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*"The longer I live
the more beautiful
life becomes"*
— Frank Lloyd Wright

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At home with Donna Hay

Summer is a time for fresh berries, juicy mangoes and tasty vegetables and, for this best-selling cookbook author, it's also an excuse to indulge in her secret passion – ice-cream.

Interview by **Delicia Smith**

Donna Hay has been cooking since she was a little girl. Her love of food led her to a career as a food writer at 19, and then on to become food editor at *marie claire* at 25. She is now one of Australia's leading food editors, a best-selling cookbook author, homeware designer and owner of a new general store in Woollahra, Sydney.

Hay's trademark style showcases simple dishes photographed close-up on white plates. Her food, recipes and styling focus on basic ingredients, simply prepared and beautifully photographed. Hay lives in Sydney with her husband, Bill, and children, Angus and Tom. Her latest book, *Seasons*, is designed with her usual flair for food styling and builds on the trend for cooking delicious food using the best of the season's ingredients.

MiNDFOOD: *What are your favourite seasonal ingredients for summer?*

I love the tart sweet tang of raspberries – if I'm not careful they never make it past the punnet and into the dessert I'm planning. Juicy mangoes are another favourite, while I can't go past corn and tomatoes when it comes to the season's veggie offerings.

What's your favourite season?

I'm a beach girl through and through, so I have to say summer. Everything seems to have a more intense flavour in summer, too.

Which local ingredients do you especially like to use in your cooking?

I love the fact that we have access to all sorts of Asian greens and herbs, not just at the local Chinatown and farmers' markets, but also in most supermarkets as well. They're perfect quickly stir-fried, steamed or tossed through a salad. I always have some in my crisper.

How do you celebrate summer with your family? Do you have a favourite picnic spot?

Nothing beats long and lazy afternoons at Nielsen Park, a little harbour beach in Sydney's eastern suburbs. I like to take my little boys down for a swim and fish and chips (and usually an ice-cream). And on the drive home up the hill from the park, you get one of the best views of Sydney; it always reminds me why I love living here.

Which dishes from your kitchen do you think your children will remember most fondly?

I think the dishes they had a hand in making, whether it's our little sushi rolls

(my three-year old is mad for sushi) or pizza on the barbecue when they can choose their own toppings. They love baking and decorating their own cupcakes, too.

What is your fail-safe simple dish that never lets you down?

I've always been of the view that if you've got eggs in the fridge, you've got a meal. And pantry ingredients, such as tinned chickpeas and lentils, are a lifesaver. My current favourite stand-by dish is a salad of shaved fennel, tinned lentils, fresh herbs such as parsley or mint, lemon zest and juice and a little olive oil.

You frequently visit New Zealand. What do you love most about the food here?

I love the number of artisan producers New Zealand has and your support of them. I also like the innovation of the chefs and the freshness of the produce.

Is there something or somewhere you always have to eat when you're in New Zealand?

Whenever I'm visiting family, I always insist on whitebait fritters. The seafood is gorgeous, especially mussels. And I think nothing beats New Zealand ice-cream; it's really something else.

You have the books, the magazine, the homewares, the shop – any plans for a restaurant?

No, I much prefer being on the other side of things – producing magazines and books for home cooks. I take my hat off to chefs and restaurateurs though, and their hard work and long hours.

What are you enjoying most about running your new Sydney store?

I love playing shop, just like I did as a little girl! I love the merchandising and styling too – especially styling the windows.

What is a typical day like for you?

No day is the same in my world and that's why I love what I do so much. Whether it's coming up with tabletop solutions with our stylist, testing a new recipe in the kitchen with the team or drawing up designs for a new homewares range, I never get bored.

Your new homewares are sourced from around the world. What's your favourite place to travel to? And which country's food do you really enjoy to eat?

I love France and any opportunity I get to practise my high school French. I draw inspiration from trips overseas and Paris is certainly not short of it, whether it's a vast rainbow of macarons in a patisserie window or a gorgeous fashion display in the Printemps department store. I love simple French bistro food. On my last trip I was lucky enough to try a starter of foie gras melted into custard, topped with vinegar and a burnt sugar crust – a foie gras crème brulee!

What's your top tip for impressing dinner guests? And do you have any easy food styling, table setting or entertaining tips?

I think the key is to cook one or two courses really well and not over-extend yourself. Rows of pretty tea lights in votives make any table look fabulous and I always keep those little Italian juice bottles for individual vases for each place setting.

If you could have anyone in the world cook for you, who would it be?

Peter Gordon – I love his flavours, creativity and innovative spirit.

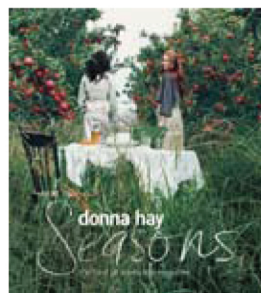


How do you relax?

You won't believe me, but I love to cook to relax. I find chopping, mixing and stirring incredibly relaxing – cooking helps me switch off after a long day.

What are you most proud of?

