

RECIPES FOR COOKING WITH PLEASURE

ALANA CHERNILA

author of *The Homemade Pantry*



THE
HOMEMADE KITCHEN



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HOMEMADE
KITCHEN

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER MAY



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FOR JAMIE



'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

—Joseph Brackett, *Shaker Dance Song*





CONTENTS



COVER

TITLE PAGE

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DEDICATION

Start Where You Are

Be a Beginner

Feed Yourself

Put Your Hands in the Earth

Be Active

Use Your Scraps

Do Your Best, and Then Let Go

Be Helpful

Do the Work

Slow Down

Eat Outside

Invite People Over

Don't Be Afraid of Food

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INDEX



START
where you are

Let us speak honestly about why we cook, and who we are.

The world of home cooking can be a challenge to navigate. On one side, we're encouraged to eat real food—hopefully organic, GMO-free, local, non-toxic, and photo-worthy food, cooked at home, and blissfully enjoyed at a table with our family while we have device-free conversation. In the wake of current problems with our food system and their effect on our general health, these aren't new issues, they're just more urgent. On the other hand, all this focus on the redemptive power of home cooking can feel oppressive and judgmental. Even now as I'm finishing this book, a new wave of responses to cheerleaders of home cooking has appeared—essays like “Let's Stop Idealizing the Family Dinner,” “Cooking Sucks,” and “What If You Just Hate Making Dinner?”

I wouldn't say I live on one side of the discussion or the other; in fact, you'll find me in both camps, depending on the moment. Talk to me on a Saturday morning when I'm working at the farmers' market, and I'll convince you that a locally grown kohlrabi (cut into fries, roasted with olive oil and salt) can change your life. Walk into my kitchen when the whole family is grumpy with hunger and I can't figure out what's for dinner, and I'll pour you a glass of wine and admit that I, too, just hate making dinner. One perspective doesn't negate the other.

But the reality is that we all have to eat, and in my house, cooking is how we get there. Sometimes my husband, Joey, cooks, and sometimes my older daughter, Sadie, takes a dinner night, but because I tend to do it well and happily, and I'm usually home to put the chicken in the oven, the cooking often falls to me.

So why do I cook? To eat, of course. But there's more to it. And that's where this book comes in.

I cook because feeding myself is the one basic, essential, daily requirement that I can do entirely in my own way. Even more, when I come into the kitchen to figure out how to make a great loaf of bread or a creamy batch of yogurt and then *I actually do it*, the benefits go far beyond the buttered toast or yogurt for that week's lunches. Not only do I get to eat what I've made, I also get to delight in my ability to create it. Small as the act might be, having the power to feed myself and my family makes me feel optimistic about my own resources to create what I want in life. This optimism isn't limited to the kitchen; with practice I can extend my optimism beyond the kitchen into my community and even my government. I can choose, day by day, to pay attention to the small moments, to love the work of life, and ultimately, to love the days I get to live it. When I create what I want to eat, the simple task becomes the seed that empowers me to live the life I want, and to create that, too. And when I cook and eat in a way that reflects how I want to live, it means I have the opportunity three (or more!) times a day to make decisions that help me live that life.

That's why I cook.

I am a brave home cook. However, I am not the kind who will always reliably feed you

the most delicious meal you've had in ages, because if you are coming over, I have taken the opportunity to try something new. This courage leads to risk, and when the end result isn't looking quite right, this risk leads to panic, which I temper with wine. I love most of all to have crowds of people over for dinner, but especially in those moments, I am a slow chopper, a messy cook, and I can't stop talking. I relish high-quality ingredients, but sometimes just for the way their bottles line up on my counter, so I save the fancy containers and refill them with cheap supermarket olive oil and kosher salt. I am mildly disorganized, generally spontaneous, and prone to embarrass my two kids by breaking into a dance in the supermarket aisle. I'll state my opinions with great certainty and just as easily change my mind. I have a garden I share with the groundhogs under the porch and the deer in the field beyond the yard, and I love it most in those few moments after dinner when all I want to do is to have my hands in the dirt. My garden grows as many weeds as vegetables, but toward the end of every summer it never fails to feed us lots of one thing or another.

