

# in the kitchen

Food safari presenter and director of gourmet safaris maeve o'meara reveals her culinary inspiration and lets us in on her plans for the future

**Q. What (or who) inspired your love of food and cooking?**

**A.** I've always loved food and cooking and the cosy relaxed feel of kitchens. There's nothing better than the smell of something yummy cooking. It's like getting a big hug; makes you feel good. I love the generosity and abundance of cooking and the sharing of food and culture — particularly amongst all the fabulous cooks I've met in my life — that sense that there's always enough for one or two or more.

I collected recipes from a young age and still have books full of childish writing with things I've adored. I should be a lot more disciplined with these gems but there are scribbles of recipes or clever ideas scattered through notebooks over years and years and the great thing is that there is always something else out there to discover — what a wonderful world! And what a great country we're in to have so much on our doorstep!

**Q. What is the one essential item that you can't live without in your kitchen?**

**A.** I hate narrowing it down to one thing but I'd have to say a good set of sharp knives. It just makes everything you do easier and makes the end result look and taste fabulous.

**Q. You've recently renovated your kitchen. What was the main goal for the redesign?**

**A.** This was a marvellous stroke of luck. Kitchen Connection asked me to be their ambassador and so I was able to get exactly what I wanted. I have two pull-out cupboards; one is entirely full of jars of spices and ingredients across at least 20 or so cuisines including things like palm sugar, rice paper, ban xeo mix, sesame seeds and rigani. The other is the one that clinks; it's full of bottles of good olive oil, balsamic vinegar, verjuice, a range of soy sauces and chilli pastes, many collected on my Gourmet Safaris through Sydney and beyond. I love finding new things and mercifully have enough space to store my discoveries.

I've got a good big triangular cupboard with shelving up to the ceiling for pantry things and gadgets plus a big island bench. It's such a beautiful place, big and light and airy and a gorgeous place to cook. My job on *Better Homes* as Food Presenter was just an extension of what I love doing — cooking and chatting — and it was great to be paid for it!

**Q. You've travelled extensively and enjoyed the cuisine of many cultures. What is it that you love about Australian cuisine and our way of cooking?**

**A.** We could not live in a better country for food. We are blessed by the many people who have come to live here from across the world and brought their beautiful recipes with them. Can you imagine how deadly it would be if we were still in that meat-and-three-veg world of the 1950s? Mind you, meat and veg done well is pretty fantastic too but I can't imagine being without pasta (and the knowledge to cook it just right) or curries or Asian noodles or Greek cakes or Middle Eastern salads. I love the way we are evolving as a country; that more and more interesting foods are available widely; that our produce keeps getting better and that that we are adventurous enough to try new things.

**Q. What's next for Maeve O'Meara?**

**A.** I'm filming Series Two of *Food Safari* — 13 more episodes of beautiful food that goes to air on Wednesday nights on SBS TV from December. The idea is to demystify cuisines, to find out what the basic ingredients are and some really simple recipes that are achievable for people at home. It's such joy filming it. Recipes and clips from the show are on [www.sbs.com.au/foodsafari](http://www.sbs.com.au/foodsafari).

Also, I'm scouting — and this one is very tough — new food/pampering destinations for *Gourmet* and *Gorgeous Safaris* and spending and savouring time with my three children, big extended family and friends.

*For more information visit [www.gourmetsafaris.com.au](http://www.gourmetsafaris.com.au) or [www.sbs.com.au/foodsafari](http://www.sbs.com.au/foodsafari)*



Image: Mark Rodgers



## Arroz Con Leche (Rice Pudding)

**Ingredients**

250g medium-grain rice  
1.25 litres (5 cups) full cream milk  
1 or 2 cinnamon sticks  
1 strip of lemon rind  
395g can sweetened condensed milk  
Ground cinnamon

**Directions**

1. Place rice in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to the boil and cook for 5 minutes. Drain rice and set aside.
2. Heat milk with cinnamon stick and lemon rind. When this comes to the boil, add the rice. Stir constantly over low heat until rice is half cooked.
3. Add condensed milk and continue stirring until rice is cooked. Test by squashing a rice grain. Spoon into individual serving dishes and dust with ground cinnamon.