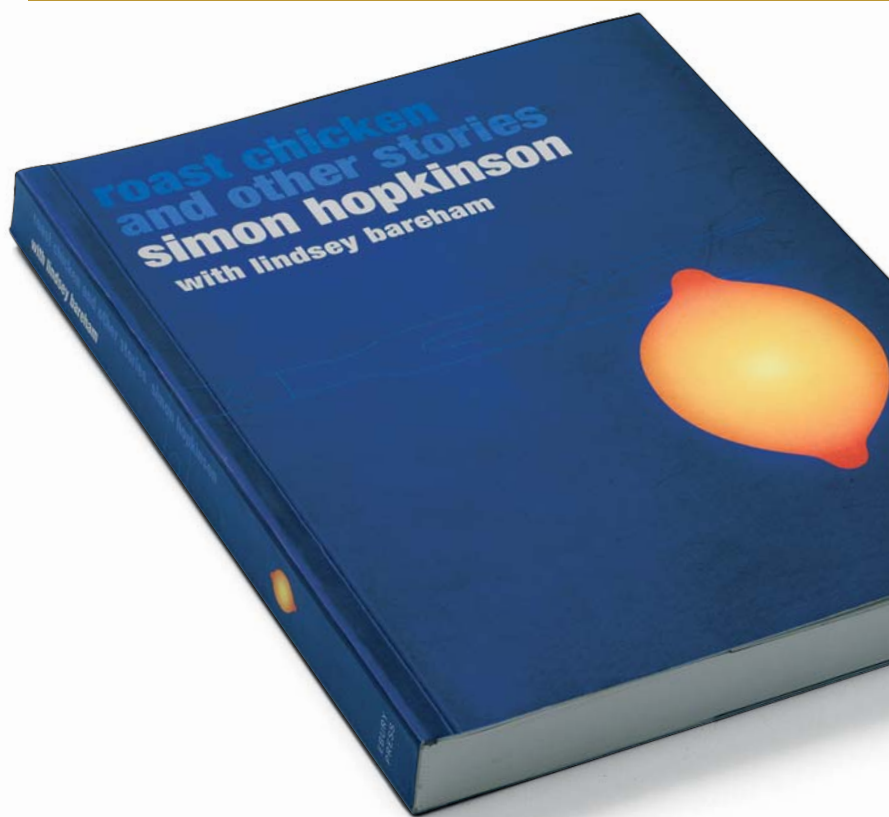


THE MOST USEFUL COOKERY BOOKS EVER!

She may be the nation's favourite cook, but according to *WFI*'s panel of top food writers, restaurateurs, chefs, cooks and consumers, Delia has been pipped at the post in the league of most useful recipe writers. The title goes to a much less famous chef. Indeed, there are many surprises in our list of volumes that no kitchen should be without. From well-thumbed classics to obscure foreign texts, these books will answer every kitchen question you could possibly ask. Photographs by Rob White



1
ROAST CHICKEN AND OTHER STORIES
 SIMON HOPKINSON
 WITH LINDSEY BAREHAM
Ebury Press; £10 (1994)

This is a magical book and its diminutive size belies its incredible value. Hopkinson, the founding chef of London's Bibendum, aided by food writer Bareham, set out to write something quite personal – a collection of his favourite dishes for his favourite ingredients, from anchovies to veal. Nevertheless, he has such good taste and sense that the result is a little blueprint for British cooking through the year. This volume may not contain every dish you might ever want to cook but the ones it has epitomise the way we love to eat today. What's more, once you've followed Hopkinson's recipes for *salade niçoise* or roast potatoes, you'll never want to do them any other way. Who needs a 500-page doorstopper, when you've got the essence of modern British cooking in a volume you could almost fit in your pocket?

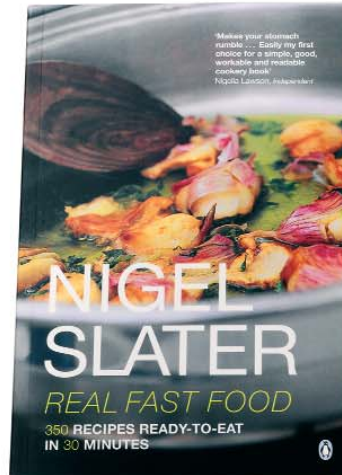
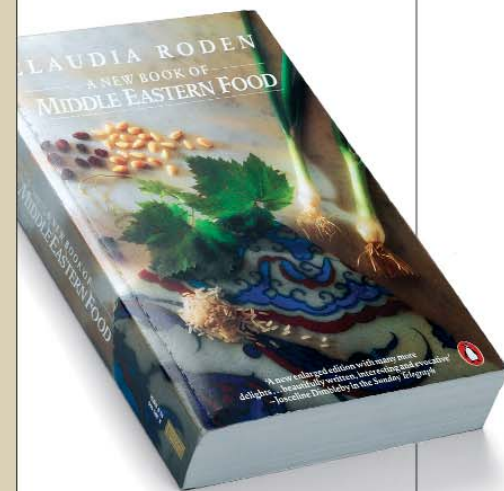
2
DELIA'S COMPLETE COOKERY COURSE
 DELIA SMITH
BBC Books; £15.99 (1978)