As much as I love to read and hear about all the wild and expensive food experiences out there, it's the basic foods I love the most. Warm bowls of porridge with maple syrup and cream in the early morning before everyone's off to school. Homemade jam on toast, with a perfect balance of sweet and tang tailored to my taste. Onion soup that smells so good that neighbors ask, What is that amazing scent wafting down the block? Simple salads of greens, hard won and fresh picked from the planter on the back porch, tossed with creamy fet dressing. Chicken potpie on a night when we really need it. These are the foods that fuel us through our lives, and I love them most when I make them here, in my kitchen.

Homemade food is the opposite of perfection. It holds the stamp of its maker. It's salty because you wanted it that way, or it's made with the kind of tomato you chose to grow when poring over seed catalogs last January. This process of cooking at home is my window into what I want to create in life as a whole. I want to make it better, unique, delicious, stamped with my own love and work. It's going to be imperfect, and I'm good with that. I have a friend whose mother slips a lemon seed or two into everything she makes, "so they know it's homemade."

This book is a map for how, day in and day out, food shapes my life for the better, in the kitchen and beyond it. I hope it makes you hungry. I hope this book inspires you to feel more adventurous and optimistic in your own kitchen. But most of all, I hope this map leads you to where it's gotten me: the recognition that you can create the life you want out of all of the small, ordinary moments of every day.

I've never been one for rules, but I've built this book around a collection of phrases I've taped up on the fridge over the years, just to help me remember that I really can create the

Why do I cook? To eat, of course. But there's more to it. And that's where the book comes in.

life I want. Within each chapter, you'll find a mix of recipes for homemade staples and dishes to create with those staples. At the heart of it all is the desire to live well, to enjoy my days, and to do what I can to support the well-being of my family and friends, my community, and, if I'm lucky, the world beyond it. Together, meal by meal, day by day, we can make it better.

START
where you are

BE
a
BEGINNER

FEED
YOURSELF

PUT YOUR HANDS
IN THE EARTH

BE
ACTIVE

USE
YOUR
SCRAPS

DO YOUR BEST, AND THEN LET GO.

Be
Helpful

DO THE
WORK

slow
down

Eat
Outside

INVITE PEOPLE
OVER

DON'T
BE afraid
OF FOOD



BE
— a —
BEGINNER

My daughter Sadie is learning how to create a meal.

Sadie is eleven, and as she starts to figure out who she will become, she seeks new skills that pique her curiosity or pull her in ways she can't yet describe. Trumpet, Shakespeare, writing, cooking. The list shifts as inspiration strikes, but cooking holds firmly to its place in the lineup, and I think it will stick with her. This is my clue: when it's been a hard day, she puts both hands firmly on the counter (usually as I'm scrambling to get dinner ready) and says, "I need to bake cookies."

It's not just that she wants to *eat* cookies. I know the urge started that way. But she also needs to find the perfect recipe, set up the ingredients, and feel the dough as it comes together. She craves the smell of those cookies in the oven as much as the cookie itself. She wants the thing she craves, and she's hungry for the act of making it. But most of all, she hasn't bungled the idea of the end result with fear and expectation, which can be so easy to do. She'll try something new if it sounds delicious to her, and she's up for the risk.

I've been a beginner many times, and I think my willingness to try anything new has helped me in the kitchen. Since graduating from college, I've taught everything from dance to calculus. I've written book contracts and studied wood finishing and been a personal assistant to a film director. I've cooked for movie crews, served in public office, sold vegetables at the farmers' market, and birthed and parented children. My only qualification for any of these jobs was that I was willing to try. And each time, I had no idea how to begin. Like Sadie,

standing alone at the counter with a craving and a cookbook, I looked for a recipe. I asked for help. But most of all, I would take a deep breath and remember that we're all beginners. It only gets harder when we try to prove otherwise, whether to ourselves or to the table we're feeding. When we enter the kitchen, we must be ready and willing to fail but not expecting to do so.

