

HOME DINING RECREATION TRAVEL COMMUNITY HEALTH SHOPPING

# 805 LIVING

JANUARY 2008

A woman with her hair in a ponytail with a yellow flower, wearing a white tank top, is sitting in a meditative lotus position on a mat. In the foreground, there is a dark bowl containing white rice. The background is a bright, blurred outdoor setting.

Resolve  
to  
Relax

# COOK TOGETHER, EAT BETTER

Try the hottest trends in cooking for kids: Join forces with them at the stove—or trick them for their own good.

AS THE MOTHER OF TWO VERY YOUNG CHILDREN, it seems that many of my goals for 2008 are centered on my kids rather than on myself. This temporary loss of identity is pretty common in mommy circles, where the hottest New Year's resolutions often include the ambitious goal of getting the kids to eat more healthfully. We all know that the benefits of a better diet would trail after them for the rest of their lives, helping them make good dietary choices and contributing to their overall wellness. And we all know that a better diet for the kids would make our lives easier right now, too (how about just making *one* meal for dinner?)—not to mention assuaging a bit of that ever-present mommy guilt. But for many of us the reality of it is this: At the end of the day, we're tired, they're tired, we want a pleasant dinner together that doesn't include arguing but does include actual eating. (If you've ever distributed graham crackers and whole milk at 2 a.m., you know how important that last part is.)

Lately, several food professionals have tackled this problem, and they're offering some smart and productive alternatives. Among the trailblazers is Samantha Saffir, the owner of Kitchen Kid, based in Santa Monica (310-450-3462 or [www.kitchenkid.com](http://www.kitchenkid.com)). Saffir offers unique in-home cooking classes for kids throughout the Los Angeles area, and has worked with families in Calabasas, Westlake, and Thousand Oaks to get the kids involved in the cooking—and as a result, more invested in mealtimes that involve balanced meals prepared with fresh, wholesome ingredients. She brings ingredients, supplies, and recipes and offers setup, cooking instruction, and cleanup, too.

"What chef doesn't want to sample her creation?" Saffir asks. "Even a child who helps make 'icky' vegetables or 'stinky' fish will feel a sense of pride and success when the meal appears on the dinner table." Saffir contends that the pattern that so many of us fall into—serving chicken nuggets to maintain the peace—is actually supporting kids' picky demands. "Parents shouldn't allow themselves to become short-order cooks," she says. "When possible, invite

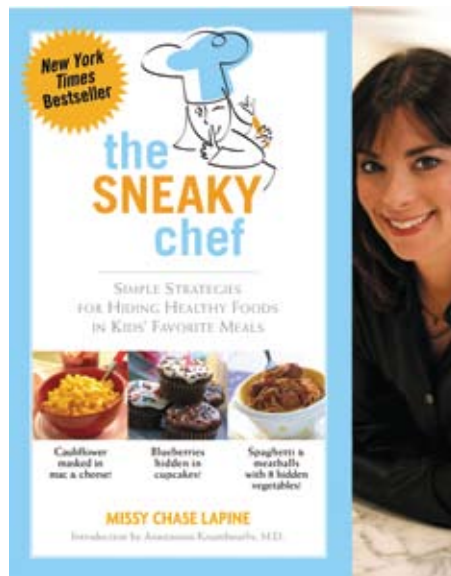
children to help out in the kitchen, making kitchen-time as special as dinnertime."

Another way to change their diets for the better is just about opposite of Saffir's approach: Join the latest trend that has parents pureeing vegetables and surreptitiously adding them to favorite kid fare. *The Sneaky Chef* (Running Press, 2007), a cookbook by Missy Chase Lapine, includes a myriad of recipes loaded with undetectable nutrients. While these techniques are based on deceit, they are very useful—and just might help provide a healthful bridge between the ridiculously picky toddler years and the elementary school years, when kids can participate more fully in meal preparation.

It's of course important to continue to serve vegetables in recognizable form on the side, giving your kids every opportunity to try new tastes and textures (Lapine devotes the first third of the book to addressing such concerns and to strategizing)—but you can relax some just knowing that the kids are getting a dietary boost whether or not they touch the green beans. Lapine's White Puree recipe, made from cauliflower and zucchini, can be mixed into homemade or store-bought macaroni and cheese, and is undetectable: My picky 3-year-old asked for seconds. And Lapine's recipe for Brainy Brownies is especially surprising; I didn't love them, but the kids did—and these brownies contain whole-wheat flour, blue-

berries, and spinach. (If this concept sounds familiar, perhaps you've also heard about Jessica Seinfeld's *Deceptively Delicious*, a similar cookbook released six months later, which took a turn on *Oprah*.)

