the animal has come from, how it's been reared or what it's been fed on. If you walk round your average supermarket, even though big efforts have been made, there are still lots of products riddled with E numbers, additives, hydrogenated fats and a whole catalogue of fillers – fake food. What I want to try and do in this book is make cooking and eating real food, natural food, healthy food, normal again. And as much as it sounds like I'm ranting, or putting too much importance on cooking, I do think we've reached a crucial point in history now – the way we produce and cook our food is going to radically affect what the next generation grows up on. Either we change back to the natural methods of food production or things will get ever more 'sci-fi' and mass-produced. I often wonder what everything will be like in, say, three hundred years' time. Will things be better or worse? Will people look back at our generation and think that the things we do now are crazy? Will we drink our dinner through straws or eat little capsules? Will our meals simply be different-flavoured jelly beans?

Now, you must think I've completely lost the plot! The thing is, the more I learn about the history of food, the more I realize that one thing we should agree on with our ancestors is that good food is important; that it has always been essential. Festivals are identified by it, families are pulled together by it, it represents good times or bad times. I suppose what I'm trying to say is that, historically, food has always had one of the most important places in the home, in the town, in our different cultures. For thousands of years in Britain we farmed reasonably respectfully and in harmony with nature, and this was followed up with cooking good stuff. But now, with our clever technology, computers and busier lives, we have moved further away from the importance of home-cooked food. Who would have thought, all those decades ago, that we would be able to buy pre-packed portions of dinner, complete with a steam valve and disposable packaging, that can be microwaved in a few minutes? Things like this would have been considered science fiction, an impossibility, yet now it's everyday life. Of course, this has all resulted from a demand from generations who haven't learned how to cook. Imagine our great-grandparents' amazement at the choice of ingredients we now have, from places like India, the Mediterranean, China even. Yet at the same time they would have wondered what the world had come to if they read the adverts in farming magazines explaining how to make animals gain more weight by making them retain more water . . . And imagine what farmers in the old days would have thought of today's battery farming practices. They'd have told you it wouldn't be allowed to happen, that it

would never happen. Why would birds be housed all together with no room to move when the big man upstairs gave them legs to run around on?

Cooking should be as normal to you and me as it was to our mums and nans, and the only way this is going to happen is if it becomes compulsory to teach kids how to cook at school again. It's important to learn about the integrity of homemade food before this knowledge is lost for ever. In the future will there be more choice or less? Will it be healthier food? Somehow, I don't think so. And I also don't think we can possibly imagine what scientists and mass food manufacturers might come up with next.

I've written this book, then, to give you some of the basics of modern-day cookery. I want to encourage you to try something new, to get to grips with a handful of simple techniques, to make informed choices. I want you to shop well and recognize when you're being ripped off by a market seller or a supermarket, when you're being sold rubbish or average stuff. But more than that, I want you to have fun, not just from cooking and eating but also from sharing your food with others. I'm going to give you helpful hints and some brilliant recipe combinations, from basic salads to fantastic family meat dishes. I want to take the opportunity to show you, for instance, how a whole animal breaks down into the different cuts. And I want you to understand a bit more about cooking methods – slow, fast, how and why.

So in this book I'm going to treat you just as I would one of my students and give you some inspiration for good, rock-solid cooking. I hope this book will get you thinking about shopping and cooking in ways that you might not have considered before. Remember, cooking isn't hard, elitist or poncey. It's just about learning little bits of information and trying something different once in a while. Just think, if you're lucky you're going to live for about seventy-five years and you're going to be eating three times a day, every single day for the rest of your life – you might as well be good at cooking!