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The New Best Recipe



Synopsis

The updated version of a best-selling classic Flagship book of award-winning series with more than 1000 pages and 800 illustrations. Would you make 38 versions of creme caramel to find the absolute best version? The editors of Cook's Illustrated did. Along with 20 versions of simple recipes such as coleslaw. Now fully revised and expanded this new edition offers more than 1000 recipes for all your favorite dishes from roast chicken and macaroni cheese to creme caramel and chocolate chip cookies. There are also expanded tutorials on grilling, baking, stir frying and much more. This is the ultimate cooking resource for novice and experienced cooks alike.

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Customer Reviews

A literal encyclopedia of recipes (culled from the magazine), this revision to Cook's Illustrated's popular The Best Recipe is almost double in size and includes more than 1,000 recipes. Cook's Illustrated is known for careful (some would say compulsive) testing of recipes with a focus on foolproof technique; detailed line drawings that take readers step-by-step through recipes; and opinionated guides that assert that their way is the best way. This methodology appeals particularly to a specific kind of cook, one with a primarily scientific rather than artistic or intuitive approach to cooking. Though there are a few photographs, readers who buy cookbooks for full-color photographs and personal anecdotes aren't likely to be drawn to this work. Twenty-two chapters cover appetizers to desserts. Even the simplest tasks, such as blanching vegetables or peeling an egg, are explained and illustrated in detail. More involved techniques include brining poultry and

roasting a turkey. Pad Thai gets a full-page description with photographs to help home cooks learn how to properly soak the noodles. Well organized and extremely clear, the book has only one drawback: its heft may make it tough to hoist onto kitchen counters. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

". . . will please those who groove to the cooking geek sensibility of CI editor Christopher Kimball."
-- People Magazine, November 12, 2004 "Its charm is its over-the-top thoroughness." -- Newsweek Magazine, December 6, 2004 "This new edition (The New Best Recipe) means business." -- The New York Times Book Review, November 5, 2004 "the book's recipes...you don't need to be a gourmet to pull them off." -- San Francisco Bay Guardian, October 13, 2004

This became my "go to" cookbook years ago. I'm buying a second copy for a vacation home. In typical Cook's Illustrated fashion the description of WHY the recipe works is often as important as the recipe itself. Totally worth the time to read everything that comes before the actual recipe. The recipes are foolproof. Every recipe I've used has been a winner. You'll soon find your own favorites. Some of my favorites, with page numbers: 193 Scalloped potatoes. Mixing white and sweet potatoes tastes good, looks cool. 294 Tuna Noodle Casserole 312-313 Brining Poultry 101. It's amazing what brining does to improve poultry. 318 Crisp skin, high-roast butterflied chicken. Better and faster than traditional method. 451-452 Meatloaf. It's worth the work. 648 Light and fluffy pancakes 693 Golden Northern Cornbread 722 Popovers 773 Thin, crisp chocolate chip cookies 970 Rich bread pudding The New Best Recipe makes a nice gift for any really good cooks you know. It's also a good gift for new or timid cooks because of the thorough description of WHY each recipe works. Frankly it's earned SIX stars with me.

Many reviews have discussed the various strengths of this book. I do think it is essential for every kitchen, particularly for any cook interested in more than just blindly following a few recipes. If you like to experiment, the long introductions to most recipes give you a lot of information about how things turned out when the recipes were varied. This is often one of the first books I turn to when considering a new dish. I may not end up making the exact recipe in the book, but if I deviate from it, I usually have a good idea about what will happen because of the detailed background in this book. There are, however, a few problems that become apparent once you've used the book a lot. Since so many other reviews have described how great this book is, I'll focus on a few significant flaws. (1) The table of contents is awful. Aside from chapter titles, you don't get any detail of what

