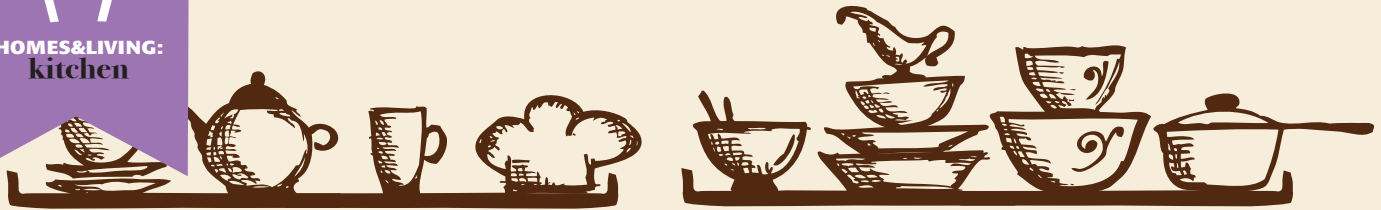


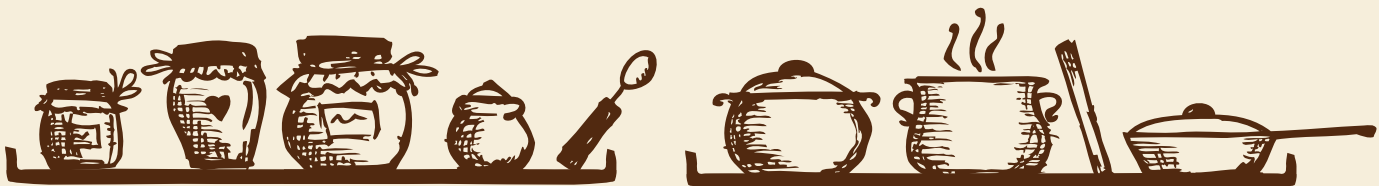


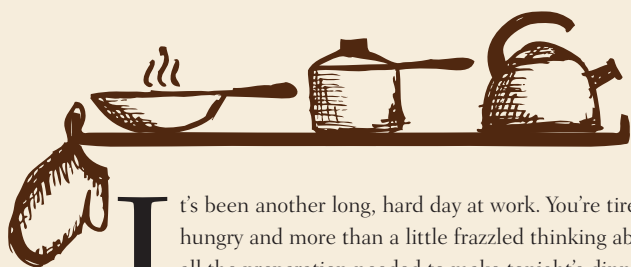
HOMES&LIVING:  
kitchen



# COOKING WITH CHEMISTRY

Contrary to popular belief, it is indeed possible for cooking and lack of time to co-exist in harmony, thanks to some simple tricks. Join NUR ILYANNA MOHD. SHAHARUL in search of the right chemistry in the kitchen





It's been another long, hard day at work. You're tired, hungry and more than a little frazzled thinking about all the preparation needed to make tonight's dinner for the spouse and kids. The horrendous traffic jam that insisted on accompanying you all the way home doesn't help your current state either. This is the moment your spouse decides to call and ask oh so cheerfully, "What's for dinner tonight, honey? And have you decided on what we're going to serve the Hansons when they come over for dinner on Saturday?"

It's a story that most mothers, wives and caregivers can empathise with; a delicate and sometimes desperate dance to successfully juggle the responsibilities that come with being the woman of the house. These days, the ideal Superwoman is expected to do everything well, and that includes the kitchen. Never mind that there are only 24 hours in a day, that you only have two hands and that there's only so much you can prepare alongside other ongoing family and work duties. And if you have little ones to care for? Well, let's not even go there.

Many of these expectations have to do with the age-old belief that the kitchen is a woman's domain. While the days of society looking down their nose at aspiring career women are long gone, a new set of expectations has emerged: one where we have to be good at our chosen profession *and* find the time to be equally good at cooking for and feeding the family.



These are certainly not realistic expectations in any woman's book, to be sure. Not everyone hires domestic help, and the reality is that it's impossible to juggle it all without running a significant risk of dropping something. Yet it's a fact that in today's whirlwind of a world, too many women feel the strain at home—even those who have strong domestic support systems. On one hand, you want to provide the best food you can for your family, or maybe you just wish you had more time to experiment with new recipes. On the other hand, the often extensive before-and-after preparations required in the process of cooking can wear you out. So, how can this dilemma be resolved?

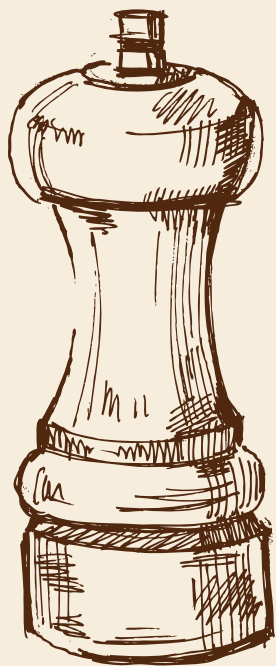
Contrary to popular belief, it's very much possible for cooking and lack of time to meet in the middle agreeably with some cunning manoeuvring around the kitchen. A little organization and creativity works wonders in transforming your kitchen space—and by extension, your cooking process—for the better. After all, it's often the simple tips and tricks that help to get our gears (and stomachs) going.



## STEP 1: PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

Sure, ambition is an admirable creature. However, it's best for you and your budget (and your sanity) to pinpoint what exactly your area of interest is in the kitchen. Aside from the standard tools needed in every kitchen, take some time to assess your 'kitchen persona'.

