

Get This Cookbook First

**It Covers All the Kitchen Stuff Your Mom
Should Have Taught You**

By Brian Cummings

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About The Author

BRIAN CUMMINGS HAS BEEN WRITING AND COOKING for most of his time on earth. He and his wife are also responsible for sending three young people out into the world armed with just enough kitchen knowledge to keep from starving. This book is



his way of filling in the gaps in their knowledge and maybe yours.

He started writing as a reporter for the now-defunct Pittsburgh Press and has been honing his craft ever since. Cooking came later. His first book, "You Said a Mouthful," gathers up most of his best recipes along with stories variously about the recipes, their ingredients or the people who enjoyed them. You can see the book in its entirety at recipestories.pbwiki.com where you can also add recipes and stories

of your own. You're also invited to leave comments on his blog at recipestories.blogspot.com.

"One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if
one has not dined well."

--*Virginia Woolf*

About The Book

The book is divided into four sections. The first, *“What to Get after You’ve Found the Kitchen,”* is a handy reference guide with everything you need to know about kitchen equipment, basic ingredients, cooking methods, cooking techniques and food safety.

The second section, *“Some Things You Can Eat with Your Fingers (and Some You Really Can’t),”* is full of easy recipes for hors d’oeuvres, soups and salads that you can serve your guests as a prelude to a great dinner party or mix and match in any combination for an evening of grazing.

The third is called *“The First Course: Soup or Salad or Both.”* It covers pretty much what the title says—soups and salads. Not the kind of soups you would have for a main course (they’re in the next section), but the kind that you sip delicately before dinner. There are also several recipes for salad dressings—including one for that the dressing turned condiment, ranch.

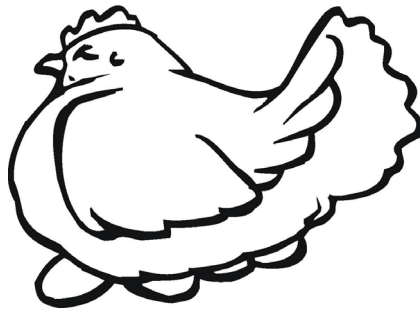
The fourth section is called *“The Protein on the Plate.”* Here, you’ll learn everything you need to know about putting a great meal on the table. There are tips on how to grill, sauté, boil and roast your favorite kind of protein. There are recipes for one pot stews, chili and soups, for pasta as a main course and some simple, step-by-step guidance on making the kinds of sauces—from gravy to barbecue -- that add the fine to fine cooking. I think this section is the most fun.

The next section is called *“The Next Most Important Thing on Your Plate: The Starch”* that covers the things that go with the protein or just after it; side dishes like potatoes, grains, pasta and rice.

Then comes the section on things you may still not be willing to eat called *“What You Didn’t Eat as a Kid: Vegetables.”* It has several recipes for things that made your mother so happy when you ate them. You still don’t have to eat them, but it wouldn’t be a cookbook without them.

Finally, there is a section that makes the book even more useful. It’s called *“Menus and the Wines That Go with Them,”* which is pretty self-explanatory.

So grab an apron and head for the kitchen. That’s usually where the stove is.



