



The good life

Renowned both for her home garden (and the delicious recipes created using the results) and her sourdough (and accompanying workshops), Nelson-based Nicola Galloway is a model of sustainable, self-sufficient and scrumptious cookery.

WORDS & PHOTOS NICOLA GALLOWAY

I believe that cooking can be more than simply creating food for sustenance (although of course there are times when this is warranted); it can also be for the enjoyment and creativity it brings. Maybe I am a romantic, but I truly believe that if we put aside time to cook for the joy and satisfaction it brings, rather than simply seeing it as a necessity, it can feed not only the body but also the mind and soul.

My love for and appreciation of cooking was ignited by many people, but most early on by my Nana Ngairi (Galloway). She took me under her wing at a young age and taught me how to cook. And it wasn't just about cooking – Nana genuinely loved food and was always reading new recipes and experimenting in the kitchen.

Sure, she had her day-to-day meals, but she regularly tried out something new, like adding avocado to chilled cucumber soup – much to my Poppa's dismay! I am sure it was Nana's creativity in the kitchen rubbing off on me that led me to train as a chef, and continue on this career path to become a culinary educator and food writer.

After I finished my chef training in my early twenties I spent a year living and working in Canada. This was a pivotal time in my life, when I became even more interested in food and cooking. It was this time spent living in British Columbia that opened my eyes to fermented foods, including sourdough bread, good-quality cultured dairy and lacto-fermented vegetables such as sauerkraut – three foods that now form the backbone of my own kitchen.

I was fortunate to rent a room from a couple with a large vegetable garden. I moved in at the end of winter when the garden was completely covered with a foot (30cm) of snow. I recall my housemate Eric pointing out an area on the edge of the property that looked like a mess of twigs sticking out of the snow.

He told me that this was the raspberry patch where we would harvest large bowls of berries through summer (to

be honest, I am not quite sure if I believed him at the time). Over the next months I watched the garden come to life as the snow melted and brightly coloured tulips burst through the ground. The raspberry canes grew green shoots and then, as I had been told, became laden with plump, sweet berries in summer.

I soon realised that having a fruitful garden was something I wanted when I returned home to New Zealand. Now, looking back 20 years it is amazing to see how such moments can shape our lives. I now have a large garden with, yes, a raspberry patch that marks the beginning of the summer fruits and brings us many bowls of fresh berries (when we can beat the birds to them!).

To complement the garden produce we also had a fortnightly Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) box arrive at our doorstep. You never knew exactly what you would get – although you could let them know what you didn't want or already had in the garden. We shared the cooking, and I loved learning how to use new-to-me produce such as kohlrabi and turnips.

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I found this a very creative way to cook – starting with the produce as the heart of the meal and adding extra flavours and protein to complement. To this day I still cook this way, beginning with fresh produce from the garden or local market and planning a meal from this starting point.

When I returned to New Zealand at the end of the year I was fired up with this way of approaching food. Admittedly, New Zealand 20 years ago was somewhat behind compared with Canada, but I gradually began to find ‘my’ people, growers of fresh seasonal produce and other local producers.

I volunteered at a local community garden where I learned about growing food and how to identify edible weeds. This is where my own personal food story began. I eventually bought a house where a previous owner had planted many heritage fruit trees and a grapevine meandering its way through the rafters of a sunroom. I planted a garden and learned how to preserve the fruit from our trees. I started writing recipes using fresh seasonal produce as my focus, sharing them online and then, eventually, in printed publications and cookbooks.

Around this time I also began teaching cooking workshops, initially small groups in my home kitchen. This soon grew and as demand increased I started teaching around the country. In the two decades I have been writing and teaching others about cooking, I have also learned from my readers and workshop attendees – both from the sharing of the collective knowledge and from the questions asked.