Admittedly, it's somewhat time-consuming to create a particular puree before beginning a recipe or to invite kids to "help" in the kitchen—but the payoff is pretty sweet. And while I'm not swearing off the chicken nuggets completely (the organic panko-coated ones are very popular around here), it is oddly satisfying to see a picky child gobble down vegetable-laced foods or get excited about helping make an omelet.



Invite your picky eaters into the kitchen to help out and they just might feel invested enough in mealtime to try new foods—even healthful ones.



## SALMON EN PAPILOTTE WITH RED PEPPERS, CARROTS, AND SQUASH

*This recipe comes courtesy of Samantha Saffir, owner of Kitchen Kid, based in Santa Monica. She writes, "This is a classic French cooking technique that steams both the fish and the vegetables in a delicate packet. Your family's favorite veggies and fish can be substituted for any ingredient listed here. Kids like making it because they get to create a package personalized with their favorite ingredients. With plastic picnic knives, kids can help prepare the veggies too. The packages can be made up to 6 hours ahead and refrigerated. Serve with potatoes with garlic and rosemary."*

- 4 salmon fillets, 6 to 8 ounces each (any white fish can be substituted such as halibut, snapper, or cod)
- 1 red pepper, cut into fine strips julienne style
- 1/3 cup carrot, cut in fine strips or shredded thickly
- 1/2 cup zucchini or yellow squash, cut into fine strips julienne style
- 4 tablespoons chopped basil, divided
- 4 tablespoons butter or olive oil, divided
- 2 tablespoons white wine or lemon juice
- Salt and pepper

Preheat the oven to 425°F.

Fold a 12x14-inch piece of parchment paper into half and cut a half-heart shape out of it, as if making a valentine. (Cut on the open side only.) You can use foil instead and eliminate this step. Unfold the heart and scatter 1/3 of the vegetables on one side of the paper heart, or in the middle of the foil sheet. Place the fish on top of the vegetables, and sprinkle with another 1/3 vegetables on top. Sprinkle basil, butter or oil, wine or lemon juice, salt and pepper on top of the fish.



Fold paper over the fish to re-create the half-heart shape. Crimp the paper around the heart's edges to seal it shut. If using foil, seal tops and sides tightly, leaving lots of air inside the package. Repeat with remaining fish packets.

Place fish packets on a baking sheet and bake for about 8-10 minutes, until flaky. (If the fish is quite thick it could take as long as 15-20 minutes.) Open one package to check for doneness.

Serve the "all-in-one" fish and veggie package on a plate, opening it at the table to release the steam for a dramatic presentation.

Serves 4.

## MASTERFUL MAC 'N' CHEESE

*This recipe comes courtesy of The Sneaky Chef (Running Press, 2007) by Missy Chase Lapine. She writes, "This is a nutritionally enhanced version of my stepmother's delicious recipe from Finland. When I mixed in the cauliflower/zucchini puree, which melted away in the familiar creaminess of the cheese, the kids didn't notice any difference from the original mac 'n' cheese."*

- 1/2 pound macaroni (preferably whole-wheat blend)
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 1/4-1/2 cup White Puree (see recipe below)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs (optional extra boost)
- 2 cups grated low-fat Colby or cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 375°F. Butter a 9-inch square baking pan.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the macaroni and cook according to the package directions, until firm and slightly undercooked. Drain and set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk the milk with the White Puree and salt. (If using eggs, whisk them in with the milk mixture.) Put half of the macaroni into the baking pan and top with half the cheese. Next, layer with the rest of the macaroni, and then pour the milk mixture over the top, finishing with the last of the cheese on top.