things are in chapters. You don't have a listing of the useful hints and tips that are inserted in many chapters (which give you background about choosing some ingredient or type of kitchen equipment, or information behind some cooking method). You'll only happen upon these by browsing through the chapters page-by-page, or if you happen upon one of the recipes that mentions this background. Unlike some reviewers, I don't find the index that cumbersome to use, but it would be nice to have a better list of what exactly is in the book to begin with.(2) Principles are inconsistently applied. For example, some recipe intros note that the authors tried to avoid unusual ingredients when possible. This leads them to reject buttermilk as an ingredient for pancakes (even though the tasters liked them better), since it's less common than regular milk in most people's kitchens. But in the very next recipe (for waffles), they decide that buttermilk is "absolutely crucial," even though its effects are similar. It seems that in quite a few recipes, better ingredients can be chosen or rejected on a whim, despite what the tasters think. A similar problem applies to the supposed amount of work or fuss for a given recipe -- sometimes, the testers reject a step that improves flavor because it's too complicated, but many times they present needlessly fussy recipes.(3) The tasters choose what they want, regardless of what is "correct." There will always be some disagreement about the best taste for a given dish, and sometimes I just disagree with the tasters. That's fine, and I expect that. But the book also displays a strange attitude toward traditional recipes that require minimal ingredients. They generally end up presenting a hybrid that won't satisfy traditional requirements but also doesn't take advantage of other possibilities. For example, before a standard superbowl party "chili" with kidney beans, ground beef, etc., they give a "chili con carne" recipe that is supposed to be closer to the classic "meat and chili peppers without much else" idea that is prized in Texas and other places. That leads them to throw out beans as an option, but they add tomatoes (even though tomatoes aren't part of traditional "chili con carne"), because they decide that chili without tomatoes is "dull." If they are going to bother to make a traditional dish, why try if all the testers think it tastes bad? In a similar mode, pancetta is rejected in favor of American bacon in their recipe for pasta carbonara, again because the tasters don't like it. What's the logic in restricting the recipe to almost all traditional ingredients, but throwing out one of the most important ones that is almost always part of the dish in Italy? If they can't satisfy their tasters with traditional ingredients, either something's wrong with the recipe or something's wrong with the tasters.(4) The testers are strangely inept at times, seemingly blindly trying things that would be obvious to most home cooks. For example, they try to cook a pot roast, but apparently they don't realize that longer cooking will make the roast more tender! Only by accident (leaving a roast in the oven way too long) do they realize that their roasts must not just come up to a full simmer near boiling, but they must stay there for a while until the

meat breaks down to become succulent and tender. Have they never cooked a pot roast in their lives? And then there is the occasionally strange advice for time-saving or labor-saving measures. When trying to construct a quick-cooking Bolognese sauce (which actually comes out pretty good), they fret that cooks will spend a long time chopping vegetables, so they make a big deal of pulling out a food processor, supposedly cutting down the chopping time from 10 minutes to 2 minutes. What was this crazy amount of chopping? They were *coarsely* chopping 1/2 of a small carrot, 1/2 of a small onion, a few mushrooms, and breaking up a can of whole tomatoes. If it takes 10 minutes for a cook to chop this small quantity of ingredients, I don't know what to say. I'd spend a lot more time getting my food processor out and cleaning it than I would chopping 3 or 4 small vegetables.(5)

Finally, the testers sometimes seem to overlook possible solutions or variations because they get locked into a particular recipe or ratio of a few ingredients or a particular method. This is one of the most common issues, and they do manage to overcome the problem sometimes. Usually, such a problem is signaled in the intro to a recipe when a dramatic turn happens about 2/3 of the way through testing when they happen upon a recipe in a different book or try out some apparently "strange" advice or (like the pot roast) happen upon something by accident. Though they do manage to solve some problems, in other recipes they end up just using a crutch of some sort to get subpar results. (Their use of cornmeal in their waffle recipe to add a false kind of "crunch" because they can't get their waffles to be crispy is a case in point. There are a half-dozen other things they could have done to fix this issue and actually produce crispier waffles.) I've encountered dozens of other strange choices and inconsistencies, which at times had led me to question the competence of the testers and tasters. But the results are generally pretty good, and even when I don't like the results, the introductions save me a lot of experimentation to home in on a way to change the recipe to be more to my liking. And occasionally there are strokes of genius in the unusual meandering testing methods. For example, the addition of extra flour to a french toast mixture to bulk up and thicken the texture of the resulting toast is very worthwhile and something I haven't seen recommended elsewhere. In sum, don't assume that all of the recipes in this book are actually the "best" recipe. The testers and tasters are clearly imperfect. But as a learning book to consider the ways a recipe might be varied and what the possible results might be, it's fantastic.

A great all-around cookbook. Not only do the recipes work (I've tried several), but they go into detail about what they tried in their test kitchen--what worked and what didn't. I like to read about stuff like that. If it doesn't interest you, you might consider it unnecessary padding. They also recommend various kitchen hardware items--knives, skillets, graters, etc., which is a plus. Some people have

complained that there aren't enough pictures (there are no fancy color pictures), but the directions are quite clear and no pictures are really needed. One example I can cite is their instructions for preparing scrambled eggs. Their ideal scrambled eggs are fluffy and light, not rubbery or gummy. The secret is to cook them quickly in unsalted butter over high heat in a nonstick skillet, stirring constantly and turning as the curds start to pile up. Take them off the heat a little before you think they are ready as the steam inside the piles of egg will continue to cook them a bit. I found that it took a bit of practice to find the perfect heat and when to turn them, but most of the time I do pretty well. They add a quarter cup of milk to four eggs along with a little salt and pepper, and beat them with a fork just until large bubbles form (overbeating makes for tougher eggs when cooked). Skillet size is important because you want the egg mixture to spread out about 1/4 inch deep over the skillet. If you like to cook, this book should be in your collection.

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