By Chef Bette Fraser

Kids in the Kitchen

Getting Ready for Thanksgiving!

The leaves have turned gold and red and have begun to drop from the trees. Halloween is behind us and Thanksgiving is right around the corner. Every family has a variety of holiday traditions but sometimes a new family likes to start their own. Thanksgiving is a great time to introduce some cooking and kitchen skills to your youngsters as well as has them brush up on their table manners before the trip to Grandma's house!

So, where to start? Certainly most kids aren't ready to tackle the turkey or pie, but something simple such as corn bread is a great place to start. Corn bread can be made in a square or round bread form, as muffins or in molded sticks. The recipe that follows is a great one to practice math skills, as it utilizes different sizes of the cup measurement and teaspoons as well as tablespoons. Plus, every child enjoys cracking eggs!

Corn Bread



¾ Cup cornmeal, preferably stoneground
1 Cup flour
1/3 Cup sugar
1 Tablespoon baking powder
½ Teaspoon salt
1 Cup milk
1 egg, well beaten
2 Tablespoons butter, bacon drippings or vegetable oil, melted

Preheat oven to 425° and butter an 8" square pan, or 12 muffin tins. If making sticks, grease well.

Mix the cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder and salt in a large bowl. Add the milk, egg and butter and blend briefly. Pour the batter into the pan or muffins cups (fill about ¾ full).

Bake for about 18-20 minutes for corn bread and muffins. Bake about 12 minutes for sticks. Serve immediately. Serves 12

Recipe Notes: For a richer corn bread, you can add an additional egg to the recipe. You can also add some of your favorite ingredients to the batter for a slightly different twist on a classic. Grated cheddar or Monterey Jack Cheese, about 1 cup; Bacon bits or diced ham, about ½ cup; Canned mild green chiles, 3-4 ounces; ½ cup roasted pumpkin seeds; 1 ½ cups blueberries.

Now that you have your corn bread made, another fun thing to do at any time of the year is to make butter. It is simple, fun and requires a bit of elbow grease. Simply pour about 1 tablespoon of whipping cream in a jar or plastic container. (A baby food jar works well, as does any commercially purchased plastic container). Add a pinch of salt, as this will give it some flavor. Now, shake, shake, shake! This may take up to 10 minutes, depending upon the strength and determination of your child. Once the solid butter forms, pour off the liquid (this is "buttermilk"). Taste it and enjoy. You can also make this in advance, refrigerate it and have it ready to put on the corn bread when it comes out of the oven.

Going to Grandma's

I think we have all experience the terror, either as a child or as an adult, of going to a relative's home and being scrutinized about our manners. The holidays certainly bring families together and before the festivities begin, now is a good time to review with your child some basic social and dining etiquette rules. These rules will serve them a lifetime, at family gatherings, dating (!) and in business situations.

- Always say please and thank you. You would be surprised how many adults forget this simple courtesy.
- Bread and rolls are broken into bite size pieces; this is why they call meals, breaking bread. The butter is spread on each bite of bread as you eat it; you never butter a whole slice of bread. Never cut the bread with a knife.
- Don't talk with food in your mouth and chew with your mouth closed. Don't blow on your food to cool it off. If it is too hot to eat, just wait.
- When you sit down at the table, put your napkin in your lap. The napkin should stay on your lap until the end of the meal, not just when you are done. Keep your elbows off the table!

Reviewing these simple rules and others with your child on a regular basis will ensure that they will have wonderful table manners that will last a lifetime. They will be able to enter any dining situation with ease and confidence.

Happy Thanksgiving, Everyone!