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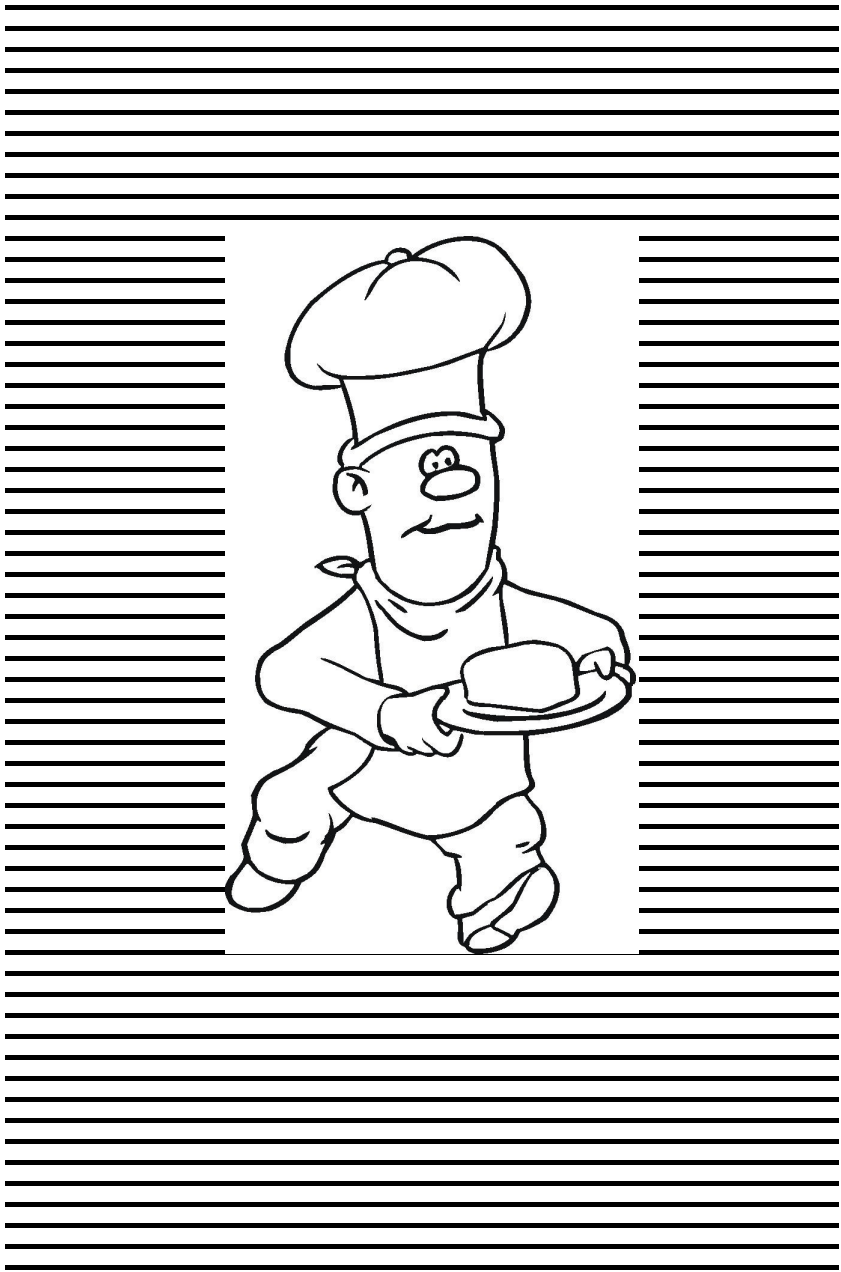
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Introduction



Why This Book

It's been rumored that while people in their 20s and 30s appreciate good food, they haven't the foggiest idea of how to cook it. I disagree. They do have the foggiest idea. That's the problem. They never really paid attention to what Mom or Dad did in the kitchen – if they did anything at all.

So they maybe have one dish they can handle when they're cornered into hosting dinner, but that's about it. Otherwise dinnertime is take-out; tuna in some sort of casserole or eaten straight from the can; cereal (without milk towards the end of the week); ramen noodles; or maybe popcorn.

If that's a fair description of your dinnertime skills, this book can help. If you only vaguely remember your parents in the kitchen (or they just never really went there); if Mom and Dad thought your dinner should come with a Power Ranger or nestled in a plastic tray; or even if they fancied themselves enlightened gourmands and bored you to tears with their lectures on soy, tofu and communal gardens, this book is for you.

It will teach you how to cook things you can eat. It won't make you trendy. It won't introduce you to food exotica or fusion cooking. But it will give you the skills you need to put together a meal that will leave your guests smiling in contentment.

Although fast food advertising would have you believe that absolutely no one cooks anymore, what's really happening is that cooking Monday through Friday is continuing a decline that started when your parents moved out of their parents' home. In the 80s, 64 percent of the dinners at home included one homemade dish. By the late 90s it was only about 50

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percent. Meanwhile the number of take-out dinners had more than doubled.

That trend probably has not slowed since then, but what is beginning to change is how we eat on the weekends.

Cooking and eating together is making a comeback, especially among men. Browse through on-line dating ads. There are a lot of folks that list “cooking” as a favorite pastime. In fact, in Japan, cooking is the number one hobby for young men. Worldwide, membership in an organization that celebrates the idea of slowing down to enjoy food—aptly called Slow Food (www.slowfood.com)—is enjoying steady growth. The organization is dedicated to—among other things—“the revival of the kitchen table as a center of pleasure, culture and community.”

Despite our continued connectedness via mobile phones and instant messaging, sitting shoulder to shoulder (or toe to toe) and sharing a meal is, well, nice. Real nice.

