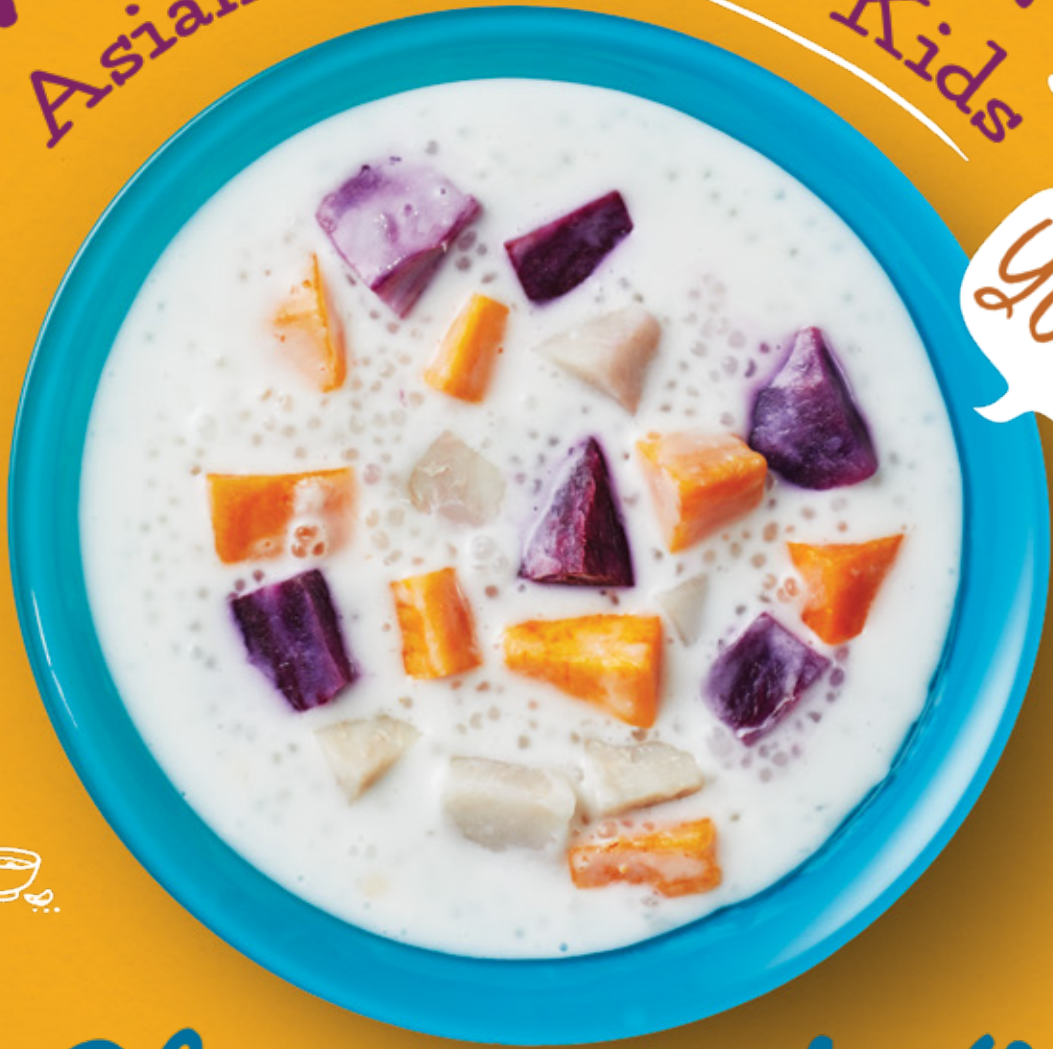


# MASAK-MASAK

Asian Cooking for Kids



YUM!

Elena AND Arti  
YEO DARYANANI

# MASAK-MASAK

Asian Cooking for Kids



For Hallie, my much-loved niece who inspired me to write this book.

—Elena

For my daughter Uma Milena, with whom I first experienced the joy of cooking with kids.