When I don’t know the full answer to a question, this has been the impetus

for my own growth and learning. It has stretched me, for example, to understand the intricacies of a volatile sourdough starter. How to tame it for the home kitchen where it may only be used once a week – quite different to a commercial bakery where a starter is often fed every six hours. I have dived deep into fermentation and home preserving, reading, learning and, most importantly, experimenting.

One proviso I would make is that you use your own instinct (or intuition) when cooking a recipe. Use cooking timings as a basis but always go with your own instinct for when something might be ready, or may need a little longer.

When I am not recipe-testing I often go by the smell and feel of the top of a cake to tell if it is ready, rather than relying on a timer.

When sautéing onions I will adjust the heat so they don’t colour too much, or if I want that golden caramelisation I might crank it up.

We use all our senses when we cook. Taste and smell are obvious, but listening to the different sounds of cooking also gives us feedback. Making ghee is a good example, as the sound changes from a quiet, rolling simmer to a more vigorous ‘popping’ boil when it is ready.

We use our sense of touch to ascertain when a bread dough is ready to shape or bake. And, of course, our sight gives us visual cues for when a pancake is ready to flip, or the cheese on top of a lasagne bake is grilled perfectly. Cooking is a sensory experience and one that I believe can nourish us at many levels.



WARM ROASTED CAULIFLOWER SALAD + ZESTY YOGHURT DRESSING

This is a warm layered salad with a base of creamy, tart yoghurt, topped with sweet roasted cauliflower and salty chickpeas, and extra flavour and texture from fresh herbs and sliced almonds. It makes a wonderful centrepiece to the dinner table, served alongside pan-fried fish or slow-cooked lamb.

SERVES 4–6 as a side

1 whole cauliflower (about 800g)
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon turmeric powder
½ teaspoon salt
cracked pepper
400g can chickpeas or 1½ cups homecooked, well drained
handful of chopped mint and/or parsley
3 tablespoons sliced almonds, toasted

Zesty yoghurt dressing

½ cup (125ml) natural unsweetened yoghurt
zest and juice of ½ lemon (1–2 tbsp juice)
1–2 garlic cloves, finely chopped (optional)
1 tablespoon olive oil
pinch of salt

Preheat the oven to 190°C (fan 170°C).

Chop the cauliflower into bite-sized florets and place on a large baking tray. Add the olive oil, spices and seasoning, and mix well to combine. Spread out the cauliflower in a single layer so that it cooks evenly and roast for 10 minutes.

Remove the tray from the oven, add the chickpeas, and use a metal spatula to flip and muddle with the cauliflower. Roast for a further 10–15 minutes until nicely golden around the edges and the cauliflower is just tender – don’t overcook, or the cauliflower will be mushy.

Cool a little.

Combine the dressing ingredients in the base of a large salad bowl. Spoon over the warm cauliflower and chickpeas. Scatter with herbs and toasted almonds and serve. Toss to gently combine at the table.

This salad can be made a few hours ahead of time and kept covered at room temperature until ready to serve (although it will no longer be a warm salad).

WHITE BEAN, ASPARAGUS & ARTICHOKE SALAD

This is a spring riff on the ubiquitous bean salad that I make throughout the warmer months. In summer, use red onions and grilled red capsicum instead of asparagus and artichokes. You can cook dried cannellini beans for this salad to replace the canned beans.

SERVES 4-6 as a side

400g can cannellini beans or 1½ cups home-cooked beans, drained
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon sherry vinegar or white wine vinegar
1 teaspoon honey
3 tablespoons lemon juice
large handful of parsley, chopped
300g jar marinated artichoke hearts, drained
250g (1 bunch) fresh asparagus
salt and pepper

In a serving bowl combine the drained beans with the oil, vinegar, honey, lemon juice, parsley, artichokes and fresh or pickled asparagus. If using fresh asparagus, thinly slice on an angle and blanch for 2 minutes in boiling water, drain and refresh in cold water and add to the salad (it can also be eaten raw if your asparagus is super fresh).

Check seasoning, adding salt, pepper and extra lemon juice if needed.



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