



Teach Kids to Cook, and They Can Feast for a Lifetime

By Janice Cook Knight

Most children naturally enjoy cooking. What's more fun than getting in the kitchen with food? Food is colorful, beautiful, fragrant, messy, sweet or savory. You can mix it, knead it, chop it (sharp knives!), ferment it, bake it and a million other things too. It tastes good, and we need to eat it at least three times a day.

A lot of kids learn to cook right at home. But in our busy lives, taking the time to teach cooking skills sometimes gets left off the agenda. Sometimes we don't take the time to stop and show kids those proper knife skills, or how to break apart a cauliflower and sauté the florets, or how to properly grill a steak, or a piece of fish, or eggplant or peppers. Sometimes we are so busy getting dinner on the table there doesn't seem to be enough time to slow down and teach. Which is too bad, because kids of all ages, if given a chance, like to help.

I still remember learning to make a béchamel sauce (we called it white sauce) with my mom. I was about 8 years old. She patiently guided me through the steps of melting the butter, keeping the temperature low so it didn't burn, and adding just

the right amount of flour, which we stirred in but didn't allow to brown. Meanwhile, in a separate pan we heated some milk to a gentle simmer, and slowly poured that into the butter and flour, stirring all the while. We cooked the sauce over low heat, still stirring often, until it had the consistency of heavy cream. Voila! We had a creamy sauce, which we used as the basis for my mom's macaroni and cheese—and many other dishes.

It is a wonderful memory, but more than that it has been a guide—like a built-in cookbook—as I've cooked for myself and my family almost every day of my adult life. I've taught students to cook as well. We all have to eat—and so we must cook, or hope to benefit from someone else's cooking.

Teaching children to cook and eat healthfully is one of the best things we can pass on to them. For kids who want to learn the basics, or just expand their repertoire, we are fortunate to have some wonderful children's and teens' cooking programs in Santa Barbara: A 2-year-old program called Apples to Zucchini teaches children to cook using farmers market produce and the experience of local chefs. Their mission: teaching children and families to prepare delicious, nutritious, affordable meals made from real food. Apples to Zucchini was founded by the powerhouse team of Nancy Marz and Terra Hillyer, who have backgrounds in nonprofit work and in nutrition and cooking, respectively. Their classes are taught as after-school programs on school campuses. About 60 kids are currently enrolled, at Adams School and Monte Vista School in Santa Barbara, and at Brandon School in Goleta, with plans to expand in coming months. Apples to Zucchini is a nonprofit partnering with the Santa Barbara Foundation and Partners in Education to make these programs affordable to all. Scholarships are available.

I watched an Apples to Zucchini class at Adams School taught by Chef Diana Cuttrel, owner of the catering business Dining with Di. The children made a beautiful pear crostata, with pears donated by our local farmers market. They prepared the pastry, chopped the pears, rolled the dough and shaped the crust into a free-form pear "pie," and the chef popped it into the oven. They learned the difference between the baking pears used in a crostata and crispy Asian pears, which are better for eating out of hand. Both kinds of pears were available at class that day so kids could see and taste for themselves. The children participated in all aspects of the cooking class, including learning table manners, eating their tasty creations, and cleanup. I happened to visit on a rare dessert day; other classes in the series might include making a complete meal, such as kid-

friendly chicken tenders, salad and a vegetable. The farmers market participation challenges chefs and students to learn to use vegetables and fruits in season.

Cooking classes are among the many offerings at Girls Inc. of Santa Barbara and Goleta. Girls Inc. is a national program whose mission is "dedicated to inspiring all girls to be strong, smart and bold." Classes are offered as after school enrichment and during summer camps. Classes such as My Plate, The Science of Cooking, Master Chef, Flavors of the World and What's for Lunch? are tailored for specific grade levels, from first and second grade up to teens. There is even a Friday Snack Shack, where kids help prepare food to be sold to parents on Fridays, learning entrepreneurial food skills as well.

The class called Flavors of the World celebrates food diversity. Students in first and second grade explore geography and culture, and how food varies in different places. Students also practice literacy through recipe writing. Another class, The Science of Cooking, helps students discover the elements that make a recipe work. Fourth and fifth graders can be inventive and experiment with recipes in this class. And nutrition is one of the subjects studied in the teen program, available at the Girls Inc. center in Goleta.

The TLC, or Teens Love Cooking, program is offered through the Food Bank of Santa Barbara County. I first learned about the program when I became a Food Bank volunteer. The seven-week program teaches teens to cook quick, healthy meals, while learning about nutrition and our local and long-distance food systems.