—Arti

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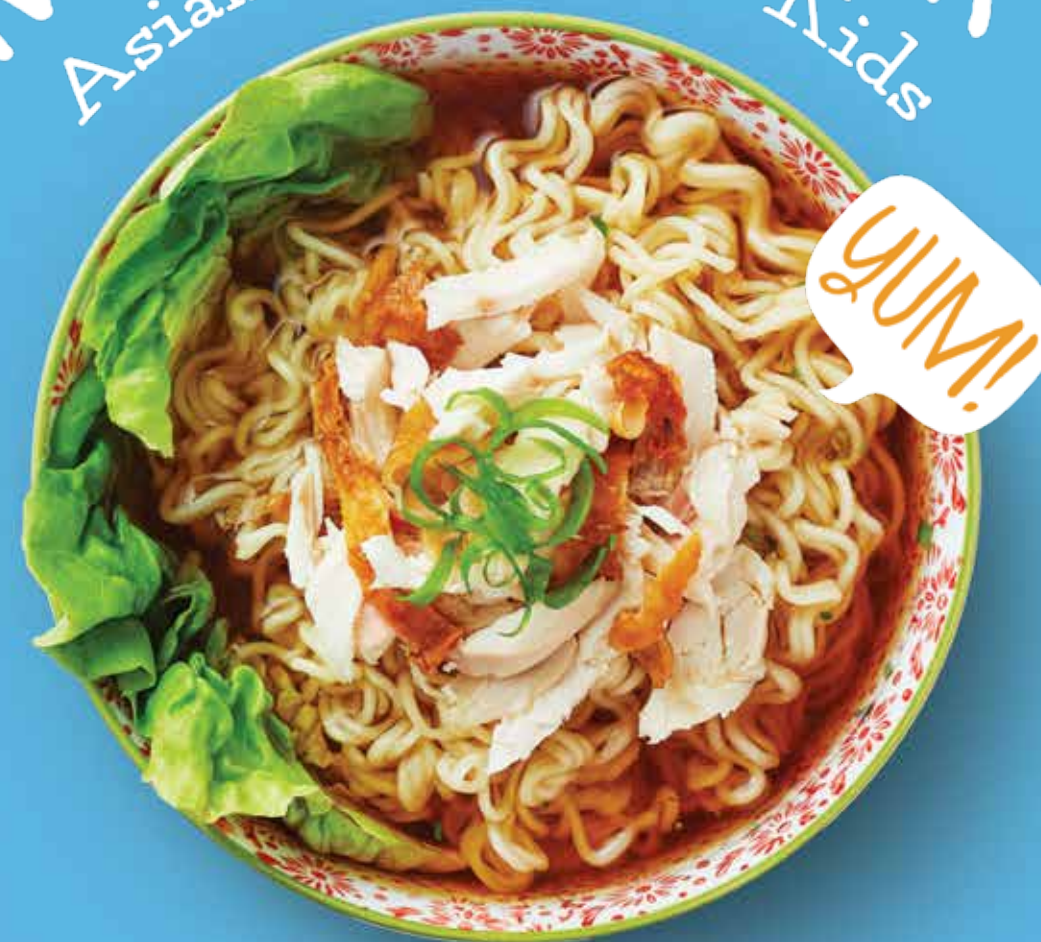
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Elena AND Arti  
YEO  DARYANANI



EPIGRAM





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# DEAR MUMS, DADS, AUNTIES, UNCLES, GRANDPARENTS & GODPARENTS... 😊

## Introduction

Knowing how to cook is one of the greatest gifts you can give a child. The kids in our families have been in the kitchen with us from an early age, so we know first-hand how much joy, knowledge, and confidence a child can get from cooking. Sadly, we are cooking at home less and less these days, opting instead for the convenience of eating out or entrusting domestic helpers to prepare meals for us. This is especially surprising given Singapore's incredible food culture.

Cooking offers many lifelong benefits: it sparks imagination, creativity, and curiosity about the world. It also instils healthy eating habits and empowers children to grow into independent adults. But most important of all, cooking is a wonderful way to bond as a family. We really encourage you to roll up your sleeves, put on an apron and cook together! You will be rewarded with many delicious meals, shared family stories and a lifetime of wonderful memories.

### Asian Food That's Easy and Fun to Make

There is a perception that Asian food is quite complicated, but you'll see that every dish in this book is easy and fun for kids to make. We have simplified 60 family favourites that will teach kids the basics of Asian cooking, plus give them ideas on how to put their own spin on these dishes as they grow more confident in the kitchen.

### When to Start Cooking

*Masak-Masak*, which refers to the children's game of playing with toy pots and pans, has been written for kids from 8 to 12 years old, but do see this as a guide. Some children can't wait to get into the kitchen, while others may only show an interest well into their teenage years. It is our wish that you will enjoy making these recipes too—whether you're an experienced cook or a complete newbie in the kitchen.

