



# FOOD LITERACY JOURNAL

**COOKING IS  
FASTEST METHOD  
TO TEACH KIDS  
TO LOVE FRUITS  
AND VEGETABLES**



PHOTO BY MARITA MADELONI, [HTTP://MADELONIPHOTOGRAPHY.COM](http://MadeloniPhotography.com)

**WINTER 2014**

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

PHOTO BY SUZANNE HAMBLETON



Last month I was invited to attend the James Beard Foundation's Food Conference, a prestigious event tailored to a small audience of food thought leaders, featuring discussion sessions with authors Michael Pollan and Mark Bittman; film producer of *Fed Up*, Laurie David; Let's Move executive director Sam Kass; and many more. Participants ranged from authors of national publications, leaders from innovative nonprofits, pediatricians and others hoping to change our food system. The event theme: health.

In a room filled with change makers discussing the future of America's health, the topic of food literacy repeated. Doctors called for eating more fruits, veggies, nuts and seeds with less sodium, sugar and processed foods—messages everyone agreed needed to reach the youngest generations. The power of cooking was celebrated as a leading solution to our diet-related problems.

"Cooking isn't a value of this country anymore," said Laurie David. "I see this as a justice issue that kids don't have a shot at a healthy future."

Discussions also included a call for changes in food policy, education of youth, and the mobilizing of America's biggest role models, chefs.

While obesity rates continue to outpace tobacco use as the leading cause of preventable death in America and two generations of families do not know how to cook, some attendees asked whether the food movement is building enough momentum. My view from the ground floor of a growing grassroots nonprofit is a resounding YES!

This quarter, fast-food giant McDonald's profits fell 30 percent, marking its fourth straight quarter of losses. In San Francisco and Berkeley, California, ballot measures invited voters to approve a tax on sugary beverages. Locally in Sacramento, PTA groups are passing school-wide wellness policies to get junk food out of constant reach of their kids, nonprofits are collaborating to improve city ordinances around urban gardening, and even libraries have expanded cooking classes for families.

As a member of Food Literacy Center's Food Literati, your support is a revolutionary act. Your dollars bring us into more schools, improving kids' cooking and nutrition skills—habits they will carry with them for life. Your volunteer time widens our reach.

Let's continue building momentum. Together, we are making a powerful difference!

~ Amber  
Chief Food Genius

## PEARRYN'S STORY

by Aimee Darville

PHOTO BY SUZANNE HAMBLETON



Pearryn is in 2nd grade and has been in food literacy class for two years at Capitol Heights Academy, a public charter school in Oak Park, Sacramento. "Pear," as she is appropriately called, is being raised by her mom Evonne who works as an after-school teacher. In a community with a 40 percent childhood obesity rate, programs like Food Literacy Center

become paramount to building healthy changes that will last a lifetime.

Pear has become a food detective and will often ask, "Mommy is that healthy?" If Evonne isn't sure, they will read the nutrition label together, a skill Pear learned in food literacy class. Pear is not alone; 80 percent of her classmates now know how to read a nutrition label, too.

While shopping sometimes Evonne will remind Pear, "remember when you didn't like that food and then you tried it in food literacy class and liked it?" She adds a nod to the program, "They make the food so fun and colorful, the kids want to taste it."

Indeed, good food should be fun! The nonprofit focuses on the positive side of food, sharing practical and affordable ways to eat well, rather than harping on what foods people should avoid. By making healthy food fun, Food Literacy Center inspires children to make the best choices for their bodies – impacting the health of their whole family.

Evonne explains, "We love bean burritos! I used to buy fast food, but Food Literacy Center did an experiment where you make a bean burrito at home with wheat tortillas instead of flour—and whole beans. So we don't eat fast food anymore and it saves us money. My sister buys wheat tortillas now, she's trying to eat healthier, too."

Pear's favorite moment of food literacy has been going to The Kitchen Restaurant and being a mini chef. Food Literacy Center students were invited to serve appetizers, but Pear was so curious and excited to be in a working kitchen that soon she and her classmates were invited on stage to help plate dishes with real chefs!

While her favorite food changes daily, when she grows up, Pear knows she wants to be either a chef or a teacher like her mom. Perhaps she'll choose both and become a food literacy teacher!

# COOKING IS FASTEST METHOD TO TEACH KIDS TO LOVE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

by Matthew J. Blackburn

Amidst a bombardment of TV ads that convince kids to crave calorie dense and nutritionally deficient foods, it can be challenging to raise healthy eaters.

What's the fastest method to teach kids to love their fruits and vegetables? Gardening? Shopping the farmers market? New research shows that cooking is the fastest method to improving kids' food literacy and turning them into food adventurers.

"It's the collapse of home cooking that led directly to the obesity epidemic," said food journalist Michael Pollan in a New York Times interview. "Cooking links us to nature, it links us to our bodies."

Carrie Strohl, a literacy specialist with Learning Design group at UC Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science, said with school or home gardens, few can cook entirely from what they have grown.

Strohl said although school gardening helps children learn how food grows, the garden can become a form of recess, making it difficult to maintain classroom behavior. Also, creating and staging lesson plans to the ripening of fruits or vegetables can be time consuming and difficult for instructors.

"You can't appeal to the same senses in the garden as you do with cooking," said Strohl, who has conducted comparative studies on curriculums for both home economics and school gardening. "Meals prepared from scratch are usually healthier and are enjoyed more."

