

The Telegraph

The online cookery course that turns university students into supper stars



Want your teens to learn how to cook?
An online course offers flexibility and support

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Salad days are here; the long, lazy summer before university. But while exams may be done with and courses chosen, festival tickets bought and gap year travel planned, there's another crucial factor to sort before heading off. How will next term's students be feeding themselves once lectures start?

Some of the students may have already done Duke of Edinburgh Awards – more than 153,000 last year – which may have included a segment of cookery as part of the skills programme for young people.

But learning to cook, whether for the D of E award or just as a valuable life skill, isn't straightforward. Some may have learnt from their parents, but the reality of busy family life makes covering all the basics hard. And let's face it, many teenagers aren't keen on being told what to do by their mum and dad.

Other than that, the options up until now have either been an expensive hands-on cookery course, possibly miles away, or teaching yourself with books and YouTube videos – potentially frustrating and chaotic.

Consequently, many 16- to 18-year-olds leave education with no idea how to cook for themselves, leading chef Heston Blumenthal recently to call for food and nutrition classes to be made mandatory “at least” to GCSE level.

Until that happens, a new online course by Lorna Wing offers an alternative: a structured 12-week course, with Wing, an experienced cook and teacher, only a phone call – or WhatsApp message – away.



Lorna Wing encourages students to begin in the summer holidays when they have more time

What’s more, the course offers accreditation for the D of E scheme. It’s not the first online course, but it is the first to offer this level of support and flexibility. The price is reasonable, too – £150, including one-to-one feedback on every recipe the students cook.

I met up with Wing at her elegant terraced house in Wandsworth recently. She’s something of a hero of mine: when I was a student myself, I would read her recipes in Sainsbury’s Magazine, and she was the person behind the Nineties obsession with miniaturised canapés – the tiny roast dinners in mini Yorkshire puddings, the weeny fish and chips, the doll’s house Christmas dinners.

Her CV is contrastingly huge. After studying home economics at college, she worked for Prue Leith before, aged just 19, cooking and crewing on a yacht sailing the Atlantic twice, “mastering 50 ways to cook with flying fish,” she recalls.

A stint running Heal’s restaurant for Terence Conran (Antonio Carluccio used to pop in to help her out) followed. At the same time – Wing knows all about multitasking – she ran a catering company, which involved her cooking Christmas lunch for Eric Clapton, as well as catering Jerry Hall’s 30th birthday party, the Queen Mother’s 80th and the King of Greece’s son’s wedding at Hampton Court, where there were SAS in the kitchen and 600 staff to coordinate for the 1,200 guests.

Always approachable, at big bashes the likes of Tina Turner and Richard Branson would gravitate to the kitchen for a cup of tea with her.

Wing knows how to cope in a crisis, too – like the time none of the hired equipment arrived, so the butlers were dispatched to Divertimenti, the local kitchenware shop, for trays and glasses. Or when time was so tight that she drove to Newmarket with chefs chopping ingredients in the back of a VW Golf – not a scenario that would now be permitted by health and safety regulations, she admits.

These days, Wing takes no risks. “I’m super practical. I don’t leave anything to chance – everything is weighed and measured.” Working with Delia Smith, at the time heading up Sainsbury’s Magazine, in the Nineties, was a revelation.

“Everything that Delia taught me has stood me in good stead. The triple-tested recipes. Thanks to Delia, I know the art of writing a recipe that works.”

It’s those recipes that form the basis for the online course, although there are links to videos by Delia, Jamie Oliver or other TV chefs for trickier techniques that are best explained visually.

Recipes have maximum of 12 ingredients, often far fewer, which are easy to find – and with students as far away as Sydney, Wing checks that ingredients are available in Australia.

The idea for the course came to her when a neighbour popped over to borrow a cake tin for her son’s D of E course. Wing looked at the online course and wasn’t impressed.

“It was all cakes, almost nothing savoury and the recipes were flawed. And it seemed to be aimed at younger people, so not age appropriate for people in their late teens.”

Delving further into food education, she found that schools were woefully bad at preparing kids to feed themselves after leaving home. “Of 200 I got in touch with, only eight were teaching any kind of cookery in class, seven had cookery clubs, and only seven were doing proper qualifications.”

With a teenage son at university herself, Wing decided to step in. Online seemed a good option, since exam-age kids are under a lot of pressure already with the strain of homework, revision, exams and after-school activities. It also keeps costs down, as hands-on courses can run into thousands of pounds.

Wing was also determined that there should be no fixed course dates, so students can start whenever suits them, although she encourages students to begin in the summer holidays when they have more time. The course costs £150, which includes feedback on every recipe the students cook. For the D of E Award students, Wing writes an assessment, which she uploads to their D of E accounts.

There are introductory and intermediate courses, and lessons start with overnight oats, a basic that she reckons can be a student lifesaver. “It’s affordable, will last for five days in the fridge and after a challenging evening, it’s there for you,” she remarks, which makes me think that students aren’t the only ones who could do with this recipe under their belts.

Dishes progress to scrambled and fried eggs, and on to teriyaki salmon and Sunday lunch traybake, all made with minimal equipment. On the way are clever crowd pleasers such as “perfect pot noodles” made with miso soup, noodles and frozen edamame peas plus “any bits of protein that might be hanging around in the fridge”.

There’s spaghetti Bolognese, but also a spaghetti Bolognese mozzarella sandwich, while Far Eastern flavours such as spicy peanut-butter noodles and cucumber salad with rice-vinegar dressing will recall gap-year travels. It’s food that you want to eat now, while gathering skills for the years ahead. These can be your salad days, your pasta days and your roast dinner days.

Visit lornawingcookery.co.uk or call 0208 871 2507 (9am-6pm weekdays)

Try this Spicy Crab Spaghetti with Cherry Tomatoes



Serves 2

150g spaghetti
1 clove garlic, peeled & crushed
Large pinch chilli flakes
170g tin white crabmeat, whole chunks are best
8 cherry tomatoes, roughly chopped
2 tbsp lemon juice
5 tbsp olive oil

1. Cook the pasta in a large pan of boiling salted water for 10-12 minutes or until it is al dente. **2.** Drain the crabmeat well in a sieve, and then lightly combine in a bowl with the tomatoes, olive oil, lemon, garlic, chilli and some seasoning. **3.** Drain the pasta in a colander, return it to the pan, stir in the crab mixture, but there’s no need to heat it as the pasta will give enough warmth to heat it through. Serve.