

Cook' Mo Smith has recipes for kitchen success meals in a Mo-moment

If you asked children to draw a fairy godmother, most of them would create a caricature that resembled Mo Smith.

It's an appropriate comparison as Mo's books teach people how to conjure up wonderful meals in the blink of an eye.

The mother of three is silver-haired, smiley and rosy-cheeked and to complete her credentials she lives in a magical looking cottage called Bear House.

An Aga that's permanently in use is at the heart of Mo's 15th century home.

Speaking over the peal of a sweetly-chiming clock, she says: "The kitchen is the first room of the house people walk into. It means that when I cook anything you can smell it throughout the house, even if it's just toast."

But as Mo is an accomplished cook the scent of her baking is never a nuisance. Instead, it attracts her husband Adam, or whoever is in the house, to come and investigate.

This was how she entered the culinary world, by welcoming visitors to her kitchen as a cookery demonstrator.

She says: "My parents wanted me to learn secretarial skills, which I did, but I always wanted to be a cookery demonstrator.

"Everyone thought I just had a bee in my bonnet about it but after I'd gone down the secretarial route I went back to college and got the qualification. I had always loved cooking and it was my dream."

Mo moved to Bisley and started demonstrating cookery for country housewives. She was such a hit that people demanded her recipes.

This gave Mo the idea of trying to get them published but after a series of rejections, she decided to go it alone.

Today she is arguably Britain's most successful self-publisher. So while Mo's ordered kitchen and ironed aprons point to a bygone era, she is a fiercely modern businesswoman.

She came up with the Lazy Cook concept – that's recipes for those short on time and patience – and sold 18,000 cookery books.

She says: "It is hard as I have to do everything myself, all the sales and all the promotions. But I'm the person who knows everything about each book so in that sense it's a strength."

Her fourth book *The Lazy Cook's Favourite Food* is a comprehensive guide to daily meals, how to entertain and cooking tips.

But it's as much for the experienced cook, wanting to do things more hastily, as it is for the novice.

The book has also been written with modern food issues in mind. Mo talks sensibly about avoiding obesity by taking control of your own cooking so you don't need processed meals.

She also discusses the thorny issue of getting children to eat properly.

This section contains the delightful snippet that her own brood were brought up with a spoon of cod liver oil in the morning and a milky cocoa at night.



Cheers – Lazy Cook Mo Smith relaxes at her picturesque Cotswold home



"At the end of a busy day, I'm tired and hungry and want to eat straight away. The recipes avoid any unnecessary fuss, like preparing your own pastry. It's just as good to buy pastry now."

Mo Smith

Mo says: "The best compliment about my books I've ever received is from a young mum who said they taught her how to feed her family.

"No one at home had taught her how to cook and she hadn't learnt at school, so she was at a loss to make simple healthy meals.

"I think there are thousands of people like her who just want to know how to put something nutritious together after work or at the end of the day."

The answer to this problem is Mo's recipes for simple nourishing food.

But unlike so many paths to health, all the ingredients are readily available and you don't need special equipment.

Mo says: "I do grow some of my own

STORE CUPBOARD ESSENTIALS

- Good selection of breads and rolls in freezer
- Dried mushrooms and sundried tomatoes
- Tins of chopped tomatoes, salmon, sardines and mackerel
- Jars of tomato, olive and dill pastes, piccalilli and mint jelly
- Dried mixed herbs, tarragon and mint
- Ready-baked pastry cases
- Frozen fruits and berries
- Ready grated chocolate



vegetables and I love visiting farm shops but I also go to the supermarket and get everything for the week in one go.

"In terms of equipment, you just need a good knife and chopping board and a food processor is helpful."

Mo's recipes are even planned to minimise washing up. Her time-sensitive instructions never use two pans when one would do.

She adds: "I think food should be simple and once you've learnt the basics of how to combine flavours it is.

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"The recipes avoid any unnecessary fuss, like preparing your own pastry. It's just as good to buy pastry now."

But however pressed for time Mo is she always takes a few moments to dress her plate.

She says: "Presentation is very important to me, what's the point in making something if it doesn't look appetising?"

"My husband likes to watch me set food out nicely and I must admit I have a weakness for beautiful china."

But this small weakness hardly marks the copy book for Mo, a true domestic goddess.

■ The Lazy Cook's Favourite Food is on special offer during July and August to Weekend readers. To buy online, visit www.lazycookmosmith.co.uk or send a cheque for £7.99 to Bear House, Bisley, Glos, GL6 7BB. Make cheques payable to Mo Smith. All prices include postage and packing.