

Teaching Kids to Cook – Seizing the Moment with a Three Year Old

When my youngest son was three years old, he loved to watch TV cooking shows. One day, after intently watching two 30-minute shows back to back, he solemnly pronounced that the first program was better than the second one because the music fit better! Was this actually the son that I affectionately thought of as my little Mack truck?

It was about that time that I decided to teach him how to cook. More than just cook, I wanted to him to learn the additional steps of planning and shopping. So I told him I would help him learn to cook and I sweetened the deal by promising him that he could choose whatever he wanted to make for those dinners.

I was about to have my first reality adjustment. I assumed that being a kid, he would choose things like, well, kid foods. I thought he would probably want hot dogs or hamburgers, nothing too taxing on the weekly food budget. I should have known better with a son who watched cooking shows at such an early age.

When we got to the store, I lifted him up so he could see into the meat and fish counter. He clung to the refrigerated case, bouncing the toes of his scuffed, little sandals off the side, and pointed to the prawns—nice, big, expensive prawns. Since he refused to switch to something with a lower price tag, I had to revise my own weekly menu because I was now way over budget. However, I didn't want to inhibit his burgeoning interest. At least the meal wouldn't involve any complicated preparation because he simply wanted to sauté the pawns in butter and garlic.

When it was time to make dinner, he dragged a tall chair—actually his old high chair minus the tray—over to the stove. With me standing next to him to ensure his safety, he carefully put a chunk of butter in the pan and added garlic that I had minced. When we had determined that the garlic was cooked just right, he very slowly picked up one prawn by its tail, dropped it lovingly into the butter, and then raptly watched it start to sizzle. He repeated this process for every single prawn. I have to admit his artistic efforts turned into an excellent meal. In fact, we were both very proud of his work.

Although our cooking lessons continued for a while, my son eventually lost his interest in them. That was more than 30 years ago. Now if I happen to call him around dinner time, he will often tell me that he's popping some convenience food into the microwave. At times like that I think of that little, tow-haired boy standing on his old high chair, so engrossed in preparing pawns in garlic butter. At least he'll know what to do if some culinary muse should tap him on the shoulder again.

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