

My kitchen

Kate Humble

The BBC TV presenter invites us into her kitchen, where modern design marries with the old stones of a 17th-century farmhouse

interview CLARE HARGREAVES photograph ALUN CALLENDER

When she's not filming, Kate is either at her Monmouthshire farm, which runs rural skills courses (humblebynature.com); or feeding the hens, ducks and geese at the Welsh farmhouse smallholding a few miles away, where she lives with her TV-producer husband Ludo and their three dogs.

Kate will present *Back to the Land*, a new three-part series on BBC Two, celebrating the food entrepreneurs who are reviving the British countryside.

I'm a country girl at heart. I was brought up next to a farm in Berkshire. However, because of work, we lived in London for 20 years. But after a decade, I began to resent living in the city and wanted to be more connected with the seasons. It wasn't easy to up sticks and go, but after Ludo made *The Choir* with Gareth Malone and it won a Bafta, the BBC asked him if he'd work for them in Wales.

This house nearly fell into ruin. A shepherd lived in the kitchen in the Sixties while the rest of the farmhouse was left to fall apart. Happily, in the Eighties, the wreck was rescued by an artistic couple, who lived here until we bought it 10 years ago. They did it up and respected the original features, like the beams, 2ft-thick walls and stone fireplaces.

I loved this kitchen the moment we moved in. It had a great feel, even though it wasn't fitted and had dark terracotta tiles all over the floor and work surfaces.

Using the table as my worktop was hopeless. I was hunched up, plus getting to the sink in the far corner to drain vegetables meant running an obstacle course over dogs, dog bowls and clutter. I love cooking, but I got to the point of not loving it. A kitchen should be a sociable place, but I felt like a galley slave!

Oddly, my personal trainer came to the rescue! She found me a kitchen designer (her husband) and builder (her brother William). So now I have an island and I can chat to

guests while I cook. I wanted wooden work surfaces but William suggested a recycled plastic that's environmentally friendly and easy to clean. We got the warmth of wood from the tables and chairs instead, and by using oak for the window sills.

I love wooden bowls and spoons. I always bring some back when I film in Africa. I like low-tech kitchen kit alongside the modern stuff.

I treasure my cookbooks. In fact, I chose Nigel Slater's *Kitchen Diaries* on Radio 4's *A Good Read*. I like Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall too, and I've recently discovered Anna Jones' *A Modern Way to Eat*.

I wanted a range cooker, but hated the energy they use. So we got an Esse (*esse.com*) oil-fired range, which has two hotplates and four electric rings. It uses less energy, and I love that you can treat it like a normal oven. In winter, it's on low to keep the kitchen warm, then we just turn it up when we cook.

At first I panicked at owning four acres of countryside. But it's got easier. We'd had an allotment in London – however, we soon discovered it was a lot colder, more exposed and wildlife friendly here! We grow tomatoes, cucumbers, courgettes, beans and chillies.

I remember the first time I found an egg laid by our chickens. It was still warm and I cracked it open; the colour was extraordinary. Keeping chickens is a good way to begin if you're starting a smallholding – you don't need to do much to be rewarded with a few eggs a day. But before you get hens, think carefully about what's involved as it is a big responsibility. I get my hens from the British Hen Welfare Trust (bhwt.org.uk), of which I'm a patron, and they rehome commercial laying hens. Amazingly, we still have two of our original three chickens, and we've added another 14 or so. [@katehumble](https://twitter.com/katehumble)



Back to the Land starts on BBC Two on xx March at xxx.



Kate, with her sheepdog Teg, loves a mixture of warm wooden features and modern appliances



'Elisabeth Luard. Her recipes, illustrations and sheer passion for food make anyone who reads her books want to cook, eat, experiment and explore.'