

Have You Lost that Lovin' Feelin' in the Kitchen?



Much of what I learned about cooking came from watching Food Network after I got married. I did enjoy a season of contentment in the kitchen during those honeymoon years, but recently, I've "lost that lovin' feelin' in the kitchen." My aim is to get it back!

If you're feeling like me, here are some ideas Melissa and I have come up with to "get our groove back" in the kitchen:

1. Make a meal plan, and if you have picky kids, like I do, let them help:

I think this step is extremely important. Most of my detest for the kitchen comes from not knowing what to make for dinner at 4:00 PM on any given afternoon! Planning out meals for the week, lifts a

burden at the end of the day when our minds are (sometimes) weary from our daily labors.

Apart from establishing what to cook each week, another tricky part about meal planning, is sticking with it. I lost track of the number of times I started strong in meal planning and then fizzled out (at the moment, I've fizzled, so this suggestion is mostly directed to myself). Choose a particular day of the week and a particular time of that day to set aside for the task; if you're a tech-addict like me, mark it on your iCal to repeat weekly and set an alert so you don't forget! Hit the snooze button 10 times if you have to... just don't forget it!

Give your kids (if they are old enough) the opportunity to pick a meal one night a week. That takes some of the responsibility off your brain to come up with ideas, and allows them something to look forward to during the week!

Have a leftover night (or two), in order to give yourself a break, or you may reach the point of *no* return to get your groove back in the kitchen!

*By the way, I'm attaching a **weekly meal plan** sheet to this article. Hope it helps!*

2. Get inspired with a new cookbook or set your DVR to record some good cooking shows:

Melissa recommends anything by **Jamie Oliver** in the way of cookbooks; you can find his books on Amazon.com. He has several available.

I recommend my two favorite Food Network personalities Good Eats with Alton Brown and

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Barefoot Contessa. Their recipes are mostly delicious. Alton Brown even educates his audience with some interesting facts about the science of food; he's quite witty as well, and can be especially fun to watch with your budding "chefs" for this reason alone.

3. Plan one meal a week (or a month) that is out of your comfort zone and will take you a fair amount of time to prepare; schedule your day for it and be willing to surrender any possible disruptions:

Melissa says, "Make it a project and put on some really good music for cooking like Italian opera singer, Maria Callas or a french singer like Edith Piaf or Marie Laforêt."

And I suggest anything by the Sons of Korah, my favorite New Zealand music group.

I must admit that working outside of my comfort zone makes me very nervous on many levels, but I also believe it *could* be exhilarating, and surely has the *potential* to awaken a slumbering love for cooking, especially if the results are over-the-top delicious!

4. Set up your kitchen and workspace for ease of use:

This point is where I will spend the bulk of my chatter. You aren't going to love being in a kitchen that is unlovely and disorderly!

Step one: Take a morning, an afternoon, an evening to clean out your cupboards, throw expired food

away, move less useful items to the back of the shelves or pantry... basically, just organize your space *better*! Don't forget your refrigerator and spice cabinet. What's lurking in the back of your fridge these days? Do you know where your curry powder is? Do *you* have 2 bottles of some spice because you couldn't find the first when you needed it, so you just bought a new one? I do!

Are your every-day-use pans easily accessible or are they buried under not-so-frequently used pans? Store your I-only-use-it-at-the-holidays roasting pans for instance, in the back of a cupboard, top shelf of your pantry, the garage, under a bed! Make room in your cupboards for the most-useful items.

Step two: Assess your counter space.

keep your counters as clear of clutter as possible, trust me... it's revolutionary!

There is much wasted space in my kitchen due to (IMHO) poor design, but we've done one thing in particular, which is worth mentioning here, to make my workspace less cluttered. With the addition of an electrical outlet to our pantry, we moved our bulky microwave in there, and out of the way! [Best.Move.Ever] I also downsized my coffee maker since I am the only coffee-drinker in the house. Next on my list is to downsize my out-dated and over-sized toaster oven!

Have you cluttered up your kitchen counters with paper, knickknacks, what-not? I love my parents

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dearly, you know that right, mom? ☺ but it's difficult to prepare meals at their house because of the clutter on their kitchen counter. Make sure the counter is your workspace for cooking only, take care to find some other place for knickknacks, bills, notes, medicines, and anything else that actually doesn't *aid in the act of cooking*.

