

on the parents. And it may be too late to take [sydneyoperahouse.com](http://sydneyoperahouse.com)

Planting ideas: Chef and gardener Stephanie Alexander and (inset) Matt C.

Main picture: Marueta Cifra

# ALL FIRED UP



Heat is on: Melissa Matheson (left) with Leona Watson  
Picture: Katrina Tepper

**C**ould I have what it takes to impress *MasterChef*'s Gary, George and Matt? I'm about to find out with a flambe lesson from Leona Watson of Cheeky Food Group, one of the many stars of next weekend's *MasterChef Live* event at Moore Park.

While the process of adding alcohol to food and then setting it on fire sounds risky, Leona assures me I won't singe my eyebrows as long as I do it properly.

"At Cheeky, we've had over 45,000 people cook with us in nearly nine years and we've never had a stitch, an eyebrow or anything like that burnt," she says.

Hoping not to be the one to break that record, I start with a really hot pan and some chopped-up chorizo.

"Turn your exhaust fan off if you're doing this inside," Leona says, explaining

that the fan can take the flames into the kitchen roof.

"With your arm out straight, take the pan off the heat, put the alcohol in off the heat and put the pan back on so the lower lip of the pan catches the flame.

"Give it a really good shake and smile at your friends like you're a big chef."

Whoosh! There's a wall of fire in front of my face and I've forgotten all about the smiling part. The heat is intense but the smell is delicious.

I can't wait to do it again. And again. And again, until my poor chorizo is well and truly done.

"You can flambe anything really; although anything that's too wet won't work," Leona says. "The alcohol gets burnt off but the flavour really intensifies into the food."

Turning food and alcohol into a one-pan-wonder sounds like a brilliant idea to me. While I'm cooking with sherry, there are endless combinations to try. Let's flambe every meal.

"We love to use Malibu, tequila,

Bundaberg rum, Spanish sherry. You can also use vodka," Leona says. "Gin has juniper berries in it so you would use that more with dark meats such as duck, beef and venison."

At *MasterChef Live*, the Cheeky Food Group will be teaching the art of flambe to 100 cooks at a time.

"As opposed to just going to watch all the celebrity chefs, you get to be the celebrity chef, you get to be the star," Leona says. "It's all about showing people how to have fun with cooking.

"The best thing about this is they get to eat whatever they make."

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● **MasterChef Live**, Royal Hall of Industries and Hordern Pavilion, Moore Park; **October 7-9**, adult from \$30, child from \$23, [masterchefflive.com.au](http://masterchefflive.com.au)

● **Cheeky Food Group**, Level 1, 65 Foveaux St, Surry Hills; **interactive cooking classes \$135 each**, 1300 785 365, [cheekyfoodgroup.com](http://cheekyfoodgroup.com)