## Getting Kids Into the Kitchen

Many people have told us that they want their children to cook but find it hard to get them into the kitchen (and away from their electronic devices)! We've prepared some tips and tricks below that can really help. Before you know it, you'll be whipping up tasty meals together and having lots of laughs along the way.

### MAKE IT FUN—ALWAYS!

Focus more on having fun as you cook together and less on the outcome. Try making a game of it: can your child taste the difference between ginger and lemongrass? Cinnamon or star anise? These games will help kids recognise and differentiate flavours, which is an essential part of cooking.

### START WHEN THEY ARE YOUNG

The earlier you introduce a child to cooking, the easier it will be. As they gradually learn about different foods and recipes, the more confident and adventurous they will be. No more picky eaters!

### SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY

Get kids involved even before you enter the kitchen. Let them select the dish to cook or write the grocery list. Go to the supermarket together; it is a great time to discuss how to recognise ripe and fresh ingredients.

### ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO EXPRESS THEIR OPINION

Ask questions such as “Do you think it needs more soy sauce? Should we add more ginger or pepper?” Give them the freedom to be creative by substituting ingredients or adding more herbs and spices. You'll be amazed how kids can dream up new flavour combinations that really work!

### KEEP IT HYGIENIC AND SAFE

Instil good hygiene and safety practices so they become second nature. This way you will feel more comfortable leaving your kids to cook on their own when they (and you!) are ready.

### COOK ON WEEKENDS OR HOLIDAYS

You'll both be more relaxed and patient because time is less important. If you can centre cooking around a family event or special occasion like a birthday, that's even better.

### COOK TOGETHER REGULARLY

As kids become more adept in the kitchen, the more they will enjoy cooking. You will never forget the first time you see your child beam with delight when they have made something delicious.

### GET CHILD-FRIENDLY UTENSILS

Having their own utensils will make cooking more fun for kids. Child-friendly measuring spoons with large, grippy handles or colourful prep bowls also minimise mess and make cooking as safe as possible.

Here in Asia, we have a number of specialised tools and utensils such as the wok, bamboo steamer, clay pot and of course, the fearsome cleaver! These items are generally not made in child-friendly sizes or materials, so our advice is to introduce them judiciously and with close supervision.

#### A Little Note About Knives



One of the big questions is whether kids should use metal or plastic knives, and at what age. The answer depends largely on the child's motor skills and temperament: are they more cautious and mindful, or exuberant and less likely to be attentive?

*It is my view that all kids can and should learn to use knives. However, it is important to exercise judgement about when to introduce them, based on each child. I allowed my daughter to use a metal butter knife when she was three. A year later, she could use a serrated table knife to cut soft fruit and sometimes cheese. The knives were kept safely out of her reach and I always supervised their use. —Arti*

# HEY KIDS!

We are so glad you are going to start cooking! When we were your age, we loved to play “masak-masak”, using toy pots and pans to cook imaginary meals for our families. Real cooking is even better because you end up with yummy food to enjoy and share. Just remember our tips for young chefs and you will have a super fun time whenever you cook.

## Read the Recipe Carefully

When you first start to cook, it's very important to follow the instructions and use the right ingredients. For example, baking *soda* is not the same as baking *powder*. Swapping one ingredient can completely change how a dish turns out.

## Don't Be Afraid of “Mistakes”

One day, my niece Hallie accidentally sprinkled ground *cumin* on her pancakes instead of *cinnamon*. And you know what? It was delicious! To this day, we add a pinch of cumin to all our pancakes.

—Elena

## Practice Makes Perfect

It takes time to learn how to cook. You might need to make a dish a couple of times before you get it exactly to your liking.

## Play, Have Fun, Experiment

These recipes will teach you the basics of Asian cooking. After you've made a dish, think about whether you like it. We are all different and this includes what we think is delicious. If you would like more ginger, soy sauce or spices, go for it and add as much as you like! 😊



Elena & Arti

# START HERE!

## Basic Kitchen Knowledge

### PREP, COOK, CLEAN

There are three main steps in cooking, whether you are a complete newbie or already a whiz in the kitchen.

