



# in the kitchen with... Michelle Zimmer

Wild Serendipity Foods

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For Michelle Zimmer, it's been a recipe for success. Since launching Wild Serendipity Foods three and a half years ago, the engineer-turned-chef can barely keep up with demand.

Her cooking classes have become wildly popular, with her fall and Christmas-themed classes booking up within days of posting the schedule. Dates for private cooking parties are also filling up fast.

"They're a lot of fun," says Michelle. "I do private parties for corporate team-building, birthday parties, splurge groups. About one-third of my classes are private parties."

The parties and cooking classes are held in Michelle's commercial kitchen in the Avalon Shopping Centre, where she originally ran a professional catering venture.

While she still takes on a few catering jobs, her cooking classes and regular Saturday stint selling fresh-baked scones and gourmet mustards at the Saskatoon Farmer's Market are now the main staples of her business.

Her scones are a big hit. She initially tested the waters by making a dozen to sell. In no time at all, people were lining up before the market even opened.

Michelle now bakes more than 700 scones, which usually sell out by 11 a.m. She makes around a dozen varieties, including Saskatoon Berry Pecan, Toffee Cream, Spiced Pumpkin and Ginger Lime Coconut.

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## Roasted Carrot & Rosemary Soup

2 1/2 pounds carrots, peeled and coarsely chopped  
1 Tbsp. chopped fresh rosemary, or any herbs of your choice  
2 Tbsp. oil (olive or canola)  
1 Tbsp. butter  
1 onion, chopped  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
4 cups (1 L) water, vegetable stock or chicken stock  
Salt, pepper, to taste  
1/4 cup whipping cream (or yoghurt, coconut milk, soy/rice milk)

Toss carrots with chopped rosemary and oil; season with salt and pepper. Roast at 375°F for approximately 30 - 45 minutes, stirring halfway through, until carrots are tender and lightly browned.

In a large pot, sauté the onion in butter over medium heat until softened and beginning to brown. Add the garlic, cook another minute. Add the roasted carrots, and add the cooking liquid (water or broth), making sure carrots are just covered. Bring to a boil, then simmer for ~10 minutes. Puree to desired consistency, then add whipping cream.

Taste for seasoning, adding additional salt or herbs, as desired. Bring back to just boiling; serve immediately.

## Mediterranean Quinoa Salad

An ancient staple food of the Inca civilization, quinoa is now cultivated in North America. It has the highest protein content of all the grains and is gluten free. Rinse thoroughly before cooking. Look for it in the bulk food section at the grocery store or at a health food store.

2 cups quinoa, rinsed and drained well  
3 cups water  
1 tsp. salt  
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice  
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil  
1 clove garlic, minced  
1 1/2 tsp. dried oregano  
Salt, pepper to taste  
1/2 cup feta, crumbled  
1/2 cup marinated artichoke hearts, chopped  
1/4 cup sun-dried tomatoes in oil, chopped  
1/2 cup finely chopped red onion or shallots  
1/2 cup chopped parsley  
Toasted pine nuts, for garnish

In a large pot, bring the rinsed quinoa, water and salt to a boil. Cover and reduce heat to low; simmer for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and fluff with a

## Chai

To 4 cups water, add:  
4 or 5 green cardamom pods  
5 to 8 whole cloves  
1 or 2 cinnamon sticks (broken up)  
2 or 3 star anise pods (or some fennel seed)  
5 to 8 peppercorns  
2 or 3 slices gingerroot (optional)  
orange peel (optional)

Mix the above together in a pot. If you like your chai spicier, go for the larger amounts of each spice listed. Bring to a boil, then turn off and allow to steep for as long as possible (20 minutes to a few hours). The flavours will become stronger as it sits.

When ready to make the tea, add 3 or 4 tea bags (orange pekoe), bring back to a boil, then allow to steep for a few minutes. Add roughly 3 to 4 cups of milk (whole, preferably, but you may substitute with any milk, including soy, coconut or rice) and about 1/4 to 1/2 cup of sugar, depending on how sweet you like it (or none, if you prefer). Honey can also be used as a sweetener.

Watching closely to avoid a stovetop mess, bring to a boil over med/high heat. Once it comes to a boil and starts rising up the sides of the pot, it's done.

Pour through a strainer to serve. If you have leftover chai, remove the tea bags, but leave the spices in to allow it to become even stronger. Serve over ice for iced chai.

## Beef Enchiladas with Creamy Green Chili Sauce

1 lb. lean ground beef  
1 onion, chopped  
1/2 tsp. salt, or to taste  
Freshly ground pepper, to taste  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1 tsp. ground cumin  
2 tsp. oregano  
8 flour tortillas  
1 Tbsp. chili powder (not cayenne)  
1/2 cup of your favorite taco or enchilada sauce, or salsa  
2 cups shredded cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese  
1/4 cup butter  
1/4 cup flour  
2 cups chicken broth  
1 cup sour cream  
4 oz. can chopped green chilies, mild or hot, whichever you prefer

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Over medium heat, cook the meat and onion until meat is browned, seasoning with salt and pepper. Add the minced garlic, cumin, oregano and chili powder. Cook for another couple of minutes. Add the taco/enchilada sauce, then remove from heat.

# In the kitchen with Michelle Zimmer

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The Farmer's Market is where Michelle first started out in March of 2006, and it's where she's found her niche. Today, about 80 per cent of her revenues come from the weekly market.

"I'm known as the 'scone lady'," she says. "The key is making them fresh that day."

Michelle gets up 2:15 a.m. every Saturday so the scones are baked fresh on market day. It's a small sacrifice, she says, for being able to make a living doing what she loves.

Indeed, Michelle's passion for food and cooking is what led her to change career paths and launch her own business. A chemical engineer, the Regina native spent nearly 10 years as an environmental consultant in Victoria and Vancouver before setting up Wild Serendipity Foods in Saskatoon.

"My desire to work with food sort of turned into a need," she says. "I've always loved cooking. My grandma taught me how to bake at the age of five."

She's now teaching others how to make their way around the kitchen, with themes for her cooking classes varying from month to month. In October, for example, themes include 'Soul Satisfying Soups' and 'Tantalizing Tapas'. Her Sushi classes are always a hit, along with Thai and Indian dishes, one of her specialties.

Michelle says while some of the recipes may look daunting, she assures they are stress-free.

"My philosophy of cooking is 'maximum flavour, minimal effort,'" she says. "I do recipes that people can easily replicate at home."

Everyone helps out in preparing the meal, and students also get to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

"My classes are hands-on. We prepare it communally, and then we all sit down and eat together. It's very casual and relaxed."

Details of the classes are posted on her website – [www.wildserendipity.com](http://www.wildserendipity.com) – which also features a regular blog. Each class costs \$30 per person. Private classes require a minimum of eight people, and they can choose their own theme.

She says the classes attract a wide variety of people, spanning

from beginners to dedicated 'foodies'.

Fresh herbs and spices are integral to many of her dishes but at home with husband Dana Fenske and their two young sons, Jonah and Joshua, Michelle says she keeps family meals fairly basic.

"It's kind of like a mechanic and his car," she laughs. "I cook pretty simple at home."

Once her children are older, Michelle is considering expanding the business to include a storefront location. For now, Wild

Serendipity Foods has gone beyond her expectations.

"Part of me is surprised by the success of it – pleasantly surprised."

While her background in engineering has helped with problem solving when it comes to managing the business, Michelle says she can't imagine returning to her demanding days as a consultant.

"I've never looked back," she says. "I'm a lot happier now. Not a day goes by that I don't think, 'I just love my life.'"