

Anna Olson

WITH A DEGREE IN POLITICAL STUDIES AND SOCIOLOGY FROM QUEEN'S University, it was impossible for **Anna Olson** to predict her future would be in food. It wasn't until she was working at a bank in Toronto and wandering the St. Lawrence Market on her lunch breaks that the future kitchen diva discovered her hidden passion and decided to enroll in the culinary program at a Colorado university. Since then, Olson has married fellow chef **Michael Olson**, authored four books (with a fifth set to release this fall), opened Olson Food and Bakery in Port Dalhousie, Ontario, and hosted three cooking shows, including the popular dessert-fest *Sugar* on the Food Network. In her latest show, *Fresh With Anna Olson*, the Canadian foodie invites viewers into her Niagara-area country home where she prepares a range of fresh dishes inspired by the local bounty. In a recent chat with TV Week correspondent **Amanda Ryan**, Olson dished about keeping it simple, eating locally and the trouble with pumpkin pie.

Why do you think people should choose local products?

I think we should choose local not because of any political thing, but it's the natural thing to do. To eat what's closest to you makes more sense. It doesn't cross my mind to eat strawberries in January; June I completely gorge myself on strawberries and I don't want to see them for a year.

Do you think eating locally is feasible for Canadians all over the country?

I do believe you can shop locally, and that's how local regional cuisines evolve. If you go from town to town in Italy, they each have distinct flavours and ingredients and combinations, and the towns can only be 10 km apart and the dishes don't resemble each other because they grow different things. Supporting local entrepreneurs and small food providers — butchers, little cheese shops — it goes beyond your produce.

How can cooks make their time in the kitchen more fun?

Simplicity, I think, is the key. Instead of trying to overdo something or pull out an elaborate recipe, start with a simple one. Sliced tomatoes in August with a little drizzle of a good olive oil and some fresh basil leaves, and voilà! You've made a **Jamie Oliver**-style tomato salad without doing anything.

Do you have a culinary role model?

My husband Michael actually is my culinary mentor. I was working in the States, and on a visit (my parents lived in Toronto) we came to his restaurant, and I was enthralled. He was bringing to Niagara the [idea of] eating fresh, eating local. He actually got farmers planting fields with his ingredients, which is a great deal for farmer and restaurateur.

Who are your recipe guinea pigs?

My husband most often, because he's closest at hand. At the bakery I use my staff and, in fact, when I write recipes, I like to have a non-professional cook test them. And then they share with their families and I get the whole family's feedback.

Who does the majority of cooking at home?

It totally depends on our schedules and where we're at. When I was filming *Sugar* I was driving back and forth to Toronto, so Michael would be the one to have dinner ready quite often when I'd come home. Right now I'm developing recipes because I'm in season two of *Fresh*, so pretty much it's me putting dinner on the table.

Have you ever had a kitchen disaster when company was over?

My first year after university I decided I would host Thanksgiving dinner, and I'd never made a Thanksgiving dinner before in my life. I made a pumpkin pie; I followed a recipe from *Canadian Living Cookbook*. The meal went off great, and as I'm cutting into the pumpkin pie I realized at that moment I completely forgot to add the sugar. I tried to rescue it by pouring maple syrup over it, and that just made it worse. ■

FRESH WITH ANNA OLSON airs weekdays at 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. on Food.

