

Culinary communication

Charlotte Hastings explores how food shapes our relationship with the world around and within us



Welcome to the first *Kitchen reflections* column. I wonder if you have a cup of something warm, possibly a soft treat on the side, while you tuck into this season's *Thresholds*. I'm typing this note from my garden studio where there is both a couch and a kitchen for therapy practice. Since I can remember, food has played a powerful part in my understanding of the world around me. I was both extraordinarily hungry and fussy as a child. My sensory antennae, wired to assess for security, pleasure and fear, communicated with me, unconsciously, through food. Today, they still do, but through a lens of evolving awareness. I wrote *Kitchen Therapy: how to become a conscious*

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cook' to share that journey. The recipes within it chronicle a lifetime of seasons, exploring food's natural therapeutic purpose and potential. It is about rewiring the human spirit, with nature as divine guide.

This column will explore each season's theme, offering a culinary reflection – a touch of therapeutic spice to feed the soul. This issue finds us in autumn, a time of harvest, symbolising community, collaboration and connection. It's about each of us joining around the campfire with our unique ingredient to blend.

Making a community casserole
As an only child managing complex family dynamics, food offered me a way of understanding the adults around me. Initially in the way they fed me, and then

in how I could be of help. Finding a place of usefulness, reciprocity and responsibility, is crucial to healthy human life. Food is a universal bridge.

Lentils know this well. There they are waiting, full of potential and ability, but dried they are inert. Add water to soften and their journey begins. Add fire and they become transformed into something edible. Earth, air, water and fire form an elemental beginning. But, to make a real meal, like dahl, these lentils need real help. Here is a kitchen therapy recipe to try for yourself:

Onions, ginger, celery and garlic sauté with oil in heavy pot. An orchestra sets the scene, ready for a cabaret of spices to whet the appetite. Cumin and coriander come in to cleanse the blood and ignite the digestive fires. Turmeric supports immunity and calms inflammation. Cinnamon sweetens. Add black pepper to sizzle, spice and activate the process. Our key character, lentils, whose defences are soaked free, are ready to take to the stage with the *mirepoix-milieu*. Now, we bring in the liquid. A stock, perhaps softened with coconut, maybe deepened with miso, holds and harmonises the dish towards its resolution. Laced with freshly chopped coriander, the dish is ready to grace the table.

Cauldrons of connection

I associate the element of water with autumn, as it is the vehicle that harnesses, synchronises and matures a whole meal into being. Making pots is relatively recent in human history, marked by anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl as the move into culture and civilisation.² 'Collective cooking' of ingredients into a soup stew creates a meal which can be equally enjoyed. The flavour develops over time and allows for ideas to be trialled and errors to be learned from,

into recipes passed on in time and space. During a conversation with Grace Mansah-Owusu for BACP's *Insights* podcast,³ I recalled a story of an African woman who developed a peanut allergy in the UK. However, when she travelled home and ate peanut curry, there was no problem! The way the allergen had been cooked, surrounded by its friends and family, meant that once again, it became a palatable part of the party.

Campfire con-panis

The word company is derived from the Latin, *con-panis*, 'with bread', denoting the essential nutrition of relationship – love, in its various dimensions. As part of my community cooking mission, I help with an organisation called Chomp (www.chompbrighton.co.uk), which provides food and fun for families during the holidays. We make a meal together while foraging, playing and creating memories to feed us long after the meal has gone. Helping to cook their own 'community casserole' generates a sense of shared resource. Everyone is aware of their value to the whole group – the social soup – as per Mother Nature's autumn menu plan. ●

Biography

Charlotte Hastings has been a psychodynamic practitioner since 2010 and BACP accredited since 2017. *Kitchen therapy* emerged through her childhood, marked by complex family dynamics, often expressed through food (as her chapter in *Attachment Relationships and Food* and book *Kitchen Therapy, how to become a conscious cook* describe). www.therapykitchen.co.uk

References

- 1 Hastings C. *Kitchen therapy: how to become a conscious cook*. London: Ortus Press; 2024.
- 2 Lévy-Bruhl C. *The origin of table manners*. New York: Harper and Row; 1978.
- 3 Hastings C. Introduction to kitchen therapy. [Podcast.] BACP Insights 2025; March. <https://tinyurl.com/ykrpt6kj> (accessed 5 August 2025).