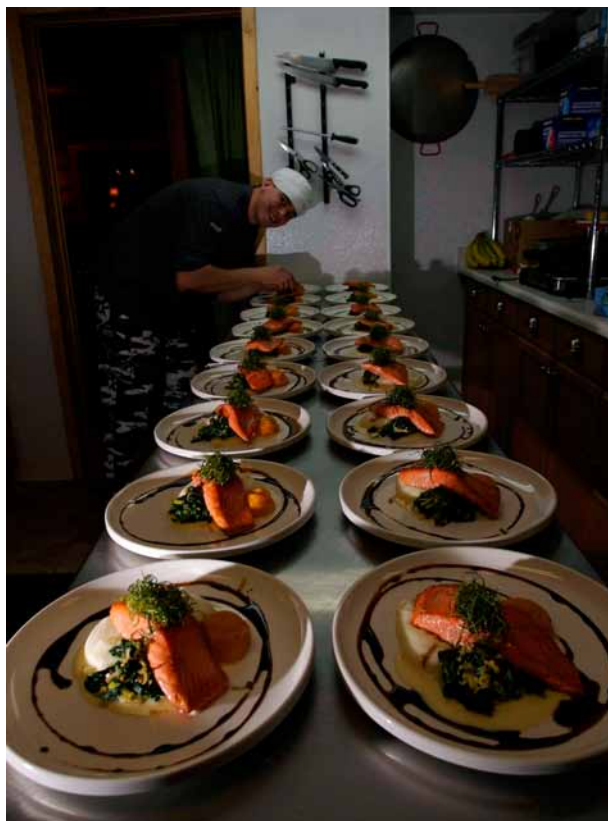

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Kitchen WOD

Mise en Place: CrossFitting chef Nick Massie on how to make cooking fast and enjoyable.

By Nick Massie

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Will Wissman

Food—we all eat it, and most of us enjoy it. Some look to it for comfort, while others see it strictly as fuel.

However you view food, there is one resounding truth: it can be a daunting task to learn to prepare it well. From planning a weekly menu to shopping, storing, cooking and cleaning up afterward, a lot goes into food preparation.

The following are some valuable lessons I've learned in the kitchen over the past 15 years. I hope that sharing them with you will provide a better understanding of how to approach cooking, and that you will learn to enjoy planning your weekly menu.

And maybe you'll see how similar cooking can be to CrossFit.

Mise en Place

"Mise en place" is the most basic lesson one can learn in the kitchen. It's like learning the squat.

Translated literally from French, it means "putting in place"; in culinary terms, it means "everything in its place." This is how you set up for a dinner service in a restaurant, and this is how to best set up for preparing a recipe. You go down your ingredient list and prep everything so it's ready when the cooking process begins.

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Equate it to the Filthy Fifty. You can either set up all your bars, weights and stations before the clock starts or you can do it as you go. It just makes sense to have everything set up ahead of time. In the end, it will make you more efficient, and with CrossFit, cooking and life, efficiency is a good thing.

Clean as You Go

It's another seemingly easy task, but how many of you have set out to prepare a simple recipe and ended up with a train wreck of a kitchen and a sink full of dishes?

You've put all your energy into preparing the meal, you've just enjoyed eating it, and now you have to return to the kitchen to do all the dishes. What a drag! This would be like a box owner running different workouts all day at the gym but not requiring athletes to put away their equipment. Then, at the end of the day, the trainer alone takes on the task of putting away everyone's gear. It just doesn't make sense.

Make it your goal to start each cooking session with a sink full of hot, soapy water and to end each session in the same situation: all dishes cleaned, wiped dry and put away, with only hot soapy water to wipe the table after dinner and just enough room in the dishwasher for the plates, silver and glassware you just used.

One Step All

This is a concept I learned from one of my culinary-school teachers, Vern Wolfram. Think of it as multi-tasking with a Henry Ford-assembly-line twist.

To understand this concept, ask yourself questions like, "How many times am I going to open the fridge?" "How many trips am I going to make to the grocery store today or this week?" and "How many times am I going to peel and dice onions?"

