

COOKING UP *a storm with* JAMIE OLIVER

RHIANE KIRKBY HEADS TO THE KITCHEN TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT FAMILY MAN JAMIE OLIVER'S NEW COOKERY SCHOOL

At least I haven't come home to find Jools chewing on a hot water bottle or dipping bananas in milk this time round. She's just been craving salty snacks instead. Oh, and she had gone off coffee, but is getting back on the cappuccinos now."

It may come as a surprise that a man who has his diary planned 18 months in advance, is worth an estimated £160 million and dedicates his time to saving the world from poor nutrition still has the time and the energy to be passionate about family life. But this is Jamie Oliver we're talking about. In the flesh, he's even more enigmatic than he is on screen and even though he jokes about the impending arrival of his fifth child ("don't talk to me about parenthood, I think I need to be a bit more restrained!"), he's clearly very, very excited.

"Mealtimes are colourful in our house, we have a big family that's about to get even bigger and there are often tears and tantrums, but we do try to cook and

“Mealtimes are colourful in our house, we have a big family that’s about to get even bigger”

eat together." He laughs when he talks about making pizzas from scratch with five-year-old Buddy and seven-year-old Petal. "Buddy always decides he needs a wee when we're cooking and it's all a bit imperfect with kids, but that doesn't matter." For Jamie, it's far more important that children get to "touch, smell and taste the food" and "really use their hands".

"I've never met a kid who won't eat something

they've grown themselves," he explains, "that's why it's so important we instil these skills and teach them where things come from."

When asked whether he has a house full of budding chefs, Jamie's quick to point out that he doesn't "ram cooking and healthy eating down their throats". But he's also aware that his passion does rub off on them. "Take Buddy into our garden and he could name about 30 herbs," he says, quickly adding that he's not been "formally teaching him", instead he's been "talking to him about them, letting him smell and taste them... as that's how kids learn."

Of course, Jamie has his parents to thank for introducing him to food and so not surprisingly, in his eyes, "mum and dad are the number one most important people to teach you to cook." He realises though, that not everyone's as fortunate as him and that these days many parents struggle with basic skills. That's where his latest venture, The Jamie Oliver Cookery School, comes in. Based at Jamie's Italian

in Westfield Shopping Centre, Shepherd's Bush, its aim is "to make learning accessible and affordable. For us, as a company, getting kids involved is the holy grail," says Jamie. And it's clear the set-up has

been designed with the younger generation in mind. The atmosphere is relaxed and informal, the team of chefs, handpicked by Jamie, ooze the same energy and charisma as himself and the 10 lessons seven to 14 year olds can choose from have certainly been created by someone who knows exactly what kids want. Bread, pasta, Moroccan meatballs and sushi are amongst the most popular. ▶



Jamie and Jools take the family blackberry picking. "It's important to teach kids where food comes from," says the chef



The couple are expecting their fifth child this summer



“I’ve never met a kid who won’t eat something they’ve grown themselves – we need to instil these skills”

Thai green curry is another favourite. “My kids love, love, love this,” says Jamie, admitting he does hold back a little on the chilli at home. “I remember eating this for the first time aged 15,” he reminisces, “it blew my mind. The flavours, the intensity. My tastebuds went ‘wow.’” But for Jamie, this dish represents more than just a good meal, it’s a personal crusade. “Takeaway is for adults what the school dinner issue was for kids,” he explains, “the biggest public enemy when it comes to food.” Twenty years on, it’s clear he’s still passionate about tackling our takeaway culture, which is part of the reason he’s decided to teach me how to cook a “really simple, healthy curry that’s perfect for the whole family” today.

“You can do this in about 15 minutes. Get all your ingredients ready and let the rice be your timekeeper,” he advises, pulling out his trusty pestle and mortar. “Smash it, bash it,

taste it, finger it” he almost chants, referring to the coriander, onion, ginger and kaffir lime leaves he’s just “chucked in”. Jamie, of course, makes it all look simple, but I have to admit, it wasn’t too taxing for a self-acclaimed culinary disaster-master like myself. Not sure the results would be quite as good at home with a two-year-old clinging to my legs, though. But Jamie’s advice is to “just give it a go – anyone can cook.”