It's also cheaper. As long as you stay away from ingredients like truffles, saffron and several of the more exotic mushrooms now available, not only can you impress your friends, you can (if you make enough) have leftovers for at least another meal.

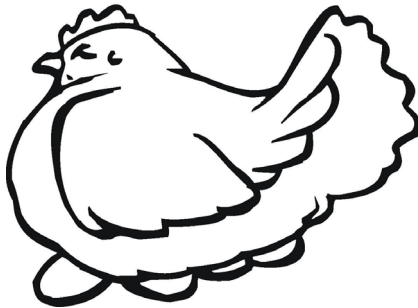
But you want the food to be more than just good. You also want to impress. You want to see that look of admiration and envy when you swoop up to the table with platters of tasty, beautiful food made in your own kitchen.

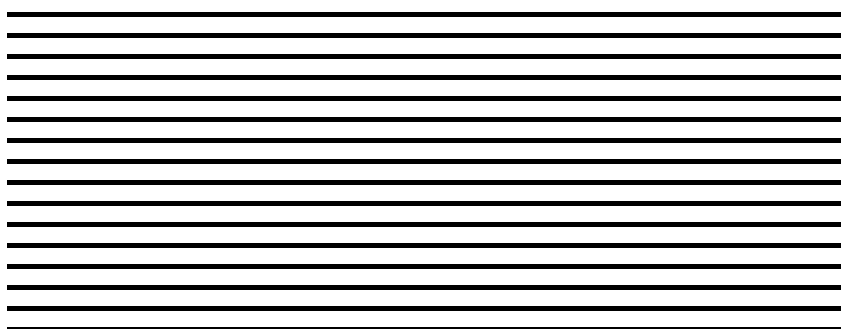
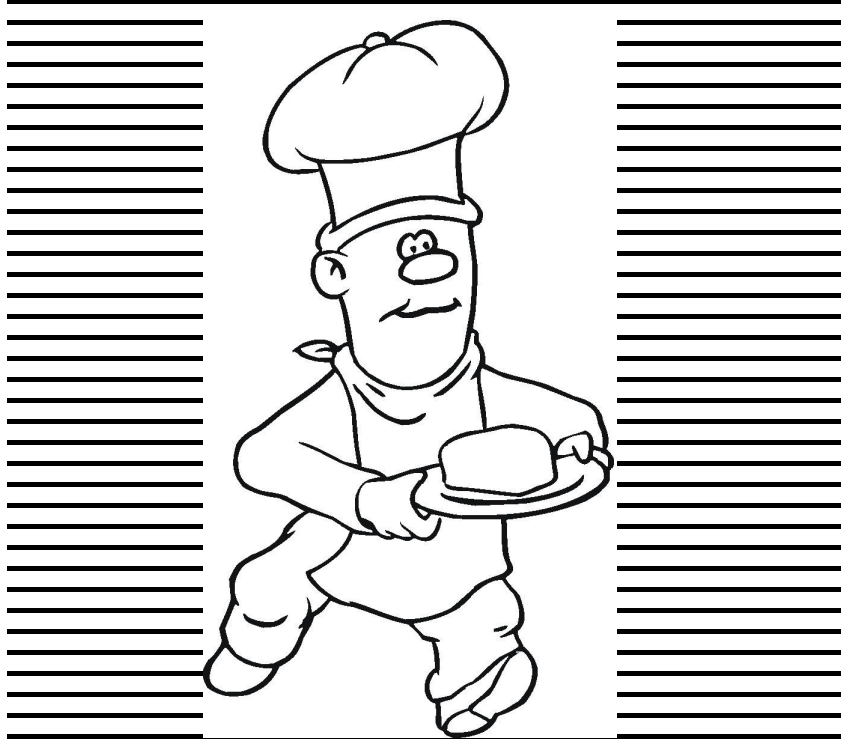
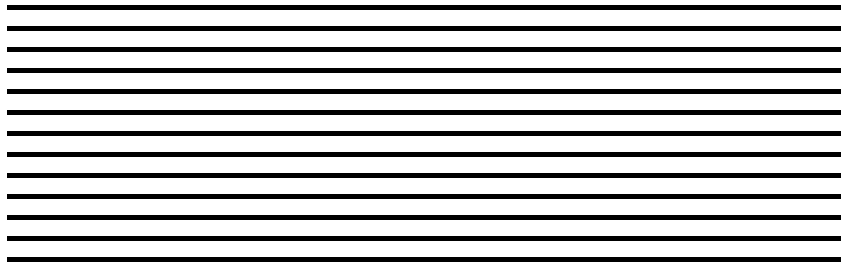
“Get This Cookbook First” is what you need. It will give you the simple, quick tips, tactics and recipes you need to cook like a gourmet chef and make your friends and family beg for more. Most recipes you can do in about the same amount of time that it takes to watch a rerun of Friends or Sex in the City. (For some of them though, think Sopranos or Six-Foot-Under.)

