



**Having fun:** Maria Benardis has loved cooking all her life

## A passion for ancient skills

**Name:** Maria Benardis

**Age:** 38

**Job:** Instructor and founder of the Greekalicious Greek Cooking School.

**Have you always been handy in the kitchen?**

For as long as I can remember. I began cooking at the age of five with my grandmother on the Greek island of Psara. I would help her make many dishes, including cheese, yoghurt and bread.

**What formal or informal training have you undertaken?**

Most of my training has been hands-on. My aunt, Stavroula, has played a big part in teaching me everything there is to know about traditional Greek cooking. I have also worked in the kitchen at the Neil Perry restaurant, XO.

I spent years studying ancient Greek cuisine and travelling throughout Greece to explore the cuisine, ingredients, recipes, people and culture. I also have a Bachelor of Business and a Masters in Taxation Law. Although not essential in my work, it enables me to handle the accounting and marketing aspects of my business.

**What skills does a good cooking instructor/teacher need?**

An open mind and a sense of humour. Cooking is about having fun and not getting bogged down in the theory. It is about experimentation, using



your intuition and having no rules.

**What favourite Greek dish do you like to teach?**

I love to teach them all. Every dish has a story, tradition or a piece of history attached to it.

**And your favourite for eating?**

I enjoy especially those that use ingredients such as seafood, masticha, saffron, pomegranate, figs, lamb, Greek-style yoghurt and fresh fruit and vegetables.

**Best part of the job?**

The wonderful people that I get to meet, and sharing my recipes.

**Worst part of the job?**

My job is my passion so there are none.

**Advice for people seeking to enter the industry?**

It is an extremely hard-working role. It's important to have passion for cooking. If there is a restaurant you would like to work with, then ring them up and ask them if you can work for them even if it's on a pro-bono basis to get that experience. On-the-job training is essential to succeed in the industry.

**What's the money like?**

The money doesn't really matter when you're really happy and passionate about what you do.