Teens begin with knife and other kitchen safety skills. They might watch a short video of British chef Jamie Oliver, who gives a brilliant knife skills demo. The lead educator demonstrates knife skills and teens get to practice while volunteers supervise. Teens *love* learning knife skills.

Each week the recipes—for things like whole-grain pasta with fresh, uncooked tomato/garlic/basil sauce; mango salsa; traditional hummus and orange-chicken stir-fry with brown rice—demonstrate useful, everyday foods that students can repeat at home. Recipes stress whole grains over refined, and lots of fresh veggies and fruits. Traditional sugary desserts are not emphasized, though fresh fruit is, but students might prepare a simple fruit cobbler with a small amount of sugar. Alternative proteins, such as tofu, are explored.

Teens also learn which foods (such as fast foods), are especially high in salt, fat and sugar, and learn how to make

better choices. Students carefully examine labels of prepared foods, and calculate fat, salt and sugar intake in typical portions. The curriculum covers which basic nutrients are available in fresh foods, and why eating a rainbow of colorful foods (red cabbage, spinach, dark green or red-leaf lettuce, fresh garlic, yellow bell pepper, as examples) is beneficial.

For the last class, students create a “fiesta,” where they prepare their favorite class recipes and share them with their families and invited friends. This brings home what they have learned. They even earn prizes, such as small cooking utensils or cookbooks, to take home at the end of class. As of this writing, classes are being offered in Isla Vista at the St. George Family Youth Center and Housing Authority’s Teen Academy, and at Carpinteria Middle School.

Caveat: To take the above-mentioned classes, students first must be enrolled in one of the participating schools or programs or at Girls Inc. Some of the classes listed in our adult cooking class section also have classes for kids and teens. Heat and Food Liaison, both in Carpinteria, offer kids’ classes, as does Cooking with Laurie.



Leah Diamond is the owner of Healthy Cooking with Kids. Her classes are taught in her home and are generally small, usually five or six students, so that all students are hands-on cooks. Leah has been teaching healthy cooking for over 20 years. She will also teach private classes in your home, including children’s birthday parties. Leah can accommodate dietary restrictions such as gluten-free or dairy-free cooking; she teaches adult cooking as well. Call 805 683-2525.

I’m happy that these excellent cooking programs are available. I only wish there were more. Given the obesity rate among children and teens (in California, about 30%), and the corresponding diseases associated with obesity, I’d love to see hands-on healthy cooking classes built in at *every* school. We must eat every day of our lives. Eating well is as important as English, math, computer skills, the arts, sciences, sociology and leadership. If we do not eat well, how can we flourish? 🍴

Adult Cooking Schools



The Santa Barbara area offers a wealth of cooking classes for adults, whether you are learning the basics or expanding your repertoire. Here are some of the most popular:

Cook and Bake with Laurie

Laurie Zalk was the owner of Our Daily Bread, the beloved local bakery, for 35 years, and owned the Main Squeeze for 12. After all that experience teaching her staff to prepare food, it’s a gift to our community that she’s now available to teach private classes for small groups. Classes can be held at her home or yours. She specializes in bringing you great recipes for every dietary requirement, and likes to demonstrate tricks like fast, fabulous but easy desserts. Possible classes: Men’s Only, Children’s Baking and Cooking, Gluten-free Baked Doughnuts, Summer Salads. She can do it all. Laurie also is one of the chef/teachers in the Apples to Zucchini program. CookAndBakewithLaurie.com; 805 689-2416; Instagram, Facebook.

Farmbelly

Michelle Aronson, a farmer herself, offers classes with a farm-to-table aspect. Classes with titles like Eat Like a Farmer, Pickling and Fermenting, Farmhouse Cheesemaking, Vegetable Butchery and Culinary Herbs 101 emphasize using the best local produce. Michelle will teach in your home, or for larger classes will arrange another venue. Michelle trained at the famous Ballymaloe Cooking School in Cork, Ireland, and managed an educational organic farm in Charlottesville, Virginia. More recently she has been the garden manager and sustainability coordinator for dining services at Westmont College. Last fall she taught a fundraising Tomato Preservation Class with the organization Veggie Rescue, which distributes surplus farm produce to people in need. Farmbelly.com, 314 369-8140; Facebook, Instagram.