Where would we be without Delia? Not only are her recipes ultra-reliable but the notes that go with them seem to answer all your questions before you've even asked them. Regularly revised and updated, this is an encyclopaedic book, covering the gamut of British cooking. Size doesn't always equate with usefulness, of course, but in this case the sheer scope of the recipes, from a simple omelette to a Christmas dinner, provide a kitchen comfort blanket. Whether you're an absolute beginner or an experienced cook trying out a variation on a classic, you're never alone if Delia's on your shelf.



5
A NEW BOOK OF MIDDLE EASTERN FOOD
 CLAUDIA RODEN
Penguin; £14.99 (1968)

British cooks don't just cook British food, of course, and if you're attempting something unfamiliar, there's even more need for a good guide. One of the great strengths of this book is its sheer scope: it covers food from Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Greece, Israel, Turkey and many of their neighbours. If you love any of those cuisines, do not waste your time on any other book than this. Born in Egypt and widely travelled, Roden is not just a food expert but a scholar: her exhaustive research means she can tell you all the little things you need for authenticity (Middle-Eastern salad dressings are sharper than western ones; fish should be accompanied by rice) and her enthusiasm is infectious.



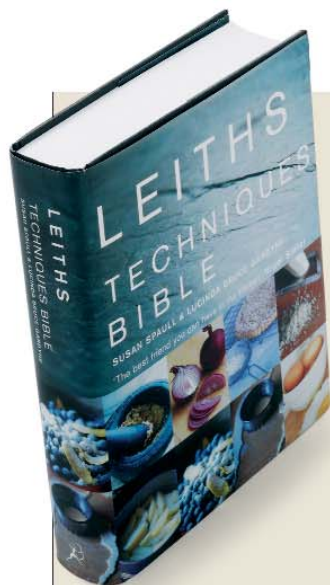
3
REAL FAST FOOD
 NIGEL SLATER
Penguin; £7.99 (1992)

This, Slater's first book, is among his most valuable. You could turn to it every night of the week when you roll in from work, weary, hungry and a little crotchety, and on each occasion be inspired to whip up something simple and delicious. Slater's method is spot on: he picks key store-cupboard ingredients – eggs, pasta, rice, tinned tuna – then gives endless ideas for what to do with them. It's all wonderfully unpretentious – he includes fishfinger sandwiches (made correctly, of course) and umpteen variations on cheese on toast – and nothing here takes longer than 30 minutes to get on the table.

4
THE RIVER COTTAGE MEAT BOOK
 HUGH FEARNLEY-WHITTINGSTALL
Hodder & Stoughton; £25 (2004)

Some books are crucial not just because of what they say, but when they say it. At last, we as a nation are coming round to the idea of paying more for properly reared and butchered meat and cooking it in traditional and economical ways. But for many of us, the theory isn't supported by practical knowledge. Having been at the forefront of the campaign for real, quality meat, Fearnley-Whittingstall here tells you everything you need to know about buying, storing and cooking it. The information is in-depth and thought-provoking, there are tons of delicious recipes and there's a very handy list of good suppliers.





6

LEITH'S TECHNIQUES BIBLE
SUSAN SPAULL AND
LUCINDA BRUCE-GARDYNE
Bloomsbury; £35 (2003)

Here, all the expertise of Leith's legendary cookery school is condensed into a no-nonsense manual. If you consider yourself a serious cook (even a serious beginner) you must have this. The beauty of this volume is that it arms you with the basics you need to be able to use other recipe books well: how to make an excellent stock, cook fish perfectly, or bake a feather-light sponge, for instance. The layout is incredibly clear and the panels on 'What's Gone Wrong When...' make it really user-friendly.

7

ELIZABETH DAVID CLASSICS
ELIZABETH DAVID
Grub Street; £16.99 (1999)

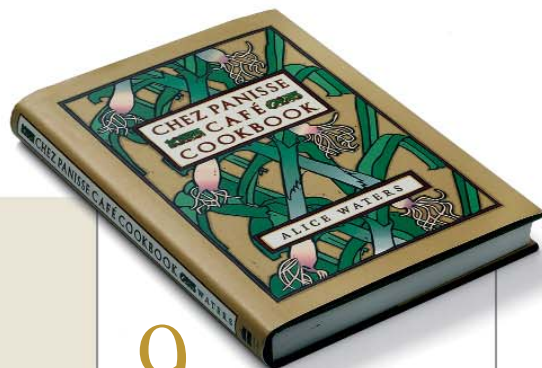
This includes three of David's works: *Mediterranean Food* (1950), *French Country Cooking* (1951) and *Summer Cooking* (1955). It's hard to deny that David has had more influence over the way we eat today than almost any other writer, and these books show why she's so iconic: they're full of knowledgeable writing that tells you how and why to cook, as well as what to cook. And the recipes give you both classics (bouillabaisse, osso bucco, piperade) and simple, quick, modern ideas, too.



