

# Modern home economics: the basics

As a Waitrose poll reveals 77% of people often or always look at the cost of the items they buy in the supermarket, Anna-Marie Julyan examines whether householders still have the skills to make their money go further in the kitchen and asks for a few tips on how to do it

Any woman who understands the problems of running a home will be nearer to understanding the problems of running a country.

These were the words of Britain's first female prime minister in 1979 as she stepped into an office dominated by men.

Plenty has changed since Thatcher's years, with the home no longer solely a woman's sphere, yet the same domestic challenges remain – not least how to balance the books and feed everyone.

Cooking healthily on a budget used to be taught in schools as domestic science or, later, home economics.

The end of the 80s, however, marked a shift away from 'traditional' subjects.

'They changed the curriculum from home economics to design and technology,' says Martin Caraher, professor of food and health policy at City University.

'The feeling was that this was creating people ready for a new future; that things would become more technical.

The basic skills of home economics disappeared, coinciding with the time we stopped training teachers in it.'

Nowadays cooking and nutrition in the UK is taught under design and technology with information on a healthy diet also covered by science. How schools choose to interpret the curriculum is up to them and may include practical work.

'It could be a day or week of cookery classes, a mother coming in to teach, or a chef adopting a school,' explains Caraher.

Luckily, cookery programmes, internet recipes and social media, mean today's youngsters, and their parents, have other resources when it comes to cooking.

They include chef Miguel Barclay, who has used the internet to spread his tips for economising at home.

Nicknamed the £1 Chef, Miguel shows his 180,000 Instagram followers how to create healthy meals for one for £1.

'I learned to cook working as a pot washer in different kitchens,' he explains.

'My recipes are very accessible but also inspirational.

'It started as something I did for fun, like a challenge where I'd see what I could make for £1.'

Miguel's short ingredients lists and step-by-step Instagram videos find a ready audience, especially among par-

ents, students and single professionals.

Recipes include chicken tartiflette, pulled pork chilli and he's even working on a lobster thermidor made with prawns.

Away from the online world, home economics does still flourish in some educational environments.

Amanda McCloat trains home economics teachers at St Angela's College, Sligo, the only place in Ireland to do so.

Her home economics courses comprise three areas: food, health, nutrition and cookery skills, family resource management and textiles and craft skills.

'We look at what you need to survive in life, to feed yourself and your family

– that's our business,' she says.

Planning menus for different numbers of people, mastering basic recipes that can be adapted for different dishes, budgeting, building relationships, avoiding food waste and nutrition are all on the curriculum.

They even teach people how to shop. 'You need to know how to be discerning in a supermarket, how to read nutritional labels and compare branded and non-branded products,' she explains.

McCloat's pearls of wisdom include a step-by-step approach to cookery.

'It's impossible to learn every dish in the world, but basic skills are important. Practise simple recipes, for example a mince ragu can be applied to a lasagne, a chilli con carne or a spaghetti Bolognese.

'Take fruit and vegetables out of their plastic wrappers before putting them in the fridge so they don't sweat.

'And, rotate the contents of your cupboards in a policy of first in and first out.'

Journalist Allison Pearson, author of *I Don't Know How She Does It* about the pressures of modern motherhood, is a good example of how practical advice learned early can stay with us all our lives.

She says domestic science (which became home economics in the 1970s) was 'easily my most useful school exam'.

'Those lessons provided an excellent grounding in how to feed a family. "Colour on the plate, girls!" was the battle cry of my formidable teacher, Miss Whittaker.

'She taught us that the more colours you got into a meal, the better the nutritional content.

'It's a great rule and I still think of it today when I'm feeding my kids.'



**RISE OF THE HOUSEWIFE** Domestic science lessons from the 1960s may have been replaced in schools, but skills can still be learned from social media and family

## How to practise modern home economics

### 1 PERFECT THE BASICS

Learn how to cook three or four basic recipes, such as a ragu, meat stew and curry, which can be adapted to make multiple dishes. (Amanda McCloat)

### 2 ROTATE FOOD

Follow a policy of 'first in, first out' with your cupboards, adding newly bought food to the back rather than the front of cupboards. (Amanda McCloat)

### 3 BATCH COOK

Make extra to freeze portions for another day in plastic containers or bags fit for purpose. Defrost in the fridge overnight so food is at a safe, controlled temperature. (Amanda McCloat)

### 4 MAKE LISTS

Plan your week's meals, leaving a day or two free to use up leftovers. Buy discounted food and freeze it, keeping an inventory on your phone so you know exactly what you have. (Rachel Phipps)

### 5 SHOP ONLINE

That way there's no temptation to buy unnecessary items. It also means no nasty surprises at the checkout as it keeps a running total. (Jane Ashley)

Photography: The Advertising Archives, Getty

## Fi Glover In my opinion



The BBC Radio 4 journalist airs her views

We might need a new motto. I'm not sure Storm Emma or the Beast From The East really proved that 'be prepared' was the phrase on everyone's lips. There were too many tales of people setting out on long car journeys with only Ken Bruce for company – and warm as he is, he's not much use at 3am when the temperature drops and you're down to the last Haribo jammed under the handbrake, but eaten anyway.