Bake casserole 30 to 35 minutes, or until golden and bubbling.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

## WHITE PUREE

*This recipe comes courtesy of The Sneaky Chef (Running Press, 2007) by Missy Chase Lapine. It can be used in the homemade macaroni and cheese recipe above, or added to the boxed version; Lapine's book outlines many other uses as well. Store any leftovers in the refrigerator for up to 3 days, or freeze in 1/4-cup portions.*

- 2 cups cauliflower, cut into florets
- 2 small to medium zucchini, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 3-4 tablespoons water, if necessary

Steam cauliflower in a vegetable steamer over 2 inches of water, using a tightly covered pot, for about 10 to 12 minutes until very tender. Alternatively, place cauliflower in a microwave-safe bowl, cover with water, and microwave on high for 8 to 10 minutes until very tender.

While waiting for the cauliflower to finish steaming, start to pulse the raw peeled zucchini with the lemon juice only (no water at this point). Drain the cooked cauliflower. Working in batches if necessary, add it to the pulsed zucchini in the bowl of the food processor with two tablespoons of water. Puree on high until smooth. Stop occasionally and push contents from top to the bottom. If necessary, add the rest of the water to make a smooth puree.

Makes about 2 cups.



## BRAINY BROWNIES

*This recipe comes courtesy of The Sneaky Chef (Running Press, 2007) by Missy Chase Lapine, who suggests dusting them with powdered sugar or sprinkles, if desired.*

- Butter or nonstick cooking spray
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 3/4 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup Purple Puree (see recipe on page 96)
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons Flour Blend (see recipe on page 96)
- 1/4 cup rolled oats, ground in a food processor
- 1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup chopped walnuts (optional extra boost)

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Butter or spray only the bottom, not the sides, of a 13x9-inch or 9-inch square baking pan.

Melt the butter and chocolate chips together in a double boiler or metal bowl over simmering water (or in a microwave, checking every 15 seconds). Remove from heat and allow mixture to cool a bit. Meanwhile, in another bowl, stir together the eggs, vanilla, sugar, and Purple Puree. Combine this purple egg mixture with the cooled chocolate mixture.

In a mixing bowl, stir together Flour Blend, oats, cocoa powder, and salt. Add this to the chocolate mixture and blend thoroughly. Mix in the chopped walnuts, if using, then pour the entire mixture into the baking pan.

Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until a toothpick comes out clean. Allow to cool completely in pan before cutting the brownies with a plastic or butter knife. Keeps for a week in the refrigerator, tightly covered.

Makes about 30 kid-size brownies.

## PURPLE PUREE

This recipe comes courtesy of *The Sneaky Chef* (Running Press, 2007) by Missy Chase Lapine. Store any leftovers in the refrigerator for up to 2 days, or freeze in ¼-cup portions.

- 3 cups raw baby spinach leaves (or 2 cups frozen chopped spinach or frozen chopped collard greens)
- 1½ cups fresh or frozen blueberries (no syrup or sugar added)
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 3-4 tablespoons water

If using raw spinach, thoroughly wash it, even if the package says “prewashed.” Bring spinach or collards and water to boil in a medium pot. Turn heat to low and allow to simmer for 10 minutes. If using frozen blueberries, quickly rinse them under cold water to thaw a little, and then drain.

Fill the bowl of your food processor with the blueberries and cooked spinach (or collards), along with the lemon juice and 2 tablespoons of water, and puree on high until as smooth as possible. Stop occasionally to push top contents to bottom. If necessary, add the rest of the water to make a fairly smooth puree.

Makes about 1 cup.

## FLOUR BLEND

This recipe comes courtesy of *The Sneaky Chef* (Running Press, 2007) by Missy Chase Lapine. Store mixture in a sealed plastic bag; Lapine includes this mixture in recipes for cookies and muffins.

- 1 cup all-purpose, unbleached white flour
- 1 cup whole-wheat flour
- 1 cup wheat germ, unsweetened

Combine the flours and wheat germ in a bowl.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RUNNING PRESS

## CRUNCHY CHICKEN TENDERS

This recipe comes courtesy of *The Sneaky Chef* (Running Press, 2007) by Missy Chase Lapine. She writes, “Chicken fingers are consistently found among the top three choices on every kid’s menu ... I set out to capitalize on the popularity of this finger food, but to transform it from a fast food into a superfood.”

- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken tenders (or boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into strips)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup flour, preferably whole wheat
- 2 large eggs
- ¼-½ cup Orange Puree (see recipe to right)
- 2 cups Better Breading (see recipe on page 97)
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Olive oil for pan frying

Season chicken tenders with salt. Place flour in a shallow dish or on a plate. Beat eggs with Orange Puree in shallow bowl and place next to the flour. In a third shallow dish or on a paper plate, combine the Better Breading with the Parmesan cheese.

