

How can Computing Help with Cooking

Barb

I was born in the early Sixties. This was the decade where the second wave of feminism was on the rise with the attempt to combat social and cultural inequities between the sexes. Women were fighting for freedom from their oppressive yet dominant profession, homemaking. My mother was the ideal homemaker, dying to be otherwise. As such, she kept an impeccable house, cooked for her family and on special occasions she made specialty recipes right down to the jellied salads and tomato aspic which name alone transcends what we today would consider edible. She had a plethora of recipes that she had inherited from my grandmother, her other homemaker friends and neighbours. Most importantly, she had recipes from her Mother-in-law so that she could cook “just like HIS mother” to please her man. Like most other women at that time, she kept all her ripped, food shrapnel covered recipes, stuffed into a little metal box that was designed to contain much less. The system was less than perfect, as the recipes were frequently lost, destroyed or illegible. In order for this system to be maintained in working order, women were required to spend hours recopying their recipe cards, either by hand or with a manual typewriter. The monotony of these tasks was daunting, boring and demanded change.

Forty eight years later, the world of cooking for women has thankfully evolved. Not only do we not have to be homemakers, we can freely work outside of the home, have bank accounts, cell phones, our own cars, not to mention many other rights and freedoms that my mother and women of her generation did not have. Ironically, amongst these many freedoms I bask in now, I choose to be the cook in our house. I cook because I enjoy it and find it relaxing. I enjoy the challenge of seeking out recipes that are delicious but can also accommodate our complicated gluten free, dairy free household diet. The challenge for me is not with cooking per se, but rather, sustaining an organized system for searching, researching and storing the acquisition of unique allergen-free recipes. Furthermore the time consuming use of a recipe box is not a viable option for organization with my hectic work and family life.

Cooking for pleasure is maintained by the ease at which I can access recipes that are easy, tasty, and contain ingredients that are safe from allergens. The tedious experience of cooking is transformed into an enjoyable one by having access to the internet and software specifically designed for cooking. I regularly use Google and other web based search engines to seek out recipes that suit my family's unique nutritional needs. Furthermore, I can perform an internet search on whatever meal that I desire to make on any given day and ask the computer to retrieve gluten free, dairy free option and I am handed a number of recipes to peruse and subsequently create.

I frequently use the internet to search for ingredient substitutions in order to make changes to recipes that are not allergy free. The internet provides simple easy access to information, making it possible to effortlessly convert almost all recipes into a gluten, and dairy free format. Using the internet in this practical manner saves me countless hours as I can print, store, create, alter, update, and recall any recipes that I wish to. (Bondar 2003 pp. 12) states that the behaviour of women online shows that they "tend to focus their interest on practical issues: they do not spend much time navigating around different sites but return to those that help them to save time and money and solve problems in the most efficient manner." Research clearly supports the practicality and time saving options that the internet can offer.

My cooking experience is regularly assisted even further by saving my recipes into a Word document on my computer's hard drive. I can then store all of my recipes in a folder on my desktop. The Windows filing system allows me to sort the recipes into a suitable filing system that makes sense to me. Old recipes can be successfully scanned and uploaded to my PC. Recipes can also be acquired easily through e-mail, either from friends or from food companies or simply copied and pasted into the word document and then saved to the appropriate file. Should it be required, the files can quickly be reorganized or moved to accommodate new categories of recipes. (Kraynak 2007, pp.50-55) Computers have quite literally taken the organizational nightmare out of cooking for me.

Recipes can also be organized by creating a recipe data base with Microsoft Works. This program allows the cook to keep all of the recipes together and lets you sort them to find the right recipe for any occasion. Once the data base is created it is easy to alter it to add new recipes as needed. (Readers Digest 2009 pp.290-291) Computers have virtually almost negated the need to store recipes in a box.

Organization is not the exclusive challenge of cooking. There are a number of other challenges which present themselves both prior to cooking and throughout the process. On occasion, (or more frequently), errors occur during the cooking process which taint the end result, such as, the dish may be too salty or too sweet. The internet can again be consulted for solutions to the problem. The computer's ability to use algorithms to sort out the problem of finding a step by step solution to cooking mistakes is another way in which computers can rescue one from blunders. (Wikipedia 2010) A simple web search of "salty food" turns up an abundance of solutions to try, such as peeling a potato and putting it into the sauce or adding sugar to name just a few. (Wiki.answers 2010) Cooks could benefit from emulating the computers use of algorithms to find solutions to problems, as computers use algorithms to solve problems systematically and logically in a step by step process until a solution is reached.

Some dishes can be intimidating to consider attempting to create, if one has never observed the process of cooking them. Take sushi for example. Each little piece is a miniature work of art. Just observing a plate of sushi, it is almost impossible to imagine how it is made. Without a creative bone in my body, I default to the belief that I am genetically predisposed to making jellied salads. Not so. Using such sites as You Tube to watch a video of a chef creating sushi ensures that even the most amateur cook can be coached through the creation of a sushi feast. Cooking videos are quite readily available through You Tube and other sites which handily coach individuals throughout challenging cooking experiences.

One's cooking experience can be made even more effortless as there are many cooking software programs available to purchase or download. Some of these programs have weekly menu plans with recipes attached. They have grocery lists that accompany the recipes. For example, "the Great Cook"

software program created independently by software programmer, Mike Cook, will search for recipes that contain a certain ingredient, will print the menu and compile a grocery list for you. It even has the ability for you to input and store the grocery aisles in which you would find the ingredients. These will pop up in future shopping lists. You can even include photos of your own recipes. (Cook) Other software programs offer much of the same type of recipe, cooking and shopping organization. For example, The Living Cookbook has features that help you to manage kitchen inventory, print your own cookbooks and it even has an on-line support forum. (The Living Cookbook 2009)

The usefulness of the computer is endless when it comes to cooking. It is quite clear that the evolution of computers has revolutionized much of what we do in our daily lives. Should one choose to cook, computers can help the experience to be relaxing, easy and much more organized. It has certainly allowed the cooks either women or men to save time and energy in the kitchen. Not only that, if you are really passionate about vintage recipes, it is even possible to use a web cam in order to have your mother coach you through the creation of her famous lime green pineapple, cottage cheese and marshmallow jellied salad. You can even use e-mail to have your mother send you the recipe. It can then be easily deleted.

Bibliography

Bondar, G. (2003). Internet users in Latin america: how many are women and who are they? *Mujer y desarrollo, Women and Development Unit* .

Cook, M. (n.d.). *the Great Cook*. Retrieved from the Great Cook: <http://www.thegreatcook.ca/index.html>

Digest, R. (2009). Make a Recipe Collection. In R. Digest, *How To Do Just About Anything on a Computer*. Montreal, Canada: The Readers Digest Association.

Kraynak, J. (2009). Managing Disks, Files and Folders. In J. Kraynak, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Computer Basics*. New York: Penguin Group.

Radium technologies, I. (2009). *The Living Cookbook*. Retrieved from The Living Cookbook: <http://www.livingcookbook.com/>

wikipedia. (n.d.). *Algorithm*. Retrieved 2010, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algorithm>

wikianswers. (n.d.). *WikiAnswers*. Retrieved from is there anything that will neutralize salt?: http://wikianswers.com/Q_is_there_anything_that_will_neutralize_the_salty_taste_when_cooking_spaggetti_sauce