#### Step 1: Prep or Preparation



Read the recipe carefully



Gather all the correct ingredients



Measure out the amounts



Rinse & peel ingredients where necessary



Chop or slice ingredients into the right sizes



Organise ingredients so they are close by when you need them

#### Step 2: Cook

This is the fun bit! If you have done all your prep properly, cooking will be much easier and faster. Remember to follow the safety tips on page 9!



**Tip:** Place a large mixing bowl on the counter where you can toss in any peels, crumbs or empty packets. When you're done cooking, tip everything into the bin. Easy!

#### Step 3: Clean

Cooking can be messy—one reason it's fun! A good habit is to clean as you go so you're not stuck with a huge pile of stuff to wash at the end. For example, while you're waiting for the kettle to boil, wipe up any spills, throw away unwanted scraps or wash any prep tools.



## USING A KNIFE

You can't paint without paintbrushes, right? Similarly, you can't cook without using knives. Some are very sharp and need to be handled with care—and permission! Please always check with an adult before you use one.



The key to using a knife safely is to pay attention and go slowly. Turn on any lights so you can really see what you're doing.



Always use a chopping board when cutting anything. If it jiggles about, put a damp dishtowel underneath so it won't move. This trick also works with mixing bowls.



Hold the knife handle close to the blade between your thumb and forefinger. Keep your fingers curled under so you have a good grip.

## KEEP FINGERS SAFE WITH "THE CLAW" AND "THE BRIDGE"

Depending on what you're preparing, you can use either of the two hand positions below.



### The Claw

Hold the ingredient on the chopping board with your fingers curled under and your knuckles pointing out. This is called "the claw" position—it keeps your fingertips away from the knife's edge.



### The Bridge

Grip the ingredient on the chopping board between your thumb and fingers to form a bridge. Position the knife in the centre to cut the ingredient. "The bridge" method is perfect when you want to cut anything round, like tomatoes.

## Basic Prep

Many recipes need chopped or sliced onions or garlic. Here are some ways to quickly prep these essential ingredients.

## ONIONS



### Sliced

1. Lay the onion on its side and cut off the top stem. Using the bridge hand position, cut the onion lengthwise from the top to the root into two equal halves. Peel off the hard outer layers and discard.
2. Lay the flat side of the onion on the chopping board with the root pointing out to the side. Switch to the claw hold. Firmly holding the knife, slowly cut the onion into thick or thin slices, depending on the recipe. When you get to the end, throw away the root.

### Chopped



1. Lay the onion on its side and cut off the top stem. Using the bridge hand position, cut the onion lengthwise from the top to the root into two equal halves. Peel off the hard outer layers and throw them away.
2. Lay the flat side of half the onion on the cutting board with the root pointing at 12 o'clock. Slice the onion vertically, stopping about 2 centimetres from the root so it can hold all the slices together.
3. When you have made all the slices, turn the onion so that the root points out to the side. Make vertical slices again so you get little pieces of onion. Discard the root.



## Boo hoo!



When onions are cut, they release fumes that can make your eyes water. If this happens, try standing a bit further away and not directly above the onion. Another tip is to use a fan so it blows the fumes away from your face. It also helps to freeze the onion for 30 minutes before cutting.

Have a clean dishtowel or paper towels nearby to wipe away any tears. Rinse your hands before touching your eyes or you'll experience Onion Ouch!

## GARLIC

Garlic grows in bulbs made up of several individual cloves. Some recipes need just one or two cloves while others may need ten.



Pluck a clove from the bulb. Place it on the chopping board and "top and tail", removing the tip and root end.



Lay the flat side of your knife on top of the clove and press down just hard enough that the papery outer layer splits open. Use your fingers to peel off this layer.



Place the flat of the knife on the peeled clove again, but this time, give it a good bash to squish the clove. Then use the knife to cut it into very small pieces.

## SAFETY FIRST!

The kitchen is a place to have fun but also where you need to be careful. There are dangers to watch out for including heat from the stove or oven, sharp tools and even ingredients that can make you sick if not cooked properly. But don't worry, follow the guide below and you'll be fine!

### BEFORE COOKING

- Always wash your hands before cooking and after you touch raw meat or fish.
- Put on an apron, roll up your sleeves and tie up your hair if it's long.
- Have dishtowels nearby to wipe your hands when they get wet.
- Have one chopping board for raw meat and fish, and a separate board for fruits and vegetables.
- Rinse ingredients to remove any dust or dirt.
- Check that you are not allergic to any of the ingredients.
- Make sure your ingredients are fresh:
  - They have not gone past the expiry dates.
  - Meat or fish are not smelly or slimy.
  - Fruits and vegetables are firm, not squishy or mouldy.

