

Inside Hackney: Alicia Weston

Alicia Weston lives in Dalston, where she runs the Parkholme Supper Club, which has raised more than £50,000 for Médecins Sans Frontières. With her new project, Bags of Taste, Alicia and her volunteers have set themselves the challenge of showing people on low incomes how to cook tasty and nutritious meals that cost less than £1. Here she explains how Bags of Taste works, and shares a healthy budget recipe.

'The night before each class, my co-director Lisa Neidich, the volunteers and I bag up the food so that each student has all the ingredients to replicate the recipes at home. In the classroom, I demonstrate how to make the dishes, and then the students cook in threes at work stations, assisted by volunteers. At the end of the class, students buy the bags of food – veg, meat and sachets of oils and spices – for £3. From this they can make two healthy meals for two people.

Buying the food encourages students to use it, and it reinforces their cooking skills. They are not put off by a big ingredient outlay – everything is on a small, financially manageable scale. And I give sourcing advice so students can buy ingredients cheaply on their own.

I'm very against the school of cooking which dictates that fancy ingredients are essential. But I like my dishes to be packed with flavour. And the students are really responding: one has already taught cooking classes to the group herself, and they all say that they are really saving money as well as cooking and eating much more healthily.'

Turkish guvech

- ½ medium onion or 1 small one
 - ½ large red pepper, about 80g
 - 1 small carrot (60g)
 - 1 large potato or 2 medium
 - ¼ tsp salt
 - ½ can chopped tinned tomatoes
 - 2 large cloves garlic
 - ½ veg stock cube
 - 1 tsp tomato purée
 - 2 tsp paprika
 - 1 cup/250ml water (approx)
- Other mixed veg:
- 100g green beans (flat or thin)
 - 100g courgette
 - 100g aubergines
- Optional herbs: chopped parsley/coriander, or ½ tsp dried oregano or basil

Chop your onion and red pepper into chunks and fry in 1–2 tbsp oil. Peel and grate the carrot, and add to the pan. While it is frying, peel your potato and cut into 2cm chunks. Toss this into the pan and stir. Add the salt, and tomatoes, garlic, veg stock cube, tomato purée, paprika and any herbs, and the water. Bring to the boil.

While this is boiling, add any other chopped veg, the toughest first. When they are all in the liquid (which should almost cover the veg), bring it to the boil and cover the pan. Put the pan on to simmer and cook the stew on a low heat for 45 mins (or bake in the oven), stirring occasionally. If it gets dry, add more water. Open the lid after 45 mins and if it is too liquid, turn up the heat to evaporate it. Serve with rice, bread or pasta.

