



[« Back](#) | [Print](#)

Chef Lidia Bastianich Talks about Kids, Culinary Careers, and Nurturing Sophisticated Eaters

This article originally appeared in SLJ's Extra Helping. [Sign up now!](#)

Laura B. Weiss -- School Library Journal, 2/21/2007

Lidia Bastianich, the acclaimed chef, TV personality, and author of four cookbooks, including *Lidia's Family Table* (Knopf, 2004), will be honored in New York City on February 27 by the [Careers through Culinary Arts Program \(C-CAP\)](#), which trains high school students nationwide to become chefs and other culinary professionals.

Bastianich was born in Istria, now a part of Croatia, where she spent hours in her grandmother's trattoria developing a love of food. Thank goodness Bastianich, who emigrated to the U.S. at the age of 12, brought that love with her. She is [the co-owner](#) of Felidia, Becco, and Esca restaurants in New York, as well as Lidia's in Kansas City and Pittsburgh.



SLJ talked to Bastianich about introducing kids to the world of food.

Kids have finicky palates, so turning them into sophisticated eaters must be a real challenge.

The development of the palate is like the development of the mind. It's an accumulation of experiences. The earlier one starts the better, and it's not just taste, it's sight, olfactory. For my grandchildren, I crack an herb under their noses and see their reaction; it becomes a familiar flavor. It becomes extremely important to expose them. It becomes part of their reference library.

How much of your own training was formal, in culinary schools?

I took more academic courses, like the science, sociology, and anthropology of food, food through the ages. In Italy, I took hands-on courses. I was working with chefs. I took a course on different techniques, pasta or soups.

You spent a lot of time in your grandparents' trattoria in Istria. It must have been quite an education.

It's about the ambiance children grow up with. My mother was an elementary school teacher, but I would love to go and stay with my grandmother. She would cook for seasonal workers when it was the wheat or wine harvest. All the elements of cooking, she raised or made them or bartered. I was in that very primary feeding level. I saw everything grow and milked the goats. She would slaughter the pigs, make prosciutto; the fall would come and we would dry the figs.

But most kids live in the cities or suburbs, far from farms and where food is produced.

[« Back](#) | [Print](#)

I think parents should make an effort to take their children to a farm; go apple picking, and pumpkin picking. Go shopping with the kids at a farmers market, so they can touch the food and talk [to the farmers].

Is reading and using cookbooks a good introduction to food for kids?

They should read [cookbooks] that relate to their family situation and make things they like, like chocolate chip cookies. Cooking teaches a great basic lesson: self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. With a simple recipe with five ingredients, you can make those cupcakes, from beginning to end.

What's a good way to get kids thinking about culinary careers?

The most important thing in a young forming mind is to stimulate this interest, to place a seed, to give them a sense of accomplishment. It's a wonderful job where you give people pleasure; you worry about people's nutrition. It's a way of touching people many different ways.

Tell me about C-CAP and the way it introduces kids to culinary careers.

The culinary world is such a great entree to the real world, but even if they don't remain in the culinary world, they can retain their accomplishment of making money and supporting themselves. It's such a wide industry, there's a place for everybody. We have [C-CAP graduates] in our restaurants. But you've got to give them an opportunity to practice. You put them to work so they can learn.

[« Back](#) | [Print](#)

© 2007, Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Advertisement

Do I need Business Interruption Insurance?

Expert Business Source Real Tips. Right Now.

sponsored by STATE FARM®