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# Cooking the Wright way

**Kate Wright, The Cobblestone Café** Galway Advertiser, Thu, Aug 07, 2008



The aroma of freshly baked scones leads many 'foodies' down the cobbled Kirwan's Lane to Kate Wright's Cobblestone Café. Still others wander down the mediaeval lane to give Kate's most faithful café companion a friendly pat on the head. Lilly – Kate's dog, has become synonymous over the past 10 years with Cobblestone, and even features on the café's website, [www.galwaycookeryclasses.com](http://www.galwaycookeryclasses.com)

Although this compact café cooks up a veritable storm in fresh home baking, it has become equally well-revered over the past six years for Kate's cooking classes, some of which take place in-situ; others in venues in and around Galway and Mayo.

### Teaching children the art of home cooking

Kate is on a mission to recapture the Irish culture of home cooking, and to help spread the message she teaches vegetarian and children's cookery classes.

In addition, Kate's cookery birthday parties for kids are becoming increasingly popular as a fun, educational, alternative to the 'bouncy castle' scene.

These two-hour long birthday party cookery classes can be held in any type of kitchen, as Kate brings along aprons, ingredients and personalised handouts for the birthday guests. Children are given a certificate at the end of the classes, and get to gobble their own creations.

"The children love mixing their own cookies and making their own chicken nuggets. I generally cap the numbers at 15 children and most of the demand comes from eight-11 year olds", states Kate.

Coming from a farming background in Fethard, Tipperary, Kate remembers well how everything was home produced. From milking the cows after school to baking mince pies at Christmas, Kate was introduced to cooking from a very early age, and the passion has stayed with her.

"Nowadays, parents don't seem to have the time to teach their children how to cook for themselves, or even how to prepare their own school lunch boxes, yet children like to take control of their own food."

### Irish people don't know what to do with vegetables

"Children love being 'hands-on', producing their own cup cakes, pizzas or smoothies, and it's an excellent platform from which to foster a lifelong interest in making their own meals, rather than relying on 'take-away' food."

Kate hopes that her children's cookery classes will help ignite the same passion for cooking that she felt herself as a child, and plans to start up classes from Cobblestone on Sundays from September.

Privacy

"The demand for my cookery classes for adults and children takes me all over County Galway, from Brigit's Garden in Roscahill to The Daisy Crèche in Oranmore. I'll also be running a one-day children's cookery workshop during the Clarinbridge Arts Festival," explains Kate.

Although Kate is happy to demonstrate meat dishes, as a vegetarian she prefers to spread the word on the beauty of vegetables.

"I want to show people how to use the abundance of fresh vegetables we have. I find that people don't eat a lot of vegetables in Ireland, as they don't know what to do with them."

Consequently, Kate buys in the finest of organic farmers' vegetables to complement the herbs she brings in daily from her own garden.

As the Cobblestone Café is open every day from morning into the evening, Kate is never far from Kirwan's Lane. "If I'm not cooking then I'm gardening, running around Kilcolgan, at the gym or practising yoga. Lilly has even run with me on a few of the local marathons", she smiles.

With an urgent desire to pass on her culinary skills to others, Kate has developed a range of cookery classes for all proficiency levels. Her aim quite simply, is to teach us how to produce straightforward meals that we can easily replicate in our own kitchens.

"My rule of thumb is that most meals be prepared in 30 minutes; these can include everything from wraps and stews to tarts and quiches."

Adult cookery classes are great social events

The Cobblestone Café's vegetarian cookery classes take place twice weekly on the premises, and have become, says Kate, great social events, with lots of repeat business.

"People sign up again and again to learn more, and the classes of 15 do fill up quickly, with the premises being small."

Kate is also introducing individual cooking classes for those who want to fast-track their way to culinary heights, and highlights the rising demand for cookery class vouchers as presents.

"Newly weds like to get a handle on how to cook nutritiously, and our vouchers have proven to be a great wedding gift."