Cooking builds community around food through a shared culture of eating in far less time than sowing a garden. By sharing the workload of creating a meal, children quickly learn essential skills that will help them to feed themselves someday: following a recipe, chopping, etc.

Pollan suggests that food education in the form of gender-neutral home economics classes would create the potential of a "gender-agnostic cooking culture," where cooking is a healthy, creative, cost-effective, democratic pleasure.

"Typically students will want to share recipes from school with their family," Strohl said.

A 2014 Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior study found that a "Cooking With Kids" curriculum involving

PHOTO BY DAWN BALZARANO, [HTTP://KITCHENTRAVELS.SMUGMUG.COM](http://kitchentravels.smugmug.com)



fourth grade New Mexican children in culinary experiences improved children's attitudes about cooking, increased self-efficacy (the ability to follow a recipe and create a meal), and boosted preferences towards fruits and vegetables. Thereby, facilitating long-term healthful food choices.

**"IT'S THE COLLAPSE OF HOME COOKING THAT LED DIRECTLY TO THE OBESITY EPIDEMIC," SAID FOOD JOURNALIST MICHAEL POLLAN**

Additionally, the study found that boys with no prior cooking experience had the greatest gains in self-efficacy.

Nutritionists and parents often focus too narrowly on isolating vegetables to fulfill dietary needs. Strohl said a nutritionally balanced meal isn't one that is nutritionally complete per se. Rather, it is food combinations with a variety of ingredients like garlic, onions, or ginger, which makes food more nutritious, palatable and better to eat. With some foods, cooking makes nutrients more readily available.

# BAKED SWEET POTATO AND BLACK BEAN TAQUITOS

Photo & Recipe by Erin Alderson

Yields: 10 taquitos (4 to 5 servings)

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes for sweet potatoes, 25 to 30 minutes for taquitos

## Taquitos

1 medium sweet potato, cut into 1/4" cubes (roughly 2 cups)

1/4 cup black beans, drained and rinsed if using canned

1 scallion (green onion) minced (2 tablespoons)

2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro

1 tablespoon fresh squeezed lime juice

1/2 teaspoon chipotle powder

1/4 teaspoon salt

10 corn tortillas

1 tablespoon olive oil

## Yogurt Dip

1/2 cup Greek yogurt

2 tablespoons minced cilantro

1 tablespoon lime juice

## Instructions for Adults:

1. Bring a pot of water to a boil. Add sweet potatoes and cook until tender, 10 minutes. Drain and place in a bowl.
2. Preheat oven to 425°.

## Instructions for Kids:

3. Mash sweet potatoes a few times with a potato masher or fork (there should still be some small chunks of sweet potatoes).
4. Add the black beans, scallion, cilantro, lime juice, chipotle powder, and salt to the sweet potatoes. Stir until well combined.
5. Take a few sheets of paper towels (still together) and dampen. Wrap around the stack of corn tortillas and microwave for 30-45 seconds. Tortillas should be warm and roll easily.
6. Place 3 tablespoons of the sweet potato filling in the half of the tortilla closest to you. Roll and tuck the end over the filling and continue to roll. Place seam side down on a baking tray and continue with remaining tortillas and filling. Brush the rolled taquitos with olive oil before baking.

## Instructions for Adults:

7. Bake for 15 minutes, flip the taquitos, and continue to bake for another 10-15 until crispy on the outside.

## Instructions for Kids:

8. Mix the Greek yogurt, cilantro, and lime juice together and serve on the side with the taquitos.

## Notes:

Look for fresh, in the cooler section of your grocery store, tortillas. These tend to roll better. Also the thinner the tortilla, the better! If desired, add 1/2 cup shredded/crumbled cheese (like cheddar or queso fresco) to the sweet potato mix.



## Fun fact: Sweet Potato

If a recipe calls for sweet potatoes, your best bet is to look for Garnet, Jewel or Beauregard "yams". Ignore the misnomer, these tubers are sweet potatoes masquerading as yams.

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Third Plate: Field Notes on the Future of Food* by Dan Barber

Book Review by Lori Easterwood, Sacramento Public Library

Dan Barber is the multiple James Beard Award-winning chef and co-owner of Blue Hill restaurants in Manhattan and at the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in upstate New York. Until recently, Barber's restaurants were synonymous with the farm-to-table movement, but in *The Third Plate*, the author-chef argues for an entirely new cuisine of sustainability. Barber calls for a holistic approach to agriculture in which the chef is as responsible as the farmer for cultivating a healthy balance of plantings leading to food with the greatest flavor and lowest negative impact on the planet. The evolution of his beliefs regarding the consumption, preparation, and production of food are traced through vividly told stories in Soil, Land, Sea and Seed sections of the book.

The opening section, Soil, is eighty pages of entertaining science and storytelling that proves the author's skill—dirt, we learn, is as full of life as the characters that fill the book. Throughout *The Third Plate*, Barber manages to educate the reader without lecturing—a rarity in the food sustainability genre. Perhaps it is because Barber brings a chef's true appreciation of food to his argument that it is so palatable—regardless, find a good earthy glass of wine and savor this new writing talent.

Suggested book pairing:

*The Once and Future World: Nature As It Was, As It Is, As It Could Be* by J.B. MacKinnon



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