Are you more of a heavy duty chef or a baker, or a bit of both? What kinds of food do you prepare most often? Would you need a steam oven or an oven with a grill? Are you into the organic style of preparing food? Do you entertain guests on a regular basis? Consider too the size of your kitchen space and how much it can accommodate. Many chefs are happy to operate in creative chaos, but unnecessary clutter could put a damper on your culinary adventures, especially if it's equipment you rarely use when cooking.



## STEP 2: INVEST IN THE RIGHT TOOLS

Now that you've narrowed down your area of expertise, it's time to think about the materials and tools you want to stock up on in the kitchen. Many a food enthusiast has fallen prey to retail syndrome, thinking that more is more. This isn't necessarily untrue, but it's not always true either. Be sure of what you need versus what you want. Even if it's just a toaster to whip up breakfast for the family, take time to pick products that truly give you your money's worth and last a good while. Not only will this help you exercise practicality, but it also enhances your focus on the branch of cooking that you have decided to devote yourself to. It also doesn't hurt that the right equipment can help to trim a lot of time off your schedule, and improve the quality of the final dish.

TIPS AND TRICKS FROM FAMOUS CHEFS

**Gordon Ramsay:** Always use high quality cookwear. It looks better, cooks better and lasts forever.

**Martha Stewart:** Open up every inch of your kitchen. I use everything in my kitchen regularly, and shelves make it all accessible.

**Jamie Oliver:** If you buy just a few good pans, a decent chopping board and a good knife, you will be 15 per cent better at cooking.

**Nigella Lawson:** To keep pots shiny,

especially after boiling starchy foods like pasta and potatoes, add a few splashes of the cheapest vinegar you can find when you clean the pot with dish soap.

**Aarón Sánchez:** Plan your meals ahead of time, and buy enough for the whole week at the grocery store or market.

**Charlie Trotter:** Always make stock in a large quantity and freeze it in plastic bags. That way, when you want to make a nice soup or boil veggies, you can simply pull the bag out of the freezer.





## STEP 3: HAVE A MEAL- PLANNING SCHEDULE

Whether you're looking to whip up a meal for the family or to entertain guests, the process of cooking even simple dishes requires precious time and effort. For the sake of preserving your sanity, create a meal-planning schedule or routine that works for you. Start with a week's worth of potential meals you want to serve for your family. Then, factor in your work hours, daily family and household duties. Survey the routes to your regular neighbourhood grocery stores and markets to find out which ones are nearest and most convenient to get to. Ultimately, you'll be able to come up with an organized weekly plan that helps you breathe much more easily, and allows your family to enjoy the food they deserve. Everybody wins!

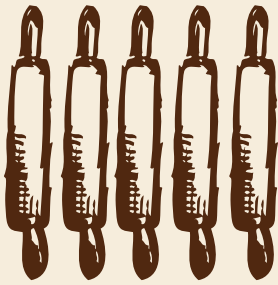


## STEP 4: ORGANIZE YOUR KITCHEN SPACE

Picture this scenario: you're basking in the glow of your brand new kitchen that's waiting to be filled with cooking tools and the tempting aroma of well-cooked meals. It starts with one item on the shelf, then another on the counter, and another... before you know it, the cabinets are filled to the brim with more crockery than you actually need, and the counter that looked so spacious in the beginning can now barely cram all of your appliances and decor. It's time to organize your kitchen space before it starts to resemble the junk-filled houses featured on the American television show *Hoarders*. The horror!

Dramatic inclinations aside, this is a common dilemma faced in a lot of kitchens. To make it easier for yourself, take stock of your kitchen inventory about once a month. If there's a broken kettle that's been lying around neglected, get it fixed or simply get rid of it. If you have more than enough plates or glasses to feed the entire neighbourhood, maybe it's time to donate some of them. Just like how Rome wasn't built in a day, most of us can't clear all the junk out of our lives in a day. But a little goes a long way, and you'd be surprised, once even a little bit of the surfaces are cleared, at how much more spacious and functional your kitchen becomes.

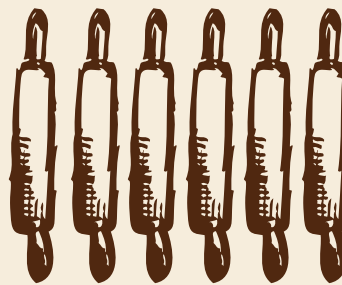




## STEP 5: GET THE FAMILY INVOLVED

In many ways, working in the kitchen is like being a one-chef army. Some even prefer it this way, enjoying the peace and solitude of cooking alone. If you're cooking for the family though, getting them involved in the kitchen is a great way to speed up the process. Plus, it helps them to recognize and appreciate the hard work you put in daily to keep them fed and healthy.

Include your spouse and kids in your meal-planning schedule and delegate tasks among them. This may take some time to perfect as you figure out the dynamic and what kind of task works best for whom. Slowly but surely, though, you'll fall into an established routine that makes all kitchen-related work more efficient and organized. And at the end of the day, once you all sit down to the meal that everyone played a part in making, the feeling of satisfaction is completely worth it. By the way, nobody gets to escape the clean-up process afterwards...



## STEP 6: HAPPY COOKING!

Just like other rooms in the house, the kitchen is a distinct domain whose personality and vibe depends on its owner(s). It's your kitchen – make it a space that you love to be in, a space that brings to mind great memories and fun-filled times. Decorate it in such a way that it feels like home, and more importantly, like yourself. Ultimately, your attitude towards your kitchen influences your cooking style and methods.

This may seem like a no-brainer. However, in today's cooker pressure world, there are many who succumb to the stress of hectic schedules and family demands, which may result in a negative attitude towards the preparation of daily meals. As the evergreen saying goes, food is like love. Therefore, it's important to nurture a positive vibe in the kitchen. Fill it with tantalizing smells and tastes, and keep family, friends and guests coming back for more. Because at the end of the day, your kitchen is your playground if you let it be. **EL**

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