Step three: How's your oven? I have a hate/hate relationship with mine, but lack of funds prevents me from replacing it. Mine is a temper[mental] oven that refuses to hold the desired temperature. If your oven is a headache, too, and your food isn't turning out right, no wonder you are weary of cooking! So, what can you do to cook well in a bad oven?

I've yet to get myself an oven thermometer, but I hear that can help. Other tips I either already do or intend to try: Make sure you pre-heat your oven and use your timer. Rotate your food during cooktime, since some ovens have hot spots and tend to lopsided doneness. Try using a heating stone, which is an unglazed ceramic tile (or clay bricks) placed at the bottom of your oven. *Apparently, earthenware, once heated, will more evenly disperse heat throughout the oven.*

My oven only partially destroyed my joy of baking, though, the other destructive force which drives my disdain comes in the way of scattered and not easily accessible ingredients and/or utensils. I'll admit, I have a tendency to groan while gathering tools on one end of the kitchen and ingredients at the other. Not to mention lugging the mixer out from the bottom of the pantry and carting it also across the kitchen when I want to use it. Talk about

deflating ambition to bake something! Maybe if I store the items and ingredients frequently used for baking in close proximity to each other, I'd enjoy it more?

Step four: Set up a trash bowl in your workspace while you prepare your meals! And remember to "clean as you go."

Have you ever dripped egg white on the kitchen floor as you hurriedly walked along with a handful of cracked eggs? I have. A trash bowl at your workspace allows you the freedom to continuously dispose of trash right there where you are working, no "running" back and forth to your trash can several times dripping and dropping this and that along the way!

What happens when you step back and look at your kitchen after preparing a meal, does it look like a mini-torнадо swept through? Mine usually does, which is (another reason) why I don't like to cook, I'm not overly fond of the clean up after! Try the "clean up as you go" approach. To do this, you may have to allot a little extra meal prep time, but it's worth it not to have a sink bursting at the seams with dirty dishes after dinner!

5. Melissa says: Cook with a friend. Make it a cooking date and make sure that you are slow in your time spent:

I wanted to make sure I qualified this point with "Melissa says" because anyone that really knows me will also know that I struggle cooking / baking with anyone! I am *Captain Control Freak* in my own kitchen, *just ask my oldest daughter*. I am not proud

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of this, but it is my personality. I am simply not comfortable in the kitchen with anyone invading my space. Needless to say, if you are anything like me, this one *may* stress you out a bit... but if you are outgoing and social, give it a try! Nothing like food and fun to cultivate any relationship!

6. Recipes, some old and some new

Do you have a trusty homemade recipe book? Several years ago I took a 1 ½" binder, printed recipes from allrecipes.com and foodnetwork, collected recipes from friends and family members, then stuffed the pages in sheet protectors and made my own recipe book. The sheet protectors keep the pages clean if I should get out of hand with my mixing or pouring. ☺ PS Having a recipe book like this, helps a great deal with meal planning! But, I'm in a rut and need some new recipes! Do you have any tried and true recipes to share? I'm looking especially for good chicken and venison recipes. If you've got some good ones, please consider emailing them to me at ihmsch3@gmail.com

7. Melissa recommends reading this story about how some Italian grandmothers, armed with bowls of homemade pasta, began a real food revolution called "Slow Food USA"

www.slowfoodusa.org/history

Are you a fast food connoisseur? Do you need inspiration to move away from the phenom which is fast food? The gist of this movement is to slow down in the kitchen in order to "*rediscover the flavors and savors of regional cooking and banish the degrading effects of Fast Food.*" Even if you do

frequent fast food joints, or prefer the frozen dinner aisle at the supermarket, admit it... food that takes longer to prepare and requires more effort, just tastes better. *And, we all know... is better for you!*

8. My last idea on how to get your groove back in the kitchen entails wearing an apron

It's symbolic really, but empowering! Put on an apron and your mindset transforms to cook-mode! I asked for one on my birthday wishlist, and ended up with the apron of my dreams (yes, there really *can* be an apron of your dreams, look for yours today!) ☺

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Deborah is a stay-at-home [homeschooling] mom of 3 blessings, and has the exciting privilege of working with Melissa as her graphic and web designer (and loves every minute of it)!

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WEEKLY meal plan

week of _____

	breakfast	lunch	dinner
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			