

# taste

# I'm giving people skills to cook

By **LOUISE HOWESON**  
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CLAIRE Barham wants to instil all cooks with confidence and the skills necessary to prepare fresh, seasonal food every day. She runs the Green Apron Cookery School, in Coggeshall, and the cuisines she teaches range from Italian, Moroccan and Thai and she can also boost your skills in baking, vegetarian cooking and student survival food.

She says: "I try to make the classes as skills-based as possible so people leave with the confidence to try things like pasta making, and baking bread at home."

"We don't use fancy machines like a pasta maker, we use a rolling pin, because I don't want there to be any reason for people not to try it at home. It's not about buying fancy ingredients or equipment when you know how."

Running her own cookery school was Claire's dream for many years. She took a year out from working as an accountant to study at the prestigious Leith Cookery School 13 years ago when she was 30.

Claire says: "It was a great foundation in French cookery and very skills based. I loved it."

"Enrolling at the school was something I had been interested in for a long time and I saved the money and took a year out from work to do it."

However, Claire had to return to her day job after her studies.

I try to promote cooking wholesome ingredients from the garden that are straightforward and from scratch. It is also about enjoying the process of cooking and eating together

She says: "I spent all my money on the course and so I had to go back to work. I started working for a management consultancy firm and I later became a partner"

"I did catering in my spare time and would help out friends I had made at Leith's who had started their own catering companies. It was always something I loved and I would joke with people at work that I always had a back-up in cookery."



■ Following her dream - Claire Barham runs Green Apron cookery school, inset right, from her home in Coggeshall  
 Picture: STEVE BRADING

Claire progressed to become a partner at the management consultancy firm and five years later she decided enough was

enough and she decided to take the plunge and start a cookery school.

Claire, who used to live in

Billericay, set her sights on moving to north Essex for a more rural life.

"I fell head over heels in love

with the house in Coggeshall and I could see it could work as a place to run the business. Originally I had wanted a cottage with an outbuilding, this house didn't have that but I felt I could make it work."

The Green Apron Cookery School building was built in the 1870s and was once owned by the Swinborn family who owned the gelatine and Isinglass factory at the far end of West Street. In the early 1930s it was sold to the Church of England and became a mother and baby home. It closed in the 1950s and was split into three properties.

Claire says: "When I bought the property it was neglected and

I offer simple tips like pressing your bodyweight on lemon with your hand and rolling it before cutting it and squeezing it and you get a lot more juice from it

needed renovation work.

"There was a basement kitchen which used to be the old wine cellar and a garden room. I made this bigger and put the cookery school there."

"I now use the kitchen in the basement for prep work and to do the washing up, helped by my assistants Ellie and Sue Douglas."

The building renovation took a year and then establishing the garden and vegetables growing took another year. Now a lot of what Claire cooks comes straight from the garden.

Claire started holding trial classes at cost price for friends and locals to Coggeshall last summer.

"I wanted to try out the cookery school and get genuine feedback on what I was doing and ways in which I could improve."

"It was also a chance for me to practise my teaching skills. I opened officially in

August last year and I have had good feedback and people seem to leave happy. I have a lot of themed and topical classes now that are popular."

Claire charges £90 per class and she also give a variety of hints and tips on cooking during the sessions.