My team and the magazine they produce so well. On a personal level, I'm super-proud of my boys, Angus and Tom.



Recipes and images from Seasons by Donna Hay, published by Fourth Estate, \$50.

CAPRESE SALAD

Serves 4

- 4 vine-ripened tomatoes
- 4 slices prosciutto
- sea salt and cracked black pepper
- extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling
- 2 x 125g buffalo mozzarellas, torn
- 1 cup basil leaves
- 1 tbsp white wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, extra

Preheat oven to 200C. Wrap tomatoes in prosciutto and place on a baking tray lined with non-stick baking paper. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and drizzle with oil. Roast for 10–15 minutes or until the prosciutto is crisp. Serve with the mozzarella and basil and drizzle with the vinegar and extra olive oil.

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COOK

MINDFOOD RECIPES

Try Donna Hay's Meals in Minutes recipes for Zucchini and Mint Pasta, and Ricotta-Basil Chicken and Wilted Tomatoes.



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MINDFOOD NEWSLETTER

Looking for inspiration for family meals? Sign up to receive our Weekly Recipes newsletter for simple and delicious recipe ideas.

“Where would I like to be in 10 years? I don't look at my diary past a week these days – it's safer not to know how many busy days I have coming up.”



LEMONY PEACH CAKE

Serves 6

175g butter, softened and chopped
 ¾ cup caster sugar
 2 tbsp lemon rind, finely grated
 3 eggs
 1 cup plain flour, sifted
 1 tsp baking powder, sifted
 ¼ cup natural yoghurt
 3 peaches, sliced
 icing sugar, for dusting
 double (thick) cream, to serve

Preheat the oven to 160C. Place the butter, sugar and lemon rind in the bowl of an electric mixer and beat for 6-8 minutes or until light and creamy. Gradually add the eggs, beating well after each addition.

Add the flour, baking powder and yoghurt and beat until just combined. Spoon into a lightly greased 25cm-round cake tin lined with non-stick baking paper.

Top with the peaches and bake for 1 hour or until cooked when tested with a skewer through the centre.

Allow to cool for 10 minutes in the tin, then turn out onto a wire rack to cool. Dust with icing sugar and serve with cream.



RASPBERRY RIPPLE SEMIFREDDO

Serves 10

360g raspberries
 3 eggs
 2 egg yolks, extra
 1 vanilla bean, split and seeds scraped
 1 cup caster sugar
 1¾ cups single (pouring) cream

Place the raspberries in the bowl of a small food processor and process until smooth. Set aside.

Place the eggs, egg yolks, vanilla and sugar in a large heatproof bowl. Place over a saucepan of simmering water and whisk the mixture with a hand-held beater for 4-5

minutes or until thick and pale. Remove from the heat and continue whisking until cool. Whisk the cream until soft peaks form and gently fold into the egg mixture. Reserve 2 cups of the mixture and pour the remainder into a 3-litre-capacity (12-cup) dish.

Fold the reserved mixture through the pureed raspberries and spoon stripes over the semifreddo. Place in the freezer for 4-6 hours or until set.

DID YOU KNOW?

Donna Hay is the best-selling author of 17 cookbooks, all of which capture her style for fast, fresh food that's great for everyday entertaining.

FABULOUS FOOD



CHILLI AND KAFFIR LIME BEEF SKEWERS

Serves 4

1 small red chilli, chopped
1 tbsp fish sauce
2 tbsp lime juice
¼ cup peanut oil
700g rump steak, cut
into pieces
6 kaffir lime leaves
basil leaves, to serve

Blanched noodle salad

150g dried rice
vermicelli noodles
¼ cup coriander leaves
100g snow peas, sliced
and blanched

Place the chilli, fish sauce, lime juice and peanut oil into a bowl and stir to combine. Place the

steak in a bowl, pour over half the lime marinade and toss to coat. Refrigerate for 30 minutes.

To make the noodle salad, place the noodles in a bowl, cover with boiling water and soak for 6-8 minutes or until tender. Drain and rinse under cold water. Place the noodles, coriander, snow peas and reserved marinade in a bowl and toss to combine.

Heat a chargrill pan or barbecue over high heat. Thread the steak and lime leaves onto skewers and chargrill or barbecue for 3-4 minutes each side or until cooked to your liking.

Divide the noodle salad among plates, sprinkle with the basil leaves and serve with the skewers.



GARLIC CHICKEN

Serves 1

1 x 200g chicken breast
fillet, trimmed
olive oil, for brushing
3 cloves garlic, crushed
1 tbsp sea salt
small bunch flat-leaf
parsley, chopped
lemon juice and 1 lemon
wedge, to serve

Brush chicken with oil and cook in a hot frying pan for 2-3 minutes on each side or until it is cooked through. Add garlic and sea salt and toss with the parsley and lemon juice. Serve with a lemon wedge on the side.

*“What’s my guilty pleasure?
Without a doubt it’s ice-cream.
It gets me every single time.
And nothing beats New Zealand
ice-cream; it really is something else.”*