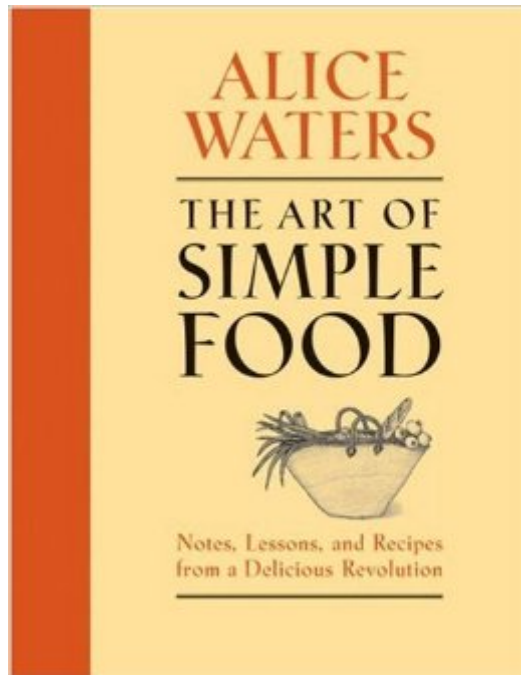


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The Art Of Simple Food: Notes, Lessons, And Recipes From A Delicious Revolution



Synopsis

Perhaps more responsible than anyone for the revolution in the way we eat, cook, and think about food, Alice Waters has single-handedly chang[ed] the American palate • according to the New York Times. Her simple but inventive dishes focus on a passion for flavor and a reverence for locally produced, seasonal foods. With an essential repertoire of timeless, approachable recipes chosen to enhance and showcase great ingredients, *The Art of Simple Food* is an indispensable resource for home cooks. Here you will find Alice's philosophy on everything from stocking your kitchen, to mastering fundamentals and preparing delicious, seasonal inspired meals all year long. Always true to her philosophy that a perfect meal is one that's balanced in texture, color, and flavor, Waters helps us embrace the seasons' bounty and make the best choices when selecting ingredients. Fill your market basket with pristine produce, healthful grains, and responsibly raised meat, poultry, and seafood, then embark on a voyage of culinary rediscovery that reminds us that the most gratifying dish is often the least complex.

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Customer Reviews

It's hard to write a review of a cookbook that you've only had for two days-- you have to actually try the recipes to know if they will work. (I have several beautiful cookbooks by famous chefs that omit important directions, or give wrong quantities of food.) However, I felt strongly enough about this book that I wanted to write an early review. For those of you who don't know, Alice Waters's restaurant, Chez Panisse, is probably the most important American restaurant in the past forty

years. Waters pioneered the use of high quality, local ingredients. The restaurant itself is delightful; they've served some of the best food I've ever eaten. In the Bay area, where I live, farmers and artisans at local markets often proudly claim that their food is served at her restaurant. Waters begins the book by extolling her philosophy: buy local, high quality ingredients, and cook them simply. (Of course, simple for a professional chef is different than simple for a home chef. I consider 6 ingredients to be pretty complicated, especially if they are all fresh ingredients.) She then proceeds to give very explicit directions on how to cook things: roasts, vegetables, baked goods, reminiscent of the explicit directions given by Julia Child in *Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Volume One*, or by Maida Heatter in *Maida Heatter's Book Of Great Desserts*. Finally, she gives lists of recipes for many dishes. What makes her recipes unique are the variations that she provides for each recipe.

I looked forward to this book with eager anticipation. I was not disappointed. I have followed Alice Waters' life and career for more than 20 years and have always looked to her for inspiration. I have all of her other books, and while "Pat's Biscotti" from her first book, *The Chez Panisse Menu Cookbook*, has been a staple from my kitchen, this new collection far outshines the rest. I have been cooking exclusively from this book for the past two weeks. Everything, absolutely everything I have made has been stellar! First, there was the minestrone, which included homemade chicken stock and beans cooked from scratch. I have made both for years, but was never really satisfied, and more recently have relied on boxed broths and canned beans. No longer. The chicken stock was not over-powered by too many vegetables as recommended in other recipes, the beans were tender and held together, and they were seasoned to perfection with Alice's direction to taste and salt along the way. This resulted in a minstrone that was as near to perfection as I have ever tasted. I added kale to mine, which added great color. As I write this review, I am eating my lunch, which is the Polenta Torta, which I made two days ago. It is still as fabulous as it was then. First, Alice directs us to cook the polenta for one hour - yes, one hour. I thought to myself, oh, I don't need to do that; 30 minutes will suffice. I had the time, so I let the polenta cook quietly on the back burner for the entire hour. What a difference! Unbelievable taste and consistency! I layered this goodness with the Simple Tomato Sauce and added a layer of sauteed mushrooms and a separate layer of sauteed zucchini. This is comfort food at its best!

A few preliminary comments from the author that put the book in context. From the author (pages 4, 5): "This book is for everyone who wants to learn to cook, or to become a better cook. . . . I'm

convinced that the underlying principles of good cooking are the same everywhere. These principles have less to do with recipes and techniques than they do with gathering good ingredients, which for me is the essence of cooking." Key aspects of her "philosophy" are printed on pages 6-7, among which are: eat locally and sustainably (use small, local producers as sources of fruits and vegetables, for instance); eat seasonally (a companion rule to the previous one); shop at farmer's markets; etc. The start is nice, in that she lays out what ingredients (herbs, for instance) and equipment should be on hand for effective cooking. One simple example: the author's emphasis at several points on the value of a good supply of fresh aromatic foods to enhance flavors in a recipe (e.g., onions, carrots, and celery). Then, she discusses how to plan menus and entertain friends for dinner. Not recipes, but useful context. The recipe sections begin with a rendering of how to make several essential sauces, including vinaigrette, salsa verde, aioli, and herb butter. None of the recipes calls for rocket science knowledge, but they are well explained and doable. One nice feature--some possible variations on the recipe. E.g., with vinaigrette, she notes that one variation could be to beat in a bit of mustard before you add the oil; alternatively, she suggests that one could use a fresh nut oil for the olive oil. There is a nice discussion of saut eing as a technique, with a nice example immediately thereafter (saut ed cauliflower). Another example of technique--poaching.

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