Kate is also planning cookery classes for second and third level students, enabling NUI Galway students in particular to save a fortune and discover a life inside a kitchen.

Being featured in The Bridgestone Guide and on a number of overseas websites brings a steady stream of tourists to the Cobblestone Café. Japanese, German and Spanish magazines have featured the business, leading visitors straight to Kirwan's Lane on arrival in Galway.

"One particular group of American visitors has been coming here for five years to learn how to make real Irish soda bread and scones. I have given out so many recipes for bread, cakes and savouries that I've decided to produce my own cookery book and also to put some of these recipes on the Cobblestone website."

Galway's recent 'People's Awards', run by Amnesty International and Fairtrade, voted Kate's gluten/wheat-free Tunisian Orange Cake tops, and she finds it hard to keep up with demand for this particular dessert.

"I regularly bake with organic gluten-free flour and spelt flour, as so many people have allergies these days to wheat. Spelt is also incredibly nutritious, as is quinoa, so I like to introduce these into my sweets and savouries, so that others can taste and start using these too."

Background is in hotel management

Although Kate has been cooking since knee-high to an Aga, her formal career in the hospitality industry began in the Cashel Palace Hotel, where she trained in all aspects of hotel management. She went on to work in Cork, gaining more experience in Cork's Silver Springs and Victoria hotels.

By the early 1980s Kate had moved to her adopted city of Galway and ran the restaurant over Tigh Neachtain's for three years, followed by eight years running The Grapevine, above the Bunch of Grapes bar.

"I love Galway, but wish that the business and tourism bodies would promote this medieval street of Kirwan's Lane more. In this economic downturn, businesses on the periphery need to be more imaginative in their approach, which I hope I am. Word of mouth brings lots of business to me, but we still need outside help.

"I'm developing a kind of virtual café on my website and will use it as an extension on which to promote and sell Cobblestone produce. It's important for small businesses like mine to consider new marketing techniques."

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Cobblestone's staples: jams, crumbles and hundreds of scones, from sun-dried tomato and olive to blackberry are produced for both eating in-house and for take-away.

"We don't concentrate hugely on take-away, but after eating in the café, people ask if they can buy to take home, and my regulars also request for special occasions."

Cooking for dinner parties

When hosting her own dinner parties Kate cooks mostly vegetarian or fish and still insists that she can rustle up great grub in a tick.

"People don't need to spend hours slaving over a hot stove to get results. By using seasonal fresh ingredients in a simple fashion, they can astound their guests.

"I can go home after a long day in Cobblestone and produce a three-course meal of simple dishes for 10 people, without exhausting myself."

Kate in your kitchen

As good as her word, Kate is also prepared to cook for others' dinner parties through her 'Healthy Eating Cook Club'.

"I agree the menu with the host and then use the host's kitchen to cook the meal, leaving the host all the time in the world to entertain her guests."

Celebrities as well as locals have a grá for Cobblestone, and Kate remembers actor James Cromwell as being a lunch time regular throughout his theatrical run last year in Druid's 'Long Day's Journey Into Night'.

"Cobblestone is an intimate venue where everyone mixes. My staff, such as Doura from South Korea are great. Sometimes they come to me with only basic skills and are really proficient after a few weeks, as I teach them well."

Kate is a big fan of Italian cooking and is delighted to have an Italian girl, Roselia, on her staff, who complements the Cobblestone menu with her own Mediterranean cuisine.

"If I ever find the time I would love to take a cookery course in Italy, as they do such fabulous vegetarian food, but I can't take much time off for holidays. I firmly believe that for a business to succeed you have to be there in the thick of it yourself."

So, does the cook actually cook for herself?

"Sometimes I will take home something I have made earlier in the day. But if I feel up to it, I'll put something together quite quickly. Fast food has a terrible reputation, but some of the fastest food is the most nutritious. A simple omelette with fresh herbs and vegetables takes only minutes to prepare."