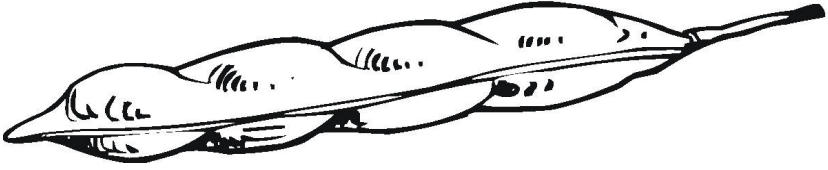
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Master the basic techniques that are here (and they aren't hard) you can develop your own recipes or embellish and change ones you find here and elsewhere.

What are you waiting for? Take a trip back to when eating was the center of social life, not an interruption in a busy day. Resolve to make your weekend meals—or at least Sunday dinner—about sharing experiences and good food well prepared. You'll be making great memories in the process.



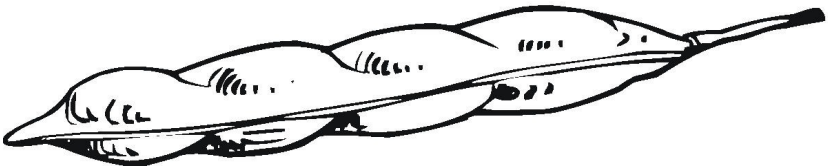




What to Get after You've Found the Kitchen

Before you can cook, you need a few things. Even though you can get by with a hot plate, a toaster oven, an iron (for grilled cheese sandwiches) and a dishwasher (to poach fish), a stove is helpful.

Once you've figured out where the stove is, you need to buy some necessary equipment and food staples. Don't buy everything at once. Although one sharp knife, a spatula and a decent skillet can get you started, you'll probably want more. Following are some suggestions.



Knives

If you can only afford one knife, make it a French or chef's knife. It has a wide, tapering, triangular shaped blade, that's slightly rounded and good for slicing, chopping or mincing. Since the blade is rounded, you can use a rocking motion for chopping. The tip of the blade is thin and flexible enough to cut around bones while the rear of the blade is heavy enough to cut through chicken bones and some beef or pork bones.



As you save your money, add a slicing knife. This kind has a long blade and is thinner than the chef's knife. My favorite is a 10-inch slicing knife with a scalloped edge that manufacturers refer to as a "hollow-edge." It's perfect for slicing roasts, etc. as well as softer things like ripe tomatoes. It's very easy to control.

Then get a paring knife. Get one that's about three inches long and looks like a mini chef's knife. Nothing beats it for slicing small items like garlic or shallots.

There's just one more to add, if you can afford it. The Eskimos call it an ulu (a.k.a. a mezzaluna) knife. The cutting edge of the blade is curved in a semicircle and can be rocked back and forth on a cutting board making chopping and mincing vegetables and herbs easy.

That completes your collection.

Don't forget to keep them sharp. Although some electric sharpeners take off too much metal, they are easy to use.

If you want to do it by hand, get a whetstone at your local hardware store. Lay the blade on the edge of the stone at a

20-degree angle with the sharp side facing away. Push the blade forward drawing it over the stone with a smooth and even pressure. Then turn the blade over and pull the other side back across the stone. Be especially careful not to cut yourself on the backstroke. Do the same number of strokes—six- to eight—on both sides.

Then finish with sharpening steel, which doesn't really sharpen the knife but makes the edge “true.” (A sharpening steel looks like a metal rod with a rough surface and a handle like a knife.) Again, keep the pressure light and constant. Start by putting the edge of the knife blade closest to the handle against the steel at a 20 degree angle, sharp side away from you. Push the knife down the steel in a smooth arc, keeping it at a 20-degree angle throughout the motion. Then turn the knife and draw it back down the steel in an arc, being careful not to hit the tip of the knife against the butt of the steel (or your hand for that matter). Use about five strokes on each side.

Before each use of the knife, use the steel to align the edge. Depending on how often you use the knife, you can probably hold the use of the sharpening stone to once a week or so.