But does that ‘anyone’ extend to me? Well, I can’t repeat what he said about the presentation of my dish, but while he’s making it look somewhere near palatable I take the opportunity to ask him about his latest victory in the battle with obesity – the Chancellor’s recent announcement, thanks in part to Jamie’s campaigning, that he’s to impose a tax on sugary drinks. Clearly, Jamie has already moved on: “The sugar tax took me by surprise, but the thing I’m focused on



right now, and this is the biggest challenge, is the Childhood Obesity Strategy. Cameron is tackling it personally, it’s his legacy and I’m confident he’ll do it well.” Going back to the sugar tax, he adds, “Soda – I get upset when I see how prolific it is. You have whole families hydrating on it and that breaks my heart.”

As he scoops my curry, which is now sprinkled with a touch of Jamie magic for my “whole family to enjoy”, it’s clear to see why his legacy of campaigning has been such a success. His down-to-earth nature, boundless energy and enthusiasm rub off on those around him, making him quite a force to be reckoned with. ●

FRAGRANT THAI GREEN CURRY

Classic, aromatic and creamy – make your own Thai green curry paste then turn it into a fragrant chicken curry with perfect fluffy rice and a refreshing coconut and tomato relish.

THAI GREEN CURRY (SERVES 8)

- 4 x 200g free-range skinless chicken breasts
- 2 x 400ml tins light coconut milk
- 75g pistachio nuts
- 6 spring onions
- 4-6 fresh green chillies
- 2 garlic cloves
- 2cm piece of ginger
- 10g lime leaves
- 2 sticks of lemongrass
- 1 tbsp coriander seeds
- 1 tsp low-salt soy sauce
- 3 drops of fish sauce
- ½ bunch fresh basil
- ½ bunch fresh coriander
- 3-4 limes
- extra virgin olive oil
- olive oil

Method

To make the paste, chop the spring onions, deseed and finely chop the chillies, peel and finely chop the garlic and ginger, tear up the lime leaves, squash the lemongrass, remove the outer layer and finely chop. Put it all in a pestle and mortar or food processor with the coriander seeds, soy and fish sauces, fresh herbs, 3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil and a pinch of sea salt and black pepper. Mash or whizz to a smooth paste. Grate in the zest from the limes to taste.

Slice the chicken into 2cm pieces and marinate in a little of the paste for 30 minutes. Heat a drizzle of olive oil in a pan or wok and add the chicken. Fry for 4 minutes, then add the remainder of the paste, it will sizzle and spit! Stir in the coconut milk, bring to the boil and simmer gently for 8 minutes, or until the chicken is cooked. Season to taste with sea salt and black pepper. It should have a kick but be reasonably mellow. Serve with rice and top with chopped pistachios. Delicious sprinkled with poppadoms for added crunch, toasted coconut flakes and fresh coriander.



Jamie's easy-peasy green curry is perfect for the whole family

CHUNKY COCONUT, TOMATO, CUCUMBER & LIME RELISH

- 16 ripe cherry tomatoes
- 1 fresh red chilli (optional)
- ½ fresh coconut
- ½ bunch fresh basil
- ½ cucumber
- extra virgin olive oil
- 1-2 limes

Method

Roughly chop the tomatoes and chilli, grate the coconut and chop the basil leaves. Peel and halve the cucumber, remove the seeds then chop into thin slices. Add to a bowl and toss together. Just before serving, add 1 tablespoon of oil and a pinch of salt and pepper. Squeeze in the lime juice to taste.

PERFECT FLUFFY RICE

- 350g basmati rice

Method

Put a large pan of salted water on a high heat and bring to the boil. Rinse the rice in a colander under running water for 1 minute, or until the water runs clear. Add your rice to the boiling

water and wait for the grains to start dancing around. From that point, boil for 5 minutes. Drain. Pour water back into the pan to the depth of 2.5cm, put it on the heat and bring to the boil, then turn down to a simmer. Cover the rice in the colander with foil and place on top of the pan of simmering water to let the rice steam for 8 to 10 minutes, or until fluffy. Remove from the heat and if you're ready, serve immediately. If not, leave the foil on and put aside – it should stay warm for about 20 minutes.

YOU COULD ALSO TRY... LEMON & NUTMEG RICE

- olive oil
- 1 knob unsalted butter
- 1 nutmeg, for grating
- 1 lemon

Method

Cook your rice following the method above. Heat some oil in a frying pan on a low heat and add the butter. Once the butter has melted, grate in a quarter of the nutmeg and squeeze in juice from the lemon. Add the rice and stir until coated. Season to taste.