Dredge each piece of chicken in the flour, shaking off excess, then the egg mixture, and then the Better Breading mixture. Press the breading evenly onto both sides of the chicken. Put on wax or parchment paper and store in the refrigerator for cooking tomorrow or proceed to cook immediately.

Pan-fry method: Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a large skillet over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking. Add a few strips at a time, pan frying on one side until the crumbs look golden, about 2 to 3 minutes. Watch for

burning, and turn down heat if necessary. With tongs, turn the pieces over and lightly brown the second side until golden, about 3 minutes. Reduce the heat to low and continue heating chicken until cooked through, about another 10 minutes. Blot cooked tenders on paper towels to remove excess oil.

Oven-bake method (not as brown and crisp, but quicker): Preheat oven to 400°F.

Place breaded tenders on a lightly sprayed cookie sheet and bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Turn chicken tenders over once with tongs, then return to oven for another 10 to 12 minutes until cooked through.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

## ORANGE PUREE

This recipe comes courtesy of *The Sneaky Chef* (Running Press, 2007) by Missy Chase Lapine. Lapine uses the puree in several of the book’s other recipes, too, and also recommends stirring it into SpaghettiOs, tomato sauce, or boxed macaroni and cheese for a quick fix.

- 1 medium sweet potato or yam, peeled and roughly chopped
- 3 medium to large carrots, peeled and sliced into thick chunks
- 3-4 tablespoons water

In a medium pot, cover carrots and sweet potatoes with cold water and boil for about 20 minutes or until yams, and especially carrots, are very tender. If the carrots aren’t cooked thoroughly, they’ll leave telltale little nuggets of vegetables, which will reveal their presence (a gigantic no-no for the sneaky chef).

Drain the yams and carrots and put them

in the food processor with 2 tablespoons of water. Puree on high until smooth; no chunks should remain. Stop occasionally to push the contents from the top to the bottom. If necessary, add the rest of the water to make a smooth puree, but the less water the better. Store in refrigerator up to 3 days, or freeze ¼-cup portions in sealed plastic bags or small plastic containers.

*Makes about 2 cups of puree.*

#### BETTER BREADING

*This recipe comes courtesy of The Sneaky Chef (Running Press, 2007) by Missy Chase Lapine. In addition to using this breading for the chicken tenders, Lapine incorporates it in her book's recipes for No Harm Chicken Parm, Hi-Fi Fish Sticks, and Crunchy Elbows.*

- 1 cup almonds, slivered and blanched (optional; omit if allergic)
- 1 cup bread crumbs, preferably whole wheat
- 1 cup wheat germ, unsweetened
- 1 teaspoon salt

With this recipe, you are aiming at the consistency of cornmeal. Pulse almonds in food processor. Don't let the food processor run continually; if you don't pulse it, you will end up with nut butter. Pour the meal into a bowl, and then combine into it the ground bread crumbs, wheat germ, and salt.

Keep refrigerated in a sealed, labeled plastic bag for up to 2 weeks.

## Bag of Tricks

TACTICS FOR OPENING RELUCTANT MINDS AND MOUTHS.

**Samantha Saffir, Kitchen Kid owner and culinary coach, shared the following tips for getting kids more involved in the kitchen and more interested in trying new foods:**

- Encourage children to taste throughout the cooking process, introducing them to new textures and ingredients in small quantities along the way. It may be okay if the ingredients are gobbled up before the recipe is complete.
- For pickier eaters, give them lots of healthy options, and empower *them* to make the choices. For example, I pour warm minestrone broth into a bowl and let the kids choose how to finish their soup. On the counter I'll place heaping bowls of corn, kidney beans, alphabet pasta or orzo, shredded carrots, spinach leaves, green peas, tofu cubes, and Parmesan cheese.
- Sometimes I meet a child terrified of new foods, especially those that are green. Instead of sneaking them in, try giving them an alias. One of the children I cook with is an 8-year-old self-proclaimed zucchini-hater. However, she loves it when we grill "frigaloni" (a special Italian vegetable with an uncanny resemblance to the familiar green squash). ■

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