That space between what we want to do and what we know we can do—that's where creativity and resourcefulness live. That space is a good place to begin. Start there, and then see what you're hungry for.



HOW TO COOK AN EGG

The first time I cooked for Joey, I fried him an egg with a crispy white and a runny center. I'm sure I'm not the first one to woo with a well-made egg, as it's perfectly suited to the task and worth your while to perfect. If you can make a good egg, you can make breakfast, lunch, or dinner. You can spiff up leftovers, turn a salad into a meal, or make everyone happy with a [carbonara](#). An egg is both junk food and health food, pleases most picky kids, and can be found anywhere. A regular old grocery store egg is delicious, healthy, and good enough. But if you can afford the extra few bucks for eggs from chickens that have seen the sun and eaten grass, the yolk will be brighter, far more flavorful, and packed with more nutrition. The better the chickens eat, the better the eggs they produce. If you do get eggs from a farm, a neighbor, or (lucky you!) your own chickens, and they haven't been washed or refrigerated, you can leave eggs out at room temperature for a week. Otherwise, store them in the refrigerator.

FRIED EGG

Heat just enough butter, ghee, olive oil, or coconut oil over medium heat to cover the bottom of your pan. Crack an egg into the pan, cover the pan, lower the heat to medium low, and let the egg sit undisturbed until the edges are crispy and a faint layer of white surrounds the circumference of the yolk, about 3 minutes. Add salt and pepper while the egg fries so they incorporate right into the cooked egg. For a firmer yolk, cook for 4 to 5 minutes. Fried eggs should be eaten right away.



POACHED EGG

Crack an egg into a ramekin or teacup and drain off the bit of watery white that will come off first. Bring a small pot of water to a high simmer, then swirl the water with a spoon to create a gentle whirlpool. Slide the egg into the water and let it cook, undisturbed, for about 3 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to remove the egg. Salt and pepper just before serving. Poached eggs can be stored in cold water in the refrigerator for up to 12 hours. If you intend to store them, just slightly undercook them; then finish them off for 30 to 45 seconds in simmering water when you're ready to serve.

SOFT-BOILED EGG

Bring a pot of water to a boil. Gently lower an egg into the water and reduce the heat to medium low. Cook for 5 minutes, then use a slotted spoon to remove the egg. Run it under cold water. Serve right in the shell, in an egg cup. (Note: If you're starting with a room-temperature egg, reduce the cooking time to 4

minutes.) Soft-boiled eggs should be eaten right away. Serve with salt and pepper on the table, and salt and pepper as you eat your egg.

 **HARDISH-BOILED EGG** 
(FIRM BUT BRIGHT YELLOW YOLK)

Follow the directions for soft-boiled, but increase the cooking time to 9 minutes (8 minutes for a room-temperature egg). Store unpeeled in a covered container in the refrigerator for up to 5 days or peeled for up to 3 days.

 **HARD-BOILED EGG** 

Follow the directions for soft-boiled, but increase the cooking time to 12 minutes (11 minutes for a room-temperature egg). Store unpeeled in a covered container in the refrigerator for up to 5 days or peeled for up to 3 days.

 **SCRAMBLED EGGS (2)** 

Crack 2 eggs into a bowl and add a splash of milk or cream, a pinch of salt, several grinds of pepper, and, for extra credit, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise. Set a small pan over medium-low heat and melt enough butter or ghee to cover the bottom of the pan. Whisk the eggs until slightly foamy and pour them into the pan. Let them sit undisturbed for about 20 seconds, until there's a soft crust around the perimeter of the pan. Use a silicone spatula or wooden spoon to gently push the eggs around the pan as they cook. When the eggs are scrambled and still slightly wet, raise the heat to high for about 5 seconds. Remove from heat and serve immediately.