What would that motto be? If we are no longer prepared should we at least be alert? One of my favourite pieces of graffiti ever was a poster with the phrase 'be alert' on it, under which someone had scrawled 'Britain needs lerts'.

But at least that's in English. Many a national motto, confusingly, is not in a native tongue. The motto of the British monarch is in French, 'Dieu et mon droit', meaning 'God and my right'. It was said to have been first used by Richard I as a battle cry and then formally adopted as a tagline by Henry V, the 'and my right' being a nod to his claim to the French crown as well as his own.

The battle cry in our house might work as a new national shout out. It's 'wait, what?' My kids begin every sentence with it. Me: 'Are you ready for school?' Them: 'Wait, what?'.

**'The battle cry in our house might work as a new national shout out. It's "wait, what?" My kids begin every sentence with it'**

Me: 'Donald Trump is President!' Them: 'Wait, what?' And so it goes on. It does sum up our changing political history right now. I wake up most mornings going 'wait, what?'.

A quick trip around the globe of world mottos doesn't disappoint. You have to admire Lower Saxony for its lack of modesty. Its motto is 'immer eine gute idee' ('always a good idea'). You have to feel a little sorry for Maryland in the US, whose motto hasn't stood the test of time – 'fatti maschii, parole femine' literally translates as 'manly deeds, womanly words'. On all state literature the phrase has been given the less sexist interpretation of 'strong deeds, gentle words' but we all know what they were trying to say.

History is often unkind to a motto. Luxembourg's 'mir wëlle bleiwe wat mir sinn' ('we wish to remain what we are') can come across as a little backward facing but actually refers to its independent stance against hostile neighbours trying to annex it throughout history. Thankfully, there are plenty to choose from that appeal more, and my absolute favourite is from the Western African nation of Niger with a long-gone French colonial past – 'fraternité, travail, progrès' ('fraternity, work, progress').

Get along, be productive, look forward not back. Perfect.

@ffiglover  
Tune in to *The Listening Project*, afternoons on BBC Radio 4

## TOP ESSENTIAL WAITROSE PICKS

We asked three different cost-savvy cooks to give us their tips on using their favourite products from the essential Waitrose range

### THE HOME COOK

Jane Ashley (below), author of *Home Economics: How To Eat Like A King On A Budget* (Short Books, £14.99)

#### 1 Short grain rice

Use this as you would arborio rice in a mushroom risotto or simple paella with leftovers made into melted cheese-filled arancini.

#### 2 Cauliflower

Roast florets with sliced red pepper and red onion, olive oil and a teaspoon each of ground cumin, ground coriander, chilli flakes, turmeric and



fennel seeds. Roast for 25 minutes at 200°C and serve with couscous.

#### 3 Aubergine (left)

Cook with tomatoes, cheese and breadcrumbs in an aubergine Parmigiana or chop with courgettes and add to tomato pasta sauce.

#### 4 Sweet potatoes

Use as an alternative to regular potatoes in almost any dish (mashed, baked, chipped). I also make a delicious spicy sweet potato soup.

#### 5 Coconut milk

I use coconut milk to make a sweet rice pudding or as the binding ingredient in dim-sum buns and naan-style flatbreads.

### THE ONE POUND CHEF

Miguel Barclay (below) author of *Miguel Barclay's Fast & Fresh One Pound Meals* (Headline Home, £16.99)

#### 1 Tinned chopped tomatoes

You don't need to buy pre-made jars of pasta sauce. Just simmer a tin of chopped tomatoes with some olive oil.

#### 2 Orzo

Pan-fry a boneless chicken thigh, throw in some mushrooms or spring onions, add a small

handful of orzo pasta and some water, then simmer away to make a simple, one-pan dish.

#### 3 Pitted black olives

(left) They're perfect on the top of my frying pan pizza.

#### 4 Sardines in olive oil

Pan-fry and add a tin of chopped tomatoes to make a speedy pasta sauce.

#### 5 New Zealand lamb mince

Pan-fry with onions and rosemary sprigs, pop into a dish and top with mashed potato, before finishing in the oven.



**SEA FOOD** Phipps' tagliatelle

### THE STUDENT COOK

Rachel Phipps (below), author of *Student Eats* (Ebury, £9.99)

#### 1 Frozen raw king prawns

It's cheaper to buy frozen prawns than fresh, and the quality is great. Add still-frozen to rapidly cook in stir-fries, or defrost fully and toss with ground cumin, chilli powder, cayenne pepper, dried oregano and lime juice for speedy prawn fajitas.

#### 2 Tagliatelle

Fantastic with a simple butter or white wine sauce and seafood.

Fry with oyster sauce and thinly sliced ginger matchsticks then serve



with sticky jasmine rice and blanched Asian greens.

#### 4 Parmigiano Reggiano

Mix with breadcrumbs to coat

chicken and fish. I also love the nice, fat piece of rind at the end, which can be frozen to add deep flavour to soups and stews another day.

#### 5 Tomato purée double concentrated

This is the best way to add a hit of sunshine back into sauces made with out of season or tinned tomatoes.

