



# CHEF CURRY

Ayesha Curry talks about her new cookbook, becoming a Food Network star, the importance of the family table, and why she's the real deal.

BY LEEANNE JONES

**Ayesha Curry** is slicing corn off a cob, her Shun chef's knife catching the sunlight in the kitchen of her Alamo home as she describes some of her favorite cooking tools. A few kernels bounce off the cutting board, roll across the countertop, and fall to the floor. At first, she doesn't seem to notice. Then, after praising her must-have appliance (a Vitamix blender), she says, "One thing I'm not is a precise chef. Stuff is flying everywhere!"

We are preparing apricot-glazed salmon from her new cookbook, *New York Times* best-seller *The Seasoned Life*, and that comment is the first of several in which Curry emphasizes her normalcy. Despite the book deal, a just-launched Food Network show, a pop-up restaurant in San Francisco, multiple product endorsements, and her marriage to NBA superstar Stephen Curry, she's much like any other East Bay mom: busy being a hands-on parent to her two daughters, working hard on the career of her dreams, and trying not to sweat a few messes along the way.

Moms on the go will certainly love this salmon dish. It has 10 ingredients and cooks up in 15 minutes, but it's also

full of veggies and has a sweet-meets-savory flavor that will have wide appeal. Curry's cookbook includes dozens of recipes like this: fast, easy, and not fussy. It includes ham-and-cheese waffles, a chicken soup made from leftovers, and the family's weeknight go-to: pan steaks. Plus, Curry's favorites from growing up in Toronto and North Carolina, such as Grandma's Jamaican escovitch (a fish dish), Mom's brown sugar chicken, and Dad's ketchup-covered meatloaf.

"I have so many friends and family [members] that don't cook because they're intimidated," she says. "I wanted to make something that could be an arsenal for when you need a quick-and-easy dish. There is nothing too tedious."

Curry cooks dinner for her family roughly four nights a week, and she took on the preparation and styling of every recipe photographed in the book. She used many of her own bowls and spoons, rounded out with items from Cost Plus World Market and Target. "I wanted it to be real," she says. "I hate when I get a cookbook and I try something, and it looks nothing like the picture. That is so disappointing."



CAROLINE EGAN DAHLBERG

Ayesha Curry  
at home in  
her kitchen

A section on cooking with kids offers practical tips and ideas to get them comfortable in the kitchen. Curry began including four-year-old daughter Riley by having her pour measured ingredients. “It’s character building for your kids—and they want to help,” she says.

Riley—who’s been sitting at a large table across the room, with several family members and friends—perks up at the mention of her name. Curry defers to Riley to answer a question about their favorite things to cook together. “Pasta, noodles, chicken . . .,” Riley says thoughtfully, and then shouts, “pizza, pizza, pizza!” Curry laughs heartily and adds, “And cupcakes because she likes to crack the eggs.”

Curry credits the family table for her early interest in food and as the motivation behind delivering simple recipes to busy home cooks. She fondly recalls big gatherings with army-size batches of food, where family members young and old discussed the day, their dreams, and even their failures.

“Growing up, our best and worst moments were spent in the kitchen. Whether we were preparing or enjoying a meal together, that moment of gathering at the table was so important,” she says. “I feel that today, with how busy people are and how much technology there is, the family meal is getting lost.”



Papa Alexander’s meatloaf



Easy pan steaks



Ham-and-cheese waffles

#### A RISING STAR

Curry pulls the salmon out of the oven and plates it with one hand, her other balancing one-year-old daughter Ryan on her hip. It’s nearing naptime, and Ryan is fussy, but Curry turns down offers of help from family, now out in the backyard enjoying the pool.

“I had a big sense of mom guilt,” she says about the many hours spent filming her Food Network show, *Ayesha’s Homemade*, which debuted on October 22. “The days were so long. And because it was recorded for television, I couldn’t have the kids running around. That was hard.”

The initial six-episode order took only two weeks to film, and because of its format, Curry was able to include her family in other ways. Each episode begins with a field trip, in which she seeks out an ingredient at a local store or restaurant. She visits San Francisco, Montclair, and Walnut Creek. Then, she prepares a related dish in the kitchen. Her husband, parents, in-laws, and siblings all make appearances.

“We tried to make cooking fun again,” Curry says. “The show is superfun, which is important to me. Nothing is perfect on there. I didn’t want it to be because that’s not how it is in real life.”

In *Diablo’s* last interview with Curry (“Women to Watch,” May 2015), when she was a rising YouTube star with newly launched olive oil and apron lines, she cited Emeril Lagasse and Giada De Laurentiis as culinary heroes whose shows taught her how to cook. I ask her how it feels now to be on the Food Network, sharing a space at their table. “I’ve never thought about it that way!” she says. “I hope I live up to their standards.”

