

# Celebrity chef Jamie Oliver celebrates vegging out

By T. Susan Chang

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Jamie Oliver, the British celebrity

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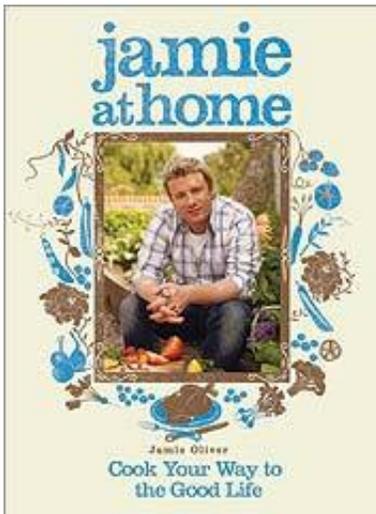
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chef, wears many hats: "Naked Chef" TV icon, school lunch crusader, restaurateur-philanthropist. Oh, and he's published 10 books, the most recent of which, "Jamie at Home: Cook Your Way to the Good Life," celebrates fruits and vegetables he has raised in his spare time. "I just like spending time with my veg," writes Oliver with his trademark brio. Don't we all!



Oliver's pace may be dizzying, but his joie de vivre is contagious. So it's hard to hold it against him when, as is bound to happen, his boisterous recipes show signs of some overly speedy testing. I'm not immune to Oliver's colloquial charm ("add a glug or two of olive oil"; "give everything another bash") But there are definitely times when a simple command - like, "drain the oil" - would help.

Beautiful zucchini carbonara is a case in point. Now, this is carbonara - nobody expects it to be a Weight Watchers special - but after you fry 12 slices of bacon, you really have to drain the fat, even if Oliver doesn't say so. And that much bacon could not disguise the fact (as my children made clear) that there were fully six zucchini lending their pale, wet inertia to the dish.

Curried cauliflower fritters hold out the promise of crunch and flavor, but the cumin-mustard seed batter doesn't deliver much of a curry flavor. Still, who can resist the texture and zing of fritters with lemon and flash-fried parsley?

If you bill a recipe as "best," it should be. "Best barbecued meat" with homemade barbecue sauce doesn't quite live up to its name, though Oliver's technique (a slow, wet bake, followed by a sear on the grill) works to perfection. But the marinade cries out for a touch of sweetness to balance out the herbal, vinegar flavors.

Plum bakewell tart takes most of an afternoon, between making the crust, the frangipane, and the jam. I eyed the quantities skeptically before turning everything into a 10-inch tart pan. Within half an hour the contents, including the three sticks of butter, were oozing

everywhere. It was like "The Blob," only tastier. When I snapped off a bit of the chewy, jammy, almondy sweet crust I saw how good an idea this was, maybe right up till the conversion from metric.

On the other hand, when Oliver gets it right, he knocks it out of the park. Crispy and sticky chicken

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COOKBOOK REVIEW

### JAMIE AT HOME

**Cook Your Way to the Good Life**

By Jamie Oliver

Hyperion, 416 pp., \$37.50

thighs with squashed new potatoes and tomatoes have the tantalizing scent of a whole bunch of oregano and sweet, concentrated cherry tomatoes.

Squash soup with Parmesan croutons is another pleasant surprise. Thanks to a surfeit of vegetables as a base, this one has more depth and variety of flavor than your typical squash soup; the ciabatta croutons are downright addictive.

If you can get good, dry Spanish chorizo, Oliver's potato & chorizo omelet with "a kinda parsley salad" has miles of flavor - the perfect easy dinner for a chilly weeknight.

"I've had brilliant fun coming up with the recipes because I've been so inspired by everything that's come out of my garden over the past year," writes the chef. These recipes may not always be speedy or reliable. But inspiring? Absolutely. If you've got a sure hand in the kitchen, go ahead and take a shot.

Just remember, a few things got lost in the translation. ■

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