### DURING COOKING

- Point the handles of pots or pans to the back of the stove so you won't knock into them.
- Never throw ingredients into a hot pan with oil or boiling water. Always add ingredients gently and slowly.
- Always wear oven mitts when putting anything in or taking something out of the oven.
- Be careful when opening a hot oven door or pot lid. There is normally a big puff of hot air or steam, so don't stand too close.
- When using electrical equipment like a rice cooker or blender, make sure there's no liquid underneath. Keep your hands dry and check with an adult before using the machine.
- Ask an adult for help if you need to use anything that gets hot, like a kettle.

### AFTER COOKING

- Meat, fish and eggs must be thoroughly cooked or you could get very sick. Ask an adult to check before you taste the food.
- Make sure the oven, stove or any electrical equipment is completely turned off.
- Wash all your cooking utensils so they are fresh and clean.

# SAY WHAT? A COOKING LANGUAGE LESSON

## Glossary

Whisk, simmer, season... There are lots of special words in cooking that can be confusing. Here is a list of the most used terms and their meanings.

### Agak-agak

A Malay word that means “to estimate” when cooking. When you become an experienced cook, you can agak-agak by roughly calculating how much of an ingredient to put in without needing to measure it. You may not even need to check the recipe and just cook by instinct!

### Beat

Using a fork or whisk to either combine ingredients or make fluffy by adding air.

### Brown

To cook an ingredient in hot oil or butter until its surface turns golden brown.

### Drain

After boiling or soaking an ingredient, you place a colander or sieve in the sink and tip out all the water, leaving the ingredient behind.

### Divided

To add an ingredient to a dish in portions at different stages of the recipe.

### Boil

To heat a liquid over high heat until it is very hot with many bubbles popping on the surface.

### Chop

To cut up an ingredient into pieces that can be small, medium or quite large.

### Bake

To cook using an oven. When baking, sometimes the dish we are cooking starts off with a different structure. For example: when we bake a cake or cookies, it goes from being a batter or dough to a cake or cookie.

### Braise

To cook an ingredient for a long time until it is very soft.

### Dice

To cut an ingredient into very small pieces (smaller than chopping).

### Egg Wash

To brush a thin layer of beaten egg onto the surface of dough or pastry before baking. This gives colour and shine. Examples: scones, pies or tarts.

### Grate

Instead of using a knife to chop up an ingredient, you can use a grater, which can be much faster. Examples: cheese or carrots.

### Julienne

To cut an ingredient into long thin strips like matchsticks.

### Level

To only fill a measuring cup or spoon to its top edge. This is very important especially when baking.

### Mince

To cut up an ingredient into tiny pieces (smaller than dicing).

### Sauté

To fry quickly in a little bit of oil.

### Fry

To cook an ingredient until it forms a crispy and browned surface. Frying usually involves a shallow pan with oil or butter over high heat. Examples: fried fish, tofu or a steak.

### Grease

To coat a baking tray or pan with butter or oil so ingredients don't stick to the surface.

### Grind

To make a paste made from various ingredients using a mortar and pestle or food processor.

### Level

To only fill a measuring cup or spoon to its top edge. This is very important especially when baking.

### Mince

To cut up an ingredient into tiny pieces (smaller than dicing).

### Season

To add various seasonings such as salt, pepper or soy sauce.

### Grill

To cook an ingredient using heat from only one direction such as above, below or from the side.

### Heaped

To put an extra amount of the ingredient into a measuring cup or spoon so that you get a little mound on top.

### Marinate

To enhance the flavour of an ingredient by coating it in a mixture of seasonings and spices for a certain length of time before cooking.

### Roast

A method of cooking usually done in an oven. Example: roast chicken.

### Sift

To pass an ingredient, like flour, through a sieve to remove any lumps.



### Simmer

To heat a liquid over low to medium heat until small bubbles form on the surface.

### Steam

To cook a dish using the steam from boiling water. Steamed dishes are very common in Asian food. Think of steamed buns, dumplings and fish. We even have steamed cakes!

### Trim

This means removing the roots and other inedible parts of vegetables or removing excess fat and tough, chewy bits like the gristle and sinew from meat.

