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Elegant WEDDING

LIFETIMES

Home Cooking

IN OLD WORLD ITALY, A BRIDE-TO-BE fine-tuned her culinary skills in her future mother-in-law's kitchen, learning to prepare her husband's favorite meals before the marriage. Today, roles and traditions in the kitchen aren't so clear-cut, and adjusting to a table for two may take some creative compromising.

"In some families, mealtime is really important, and in others, there may not be an emphasis on it," says Marjorie Druker, executive chef and owner of The New England Soup Factory in Brookline. Kitchen duty alone can spell trouble for some couples.

"Everybody has their own way of doing things in the kitchen," says Nick Speros, chef and co-owner with his wife, Maria, of 197 East Main in Gloucester. But sharing kitchen time can be a great way for a couple to bond. "If you have the time to do it, make it a day. Make it a date," says Speros.

"It's a great idea to take a couple's cooking class together," says Druker. "It's important to establish how you can combine the bride and groom's tastes." Couples, especially those from different ethnic or religious backgrounds, may have different ideas of what home cooking means. The best bet is to try recipes from both families and keep the ones you both enjoy. Eventually, a couple will develop a unique culinary tradition of their own.

"A new style of cooking is creat-

ed by the fusion," says Gordon Hamersley, chef and co-owner with his wife, Fiona, of Hamersley's Bistro in Boston. "One of the things that concerns me is that traditional family food is not being passed on because of fast food and takeout."

One way he's seen couples preserve culinary traditions is with a family cookbook. "They are often handwritten recipes from various generations with different notes on how they've changed things: upgraded frozen peas to fresh peas, for example," he says. "They are just wonderful family artifacts and can be used for future generations."

Druker has made many of her own original cookbooks to give as gifts. She starts with a simple notebook or a blank book from a stationery store and handwrites recipes she's gathered from family and friends. Include the basics—roast chicken, meatloaf, chicken soup and, of course, chocolate-chip cookies—as well as favorite family recipes or holiday dishes.

The easiest way to collect them all? "Sit down with family and ask," she says. And if you can't decipher a recipe, or the author doesn't include measurements or a method, try finding a similar recipe in a published cookbook and improvise. If you're artistic, you can customize the cookbook with calligraphy or pictures of fresh food cut from magazines and shellacked on the cover. But the most important part to personalize is what's inside. "It is so important to keep these traditions alive," says Druker. "It's not important who cooks; what's important is that you have a meal." — *Jill Waldhiser*