When I was in high school, my friend Cea and I used to frequent Paul and Elizabeth restaurant in Northampton, Massachusetts. We'd have ten bucks between us, and we'd order one of their oversized whole-wheat rolls, fish chowder, and a side of steamed broccoli drizzled with olive oil.

I loved Cea in the way I loved many people then: all at once, like my heart was divided into a jigsaw puzzle, each piece holding the face of someone, and that part of my heart pulsed when I was with them. All this love made me an extreme kind of teenager, and every behavior was led by my desire to share pleasure with people. This was true for all my pursuits of the common hedonistic activities of teens (you fill in the blank), but for me these shared bowls of steamed broccoli held just as much, if not more, pleasure than an late-night forbidden beer by the lake or joint passed behind the railroad tracks. We'd eat the broccoli with our fingers, each picking up a gently contoured trunk and devouring the dense crown before crunching through the tender stalk. I remember feeling so grown-up and fed by those dates, but most of all I remember the satisfaction I took in the perfectly steamed broccoli, especially in comparison to the broccoli served in our school dining hall which was either boiled to the point of dissolution, or withered and smelling of old refrigerators at the salad bar.

There might not be anything so pleasing to eat as a well-cooked vegetable. Why? Because it can go so terribly wrong. There are many ways to cook a vegetable well, but I'm going to focus on my two favorite methods: steaming and roasting.

STEAMING. Track down a pot with a removable steamer insert. Bring a few inches of water to a boil—no higher than the bottom of the insert—and fill the steamer insert with vegetables before covering tightly. If you don't have a steamer, you can combine the vegetables with about an inch of water in a covered pot. Steam until just tender, then transfer to a bowl and toss with simple dressings like olive oil, lemon, tamari, or some combination of the three.

ROASTING. Most vegetables do well at 425°F, cooked until they have little blackened bits. Toss the vegetable in a bit of olive oil and salt and lay out on a greased or parchment-lined baking sheet in a single layer. Nearly every vegetable can be roasted with great success, but some are clear winners.

ASPARAGUS

STEAM: Steam until tender, 3 to 5 minutes.

ROAST: Toss with olive oil, sprinkle with salt, and roast in a 425°F oven on a baking sheet until tender and just beginning to brown, 10 to 12 minutes.

GREEN BEANS

STEAM: Steam until tender, 3 to 5 minutes.

ROAST: Toss with olive oil and salt and roast in a 425°F oven until crispy, 15 to 20 minutes.

BEETS

STEAM: Peel, slice, and steam until tender, 25 to 30 minutes.

ROAST: Scrub beets, leaving skin and tail intact. Put into a roasting pan with ½ inch water and cover tightly with foil. Roast in a 375°F oven until tender when pricked with a fork, 40 to 60 minutes, depending on the size of the beets. Let the beets cool, then slide them out of their skins before cutting.

BROCCOLI

STEAM: Steam stems, leaves, and florets until tender but still bright green, 4 to 6 minutes.

ROAST: Toss with lemon and olive oil and roast in a 425°F oven until brown and crispy, about 20 minutes.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

STEAM: Steam whole Brussels sprouts until tender, 15 to 20 minutes.

ROAST: Halve or leave whole. Toss with olive oil and salt and roast in a 425°F oven until tender but not mushy, 35 to 45 minutes.

CABBAGE

STEAM: Steam until tender, 3 to 4 minutes for sliced Napa cabbage, 7 to 9 minutes for other varieties.

ROAST: No

CARROTS

STEAM: Peel and cut carrots uniformly to your desired size. Steam until tender, 5 to 10 minutes, depending on the size.

ROAST: Toss with olive oil and salt and roast in a 425°F oven whole or in pieces, until lightly browned on the outside and tender on the inside, 15 to 20 minutes.

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