### Slice

To cut an ingredient into equal-sized pieces. Examples: cucumbers, carrots or lemons.

### Stir-fry

This is like frying, except you move the ingredients around continuously, and maintain a high heat throughout.

### To Taste

To add as little or as much as you like of an ingredient. Want more sesame oil? Less coconut milk? Sure, it's up to you...to your taste!

### Zest

To scrape or grate the outermost layer of the peel of citrus fruits such as lemons and limes.

### Top and Tail

To cut off the inedible parts of vegetables or fruit, usually the bottom or top parts. You can also top and tail to make it easier to cut equal-sized pieces. Example: carrots, French beans, onions or cucumbers.

### Whisk

A utensil used to mix ingredients together or the action of mixing ingredients together quickly.



## ESSENTIAL ASIAN INGREDIENTS

Here are just a few of the Asian ingredients we love.



### Aromatics

The building blocks that give Asian food its distinctive flavours and aromas. Aromatics include ginger, garlic, lemongrass, pandan leaf and spring onions.



### Asian Spices

The most famous include star anise, turmeric, fennel, cardamom, and cumin. It might take some time to recognise each one but once you can, you'll be able to add a lot of flavour to your dishes.



### Belacan

This is a Malay word for shrimp or fish paste, which is used throughout Asia. Belacan has a very strong smell and flavour and is essential in dishes like laksa.



### Chilli

Asians love the "kick" from chilli! Listed from the most hot to least: chilli padi (birds eye), dried whole chilli, chilli flakes and big chilli (serrano). The heat is mostly in the seeds and white pith, so take them out if you want a milder taste.

Start with a little bit until you decide what level of heat is just right for you. Make sure you don't touch your mouth or eyes after cutting fresh chilli as it can burn!



### Coconut Milk and Cream

Used to add rich creaminess to sweet treats like Nyonya kueh. Also essential in curry! Coconut cream is very thick and squeezed from grated coconut. If you add water, it becomes coconut milk.



### Cooking Oil

Used to cook an ingredient without adding any flavour. For example, sunflower or vegetable oil is good for cooking because it doesn't have a strong smell or taste. There are other oils that are used to add flavour, like sesame oil. Some recipes specify a particular cooking oil because it adds to the flavour of the dish.



### Corn Starch

Used in meat marinades to ensure a soft and smooth texture, or to thicken soups and gravies.



### Ghee

Ghee is clarified butter, which means all the milk solids have been removed. Often used for frying, it doesn't burn easily like regular butter and has a more concentrated flavour.



### Gula Melaka

Also known as palm sugar. There are many types found all over Asia. It has a toffee-like flavour with hints of coconut. Yum!



### Kicap Manis

An Indonesian soy sauce sweetened with palm sugar.



### Miso

Made from fermented soybeans, it gives dishes a rich savoury flavour. There are two main types: white (light) and red (dark) miso.



### Sesame Oil

Sesame oil, like soy sauce, is a seasoning often added as a finishing touch. It is not meant for frying or cooking.



### Shaoxing Wine

A rice wine used only for cooking, not drinking. Named after the city of Shaoxing, China, it is an essential ingredient in Chinese cooking.



### Soy Sauce

Invented in China over 2,000 years ago, soy sauce is a must-have in Asian food. It was originally intended to be a substitute for salt. Today there are many different types used to add saltiness, subtle sweetness or colouring to dishes.



### Tamarind

A sweet and sour fruit that is made into a paste for cooking. It adds a flavoursome tang to dishes like fish curry.



### Taufeo

A tasty paste made from salted and fermented soybeans. It is extremely versatile—it can be used with almost everything from fish to tofu.



### Tofu

An ingredient made from soybeans. There are many kinds of tofu: soft, silken, egg, firm and hard.



# KITCHEN BUDDIES

Having some of these kitchen buddies will make cooking much faster, easier and fun!

## PREP TOOLS



### Blender

For turning ingredients like fruit, vegetables or spices into a puree or thick liquid.

### Chopping Boards

For hygiene reasons, have one chopping board for vegetables and fruit and a separate one for meat or fish.

### Colander

Essential when washing vegetables or draining foods like boiled eggs.

### Food Processor

Can be used in place of the traditional mortar and pestle.

### Graters and Peelers

There are many types and shapes so try a few to find the easiest for you to use.

### Kitchen Scissors

Can be used for everything from opening packets to snipping mushroom stems. So useful!