Adult Cooking Schools

The Food Liaison

Nirasha Rodriguez and her husband, Jason, have remodeled a strip mall space in Carpinteria into a beautiful kitchen and small restaurant. There are two working kitchens on site that can be used for cooking classes. Some of the classes are taught by Nirasha, others by chefs Food Liaison brings to the space. They often feature local farm produce. Past classes have included Vegan Tapas, The Essential Grilling Guide Class, Date Night: Spicy Cajun and Kids' Fiesta. Food Liaison also offers team-building cooking classes for corporate events. TheFoodLiaison.com; 805 200-3030; Facebook, Instagram, Twitter.

HEAT Culinary

Nikki Dailey's HEAT Culinary in Carpinteria offers a large variety of hands-on cooking classes for adults. Classes generally have about 12 people. The adventurous class subjects cover Persian cooking, Tamale making, Croissants, Thai Street Food and Cast-Iron Cooking, to name just a few. She sometimes teaches classes for children and teens as well. The kids' classes generally run in the summer, in a week-long camp where kids make as many as 15–16 dishes per day. Now that's cooking with heat. HeatCulinary.com; 805 242-1151. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter.

Le Petit Chef

Denisse Salinas offers in-home cooking classes that are global in scope, and her ingredients follow the seasons. She will customize recipes for her clients, and accommodates special diets. Her website lists a wide range of cooking class possibilities, including Leaving the Nest, a series of classes for teens going off to college; Girl's Night Out; Chocolate Creations; and Cooking for Vitality: Intro to Raw and Vegan. She may be short in stature, hence her company's name, but not in cooking knowledge. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest. LePetitChefSantaBarbara.com; 805 637-3899.

Market Forays

Laurence Hauben's cooking classes offer a true locavore experience. Her Saturday class might meet at the fish market at the harbor, then on to the farmers market for fresh fruits and veggies, followed by a trip to the cheese shop and other local purveyors before meeting at her charming home to make a meal with all the goods.

Laurence also offers private classes in your home for a party or a special event, as well as corporate team-building classes; other Santa Barbara culinary adventures, such as visits to local wineries or craft breweries, are also possible. MarketForays.com; 805 259-7229, Instagram, Facebook.

Pico Restaurant, at the Los Alamos General Store

Chef Drew Terp at Pico Restaurant in Los Alamos is teaching insider cooking classes, the secrets of Pico's restaurant menu. Past classes have included fresh pasta making, cheesemaking (mozzarella and ricotta) and a poultry class where students learned to debone a quail, stuff and truss a chicken and split and trim a duck, making duck confit out of the legs. He teaches about one class per month, but oh what a class. LosAlamosGeneralStore; 805 344-1122; Facebook, Instagram.

Private Chef Robin

Chef Robin Goldstein brings a chef's perspective to her cooking classes, demonstrating a chef's tricks of the trade. Cooking classes are held in your home. Chef Robin has 35 years of experience as a chef, caterer and event planner in California and abroad, and is the author of three cookbooks, including the recently published *Wine Country Recipes*. She also teaches at venues such as Food Liaison in Carpinteria and at the Lavender Inn and Millworks in Santa Barbara. PrivateChefRobin.com; 805 284-4264, also on Facebook and Instagram.

School of Extended Learning, SBCC

Formerly known as Santa Barbara City College Adult Education and the Center for Lifelong Learning, there are cooking classes here on a wide range of subjects. For Spring 2018 they will offer classes in Indian Vegetarian Cooking; Tapas, Meze and Antipasti; Sushi; Gourmet Make-Ahead-Meals; Fusion Food; Cooking for Two (or One); Bread Making; Ableskivers and more. The prices are still the best in town. Classes can be large, but they are generally hands-on and a lot of fun, and a great way to meet friends you can cook with. SBCC.edu/extendedlearning.

Studio Nihon

Fukiko Miyazaki offers Japanese cooking classes in students' homes. She learned to make sushi in Japan from her mother and grandmother. You may know her through the classes she taught at SBCC's Adult Education program; Fukiko also worked as a sushi chef at Ahi Sushi. You can take classes in sushi making, both Japanese-style and American-style rolls, or take a class in Japanese home cooking and learn to make dishes like tonkatsu, nabe and okonomiyaki. Fukiko is also a sake sommelier! There are so many different kinds of sake. StudioNihon.com; 805 453-7616; Facebook.

Janice Cook Knight is the author of *The Follow Your Heart Cookbook: Recipes from the Vegetarian Restaurant* and *Follow Your Heart's Vegetarian Soup Cookbook*. She has taught cooking for 35 years. Her article in the Fall 2014 issue of *Edible Santa Barbara*, "Hurray for the Orange, Red and Gold: The Season for Persimmons," won the 2015 M.F.K. Fisher Award in the Print Category. JaniceCookKnight.com