

The Love of Cooking with ... **Prue Leith**

Primary Times chats to Prue Leith who shares the importance of creating a love of healthy food

Prue Leith has had a remarkable career. As a restaurant owner, Great British Bake-Off co-host, Michelin star holder, businesswoman, former chairwoman of the Royal Society of Arts and Schools Food Trust, there is nothing Prue cannot turn her hand to. But Prue's commitment to producing and promoting healthy family cooking, has driven her to fight for healthier school dinners and create cookbooks that share a variety of cuisines to create affordable, healthy food for the whole family.

What was your relationship with food as a child?

"I grew up in South Africa and had a white privileged upbringing. We had a chef and we didn't talk about food, in the same way we didn't speak about money. It never occurred to my parents or I that our chef could teach us to cook! It wasn't until I went to France at around nineteen that I discovered people's love of food and talking about food."

Do you think it's important to encourage children to find an

interest in cooking?

"Of course, it's always important to take an interest in eating the right food. Right from pregnancy and then when weaning the child it's important to introduce them to a variety of food and not too much sugar. I know a lot of young mother's and weaning is a huge amount of work. "There's so much interest in food and diet now, but in some ways we're becoming too obsessed that it's unhealthy. A healthy relationship with food is when you love food and enjoy cooking for yourself, but don't obsess about it."

Do you think cooking can be a family or shared activity?

"Of course! There's been a change in eating habits with a shift to eating sharing platters, or cooking different meals at mealtime. Families do not have to eat the same food at the table. "I visited a Primary School that is using the Chefs in Schools charity initiative to have ex-chefs work as school cooks. The chef sat with the whole school (100 children) and the teachers and they all ate Middle Eastern mezze platter together. There were lots of different dishes;

roasted vegetables, chickpea dhal, lentils, all served in tacos. It was all healthy and vegetarian. The kids loved it and the whole school learnt to eat well together."

What are your top tips for budding young chefs?

"Get cooking! Don't wait for the right time. When I was a judge of Junior Bake Off I asked each of the children "where did you learn to bake?" and most of them replied, YouTube. Children are focused on screens and YouTube has lots of high quality demonstrations for children to follow and learn to bake and cook from. "Plus, remember to clean up afterwards!"

Tell us more about your latest cookbook, The Vegetarian Kitchen.

"I wrote this book with my niece, Peta Leith who was the pastry chef at the Ivy in London. I don't do exquisite detail; I prefer to do wholesome family cooking, which is what this book is. There are a lot of original ideas with Middle Eastern influence, and a vegetarian diet is cheaper so it makes money for the family food shop go further."



Prue's Simnel Cake

Ingredients

- Large pinch each of salt and baking powder
- 225g/8oz plain flour
- 55g/2oz rice flour
- 110g/4oz glacé cherries
- 225g/8oz butter
- 225g/8oz caster sugar
- 1 lemon, zest only
- 4 eggs, separated
- 225g/8oz sultanas
- 110g/4oz currants
- 30g/1oz candied peel, chopped
- 340g/12oz marzipan
- 1 tbsp apricot jam
- 110g/4oz icing sugar, sifted

1. Set the oven to 180°C/ Fan 160°C/gas mark 4. Prepare a 20cm/ 8-inch cake tin with a double lining of greased and floured greaseproof paper. Wrap the outside of the cake tin with a double thickness of brown paper to insulate the cake from direct heat.
2. Sift the salt, baking powder and flours. Cut the cherries in half.
3. Cream the butter until soft. Add the sugar and beat until light and fluffy. Add the lemon rind.
4. Beat in the egg yolks. Whisk the whites until stiff.
5. Fold 1/3 of the sifted flour into the mixture. Fold in the egg whites by degrees, alternating with the remaining flour and the fruit peel.
6. Put 1/2 the mixture into the tin, spreading flat.
7. Take just over 1/3 of the marzipan paste. Roll it into a smooth round. Place it on the cake mixture in the tin and cover with the remaining mixture.
8. With a palette knife make a dip in the centre of the cake to counteract any tendency to rise in the middle.
9. Bake for 1 3/4 hours, then stick a skewer into the cake. If it comes out clean, the cake is done. If sticky cake mixture adheres to it, reduce the oven heat to 150°C/Fan 130°C/gas mark 2 and bake for a further 30 mins.
10. Roll the remaining marzipan into a circle the same size as the top of the cake. Cut a piece from the centre about 12.5cm/5 inches in diameter and shape into 11 balls.