### Knives

When you first start to cook, the most useful knives are a paring knife and a chef's knife. Always check with an adult before handling knives!

### Measuring Spoons and Cups

Remember that there's a big difference between one tablespoon and one teaspoon!

### Mixing Bowls

For mixing or marinating ingredients. They're also great as mini trash containers during kitchen prep.

### Mortar and Pestle

Used to grind spices, release flavours from aromatics or create a paste. Make sure you don't overfill it with ingredients and keep your fingers out of the way.

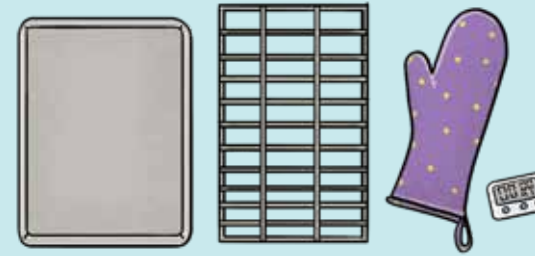
### Scales

Use a scale to weigh your ingredients for the best results, especially when baking.

### Sieve

Good for removing lumps from flour or draining ingredients.

## BAKING TOOLS



### Baking Trays

Used for everything from cookies to roasted vegetables.

### Cooling Racks

For cooling your cakes, cookies and other baked goods so they do not get soggy bottoms.

### Electric Mixer

An electric tool used for mixing and combining ingredients. There are two types: hand mixers and freestanding mixers.

### Oven Mitts

Always use when transferring anything in or out of a hot oven.

### Timer

It's important to keep track of how long things have been cooking or are in the oven so they don't end up underbaked or burnt!

## COOKING TOOLS

### Dutch Oven

A heavy-duty pot with a lid, usually made from cast iron. It is multipurpose and can be used to brown and simmer meat or vegetables or to cook a dish in an oven.

### Frying Pans

A good size to start with is a 25-centimetre pan.

### Pots

Start with one small and one medium pot.

### Rice Cooker

A must-have in an Asian kitchen! Did you know it can make more than just rice? You can also cook an entire meal (see the Salmon Rice recipe on page 34).

### Slotted Cooking Spoons and Spatulas

Multipurpose tools that can be used for cooking almost anything.

### Steamer

Many famous Asian dishes are steam-cooked like dim sum or "otak-otak", which is a fish dish wrapped in banana leaves.

### Tongs

Very helpful if you need to pick up large chunks of food, especially when frying.

### Trivet

For resting pots or pans of hot food on after cooking so they don't damage your countertops. Also needed for steaming food.

### Whisk

A utensil used to combine ingredients together or add air to a mixture.

### Wok

Very handy for almost any method of Asian cooking, from sautéing vegetables to steaming fish.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



ELENA YEO

The truth is, I am not a particularly good cook. I lack the patience to make elaborate dishes and stick to a few simple recipes that I make regularly. You won't find bags of prawn heads in my freezer!

However, I passionately believe that kids should know how to cook—especially Asian food, which is so rich and varied. It's vital that we celebrate our culinary heritage and ensure that a love and appreciation for food is passed down to future generations.

When I'm not cooking, playing with my cat or sewing clothes, I work as a Creative Producer specialising in theatre, audio-based works and live arts events.



ARTI  
DARYANANI

I enjoy cooking and being able to feed others.

Growing up, cooking was a fun activity with my mum. She would indulge my requests to make dishes I'd read about in my favourite story books. I was also regularly enlisted as her kitchen helper on the many occasions she would cook for friends and our large extended family.

Cooking is not just a life skill—it is a form of communication, a means to share personal and family history and traditions. I share Elena's wish to ensure that we celebrate and pass on our culinary heritage.

It is also my wish that this book will entice some grown-ups who fear cooking to give these recipes a try. It's never too late to learn a new skill :)





*Masak-Masak: Asian Cooking for Kids* is a collection of easy Asian recipes that kids will love to make. It features 60 dishes that reflect Singapore's amazing food culture, from Chinese steamed fish and Indian keema to Malay sago pudding—all the dishes we loved as children and still do today. This cookbook is perfect for any child from 8 to 12 years old, to help them develop a love for cooking and instil healthy eating habits for life!

Cooking is a fantastic way to bond as a family, so we encourage you to tie on an apron and cook together. You will be rewarded with many delicious meals and a lifetime of wonderful memories!

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