Think of streamlining your work processes. Plan your meals and have an idea what you have on hand so you only have to go to the grocery store once per week or maybe twice to keep things fresh. If you are going to be preparing three recipes that all have onions, then figure out how many onions you are going to need, and knock them all out at once. This also works for unloading the dishwasher or putting away dishes. Instead of making a trip to the cupboard for each dish, take dishes out of the dishwasher and organize them on the counter, then bring all plates to the plate cupboard at once, all silverware to the drawer at once and all glasses to the ... you get the idea.

How does it relate to CrossFit?



Hyun Sim

3-2-1 ... Cook!

When training and setting up a class for a barbell workout, I found it useful to break the classes up into groups to retrieve barbells, bumpers and collars. We would do it for time and it was always more efficient.

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Cheap Is Expensive

This is more of a life lesson, but has to do with anything where equipment is involved. I will relate it foremost to a good knife.

Sure, some of you will not be able to afford a good knife, but I truly believe it is only because you limit yourself. Maybe a good knife isn't on the top of the list for uses of your discretionary income, but once it becomes important, then you'll find a way to make it happen. Until then, just get by with what you have or find something cheap at the local thrift store.

I recommend spending between \$100 and \$250 for a quality chef's knife and sharpening stone. It will be a one-time purchase that will last a lifetime. You don't need a pretty block full of knives on your counter; it will just take up valuable counter space. You really only need one good knife. I recommend the eight-inch or 10-inch Japanese variety available at www.korin.com. If you want to get another knife, I recommend a paring knife or an off-set petty.

The cheap-is-expensive motto goes for blenders, food processors, cookware, etc. It is always better to save up and make a quality purchase than it is to buy something cheap over and over.



Hyon Sim

Cooking is more efficient and enjoyable when you have high-quality tools.

In CrossFit, this relates to barbells and bumpers. How many of you have seen low-quality equipment break or fall apart? I have seen it countless times. It is best to find stuff made in America; we make our stuff with pride.

It is always better to save up and make a quality purchase than it is to buy something cheap over and over.

Sense of Urgency

This is the lesson a CrossFitter will relate to best.

At my first job in a kitchen, I was a dishwasher. My boss was a former army sergeant who frequently asked me questions such as, "How fast do you think you can wash those 15 sauté pans over there?" and "What are the next five things you're going to do?"

This kept me on my toes, always thinking of what was next. It gave me a sense of urgency. This might be a tough correlation to the home kitchen for some of you, but put yourself on the clock once in a while and see how you do peeling carrots, dicing an onion or cooking an entire meal.

For most of us, time is extremely valuable, and if you can do something in 15 minutes that used to take you an hour, you just gained 45 minutes of life. When you are in the kitchen, think of honing your technique and being more efficient. There are no hard and fast rules to a lot of cooking, so if you find something that works and it's faster, then do it.

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Have Fun!

If you plan your week and set Sunday as your main prep day with a little leg work on Wednesday, you'll soon find cooking only takes two shifts per week. From there, you are simply reheating.

Don't forget that even Remy, the rat in *Ratatouille*, learned to cook from a book titled *Anyone Can Cook* and that there is a cookbook titled *The Joy of Cooking*. So if you'd rather run your knuckles up a cheese grater than spend time in the kitchen, take some of the above advice, check out [my videos](#), follow the recipes, use the Internet as a resource and chime in on the *CrossFit Journal* with any questions or comments about anything cooking-related.

Remember, making cooking fun and simple is best. Follow the above lessons and you'll be chefin' it up in no time.



Courtesy of Nick Massie

About the Author

Nick Massie has earned his living as a cook for the past 15 years. He started CrossFit in October 2008 and immediately saw the correlation between food and fitness. Since then, he has been an owner of Roaring Fork CrossFit and Aspen CrossFit, and he most recently worked as a consultant to help develop D-Town CrossFit. Nick is passionate about cooking and CrossFit and looks to use his training as a chef to serve the CrossFit community. Nick holds a CrossFit Level 1 Certificate, with CrossFit certificates in Basic Barbell, Gymnastics, Kettlebell, Mobility, Rowing, Olympic Weightlifting, and CrossFit Kids, and he also holds the USAW Club Coach Certificate. He has a small business, Samson Rings, where he makes wooden gymnastics rings. He competed in the 2011 CrossFit Open, where he placed 34th in the Southwest Region. Nick currently lives in Moorhead, Minn., with his wife, Jessica, and their two boys, Samson and Jonas, where he runs a strength program four days per week at Wild Knights CrossFit.