## “GROWING UP, OUR BEST AND WORST MOMENTS WERE SPENT IN THE KITCHEN.”

—AYESHA CURRY

#### FINDING THE PASSION

The top of the salmon fillet glistens with a bubbled glaze of apricot preserves, soy sauce, and garlic, and the tender meat flakes easily with a fork. The zucchini, summer squash, and corn that shared the roasting pan have soaked up some of the sweet-savory flavor.

But cooking at home and cooking in a restaurant are wildly different. We talk about Curry’s recent foray into the restaurant business: She just wrapped a five-month run of International Smoke, a pop-up concept she developed at Michael Mina’s test kitchen in San Francisco. The barbecue menu included several of Curry’s ideas, refined in the kitchen alongside Mina.

International Smoke was a hit. Reservations for the first month filled up in a record seven minutes, rapper Drake attended the star-studded



Apricot-glazed salmon with summer squash and zucchini

opening, and the concept is expanding to a permanent space in Hawaii. Mina has taken Curry under his wing, giving her culinary school-level training. So does she see her future self continuing as a champion for home cooks or as a restaurateur?

“I don’t know yet. It’s all kind of hit me at once, and I’m trying to figure it out,” Curry says. “I feel very blessed and fortunate and thankful. I’m definitely not taking any of it for granted, and I’m working really, really hard.”

You’d have to be off the grid not to notice Curry’s name attached to multiple products. There’s Züpa Noma, a Sonoma-based line of grab-and-go soups; Freshly Picked’s hip baby moccasins; and Cheeky, kids’ disposable and melamine dishware that supports the charity No Kid Hungry. And coming soon is Gather, an organic meal-kit delivery service. In recent months, she’s had to learn how to say no.

“Every time an opportunity is presented, it feels like such a blessing, and then I feel like a terrible person for turning things down,” she says. “But what is time with your family worth, you know? So I really had to start picking and choosing. My motto is if I’m not passionate about it, no matter what the perks, I gotta say no.”

Curry says she is still learning how to achieve balance in her life, and a big part of that has been accepting help. She credits Stephen, school, and their sitter for helping with the kids, and their North Carolina families visit often.

“I’m really learning to let go and realize that it does take a village,” she says. “If you can get the help, use it. I wouldn’t be able to do anything that I am doing without a little bit of help.”

And when she has her family time, she aims to be 100 percent focused. Whether it’s taking her girls to the neighborhood park and Riley to horseback-riding lessons, or sharing crispy glazed chicken with Stephen at their favorite Chinese restaurant and binge watching HGTV, work is far from Curry’s mind.

“I’m really sleepy,” she admits. “But it’s OK. I think it will all be worth it. At the end of the day, I want to set a good example, not for the rest of the world, but for my girls. I want to leave them with something that they can be proud of.” ■

## MAKE THE DISH

### Apricot-Glazed Salmon With Summer Squash and Zucchini

Serves two grown-ups (and one child)

#### INGREDIENTS

2 zucchini, diced  
1 yellow summer squash, diced  
1 cup supersweet corn kernels (from about 1 cob)  
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil  
Kosher salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
¼ cup low-sodium soy sauce  
2 heaping tablespoons apricot preserves  
3 garlic cloves, minced  
1 (8- to 12-ounce) salmon fillet

#### PREPARATION

- Preheat the oven to 425°F. Have a large Dutch oven or roasting pan handy.
- Put the zucchini, summer squash, and corn in the Dutch oven, and coat with the olive oil and a pinch each of salt and pepper.
- In a small bowl, stir together the soy sauce, apricot preserves, and garlic.
- Place the salmon fillet in the Dutch oven, nestling it into the veggies. Pour the apricot sauce over the top. Bake until the veggies are cooked and the salmon flakes easily when pierced with a fork, about 15 minutes.
- To serve, divide the salmon between two plates, and spoon the vegetables alongside.

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## CURRY’S TOP FIVE TIPS FOR BUSY HOME COOKS

1. “Keep salt and pepper handy, right by the stove. You should use both for anything savory and a pinch of salt in anything sweet. Storing them stove side saves major time.”

2. “Get the kids involved. This gives you the time and clarity of mind you need to actually get dinner done and on the table.”

3. “Clean as you go. Rachael Ray’s ‘garbage bowl’—to collect food scraps—is truly a genius hack that saves time. Once you’re done, just throw the contents of the bowl into the trash or compost.”

4. “Use few, but reliable, tools. An eight-inch chef’s knife is my go-to. It’s multipurpose.”

5. “Don’t be afraid to experiment. The best things come from the unknown. Try something new.”