8

RICK STEIN'S SEAFOOD SCHOOL COOKBOOK
RICK STEIN
BBC Books; £25 (2001)

An excellent example of the photographer's art, this. Looking at the pictures of crustacea being shelled and fish being filleted is almost as good as having the lovely Mr Stein showing you himself. All the basic, and some more advanced techniques are clearly illustrated, from poaching and frying, to making sushi and home-smoking. Having boosted your confidence, Stein then supplies a cornucopia of tempting recipes, including linguine ai frutti di mare, tuna carpaccio with rocket and Parmesan and stir-fried eel with black bean sauce. A must for fish lovers.



9

CHEZ PANISSE CAFÉ COOKBOOK
ALICE WATERS
HarperCollins; £19.99 (f.p. 1999)

Even if you don't realise it, Alice Waters has probably had some influence over the way you eat. With its no-choice menu of local, seasonal food, her pioneering Californian restaurant, Chez Panisse, has inspired chefs and writers for 35 years. This book (worth buying for the illustrations alone) is a pared-down selection of classic fare from the Chez Panisse Café, which is slightly less formal than the restaurant. The recipes, such as Mozzarella salad, fresh pasta with wild mushrooms, beef carpaccio and panna cotta, are perfect for informal entertaining.

10

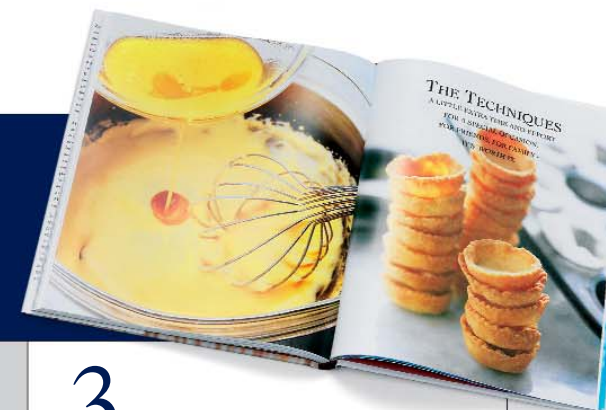
THE COOK'S COMPANION
STEPHANIE ALEXANDER
Lantern; £35 (1996)

This Australian book is incredibly helpful for any cook. The chapter on 'Basics' alone is indispensable: it gives vital recipes for things like batter, crumble topping and muffins, explains bandied-about cookery terms such as deglazing and macerating, and lays down essential hygiene rules. There follow countless recipes arranged, as in so many of the most useful books, by ingredient; each augmented with notes and quick ideas. There is a lifetime of food experience here and the beauty of this huge book is that it hasn't been condensed at all.



5

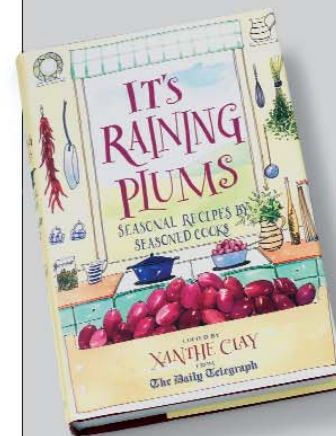
VERY USEFUL BOOKS YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD OF...



1

IT'S RAINING PLUMS
XANTHE CLAY
John Murray; £14.99 (2002)

This collection of reader's recipes published in *The Daily Telegraph* is an absolute joy. It's divided into months, each featuring recipes for key seasonal ingredients: blackberries and marrows for September, apples, leeks and pumpkins for October, and so on. Because all the recipes are tried-and-tested family favourites, this book gives you something new, delicious and reliable to try every week.



3

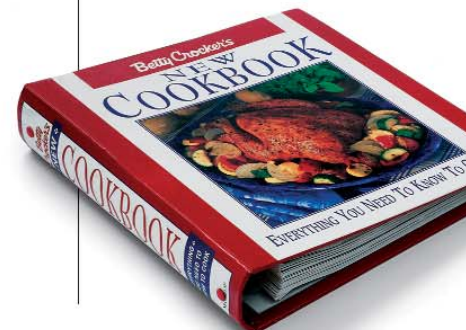
CANAPES ERIC TREUILLE AND VICTORIA BLASHFORD-SNELL
Dorling Kindersley; £12.99 (1999)

If you're throwing a party, whether it's drinks for a few friends or a full-blown wedding reception, this book will help you impress your guests. From the simplest dips to more elaborate creations such as mini peking-duck pancakes or baby profiteroles, it has all the inspiration, information and advice you need, including illustrated techniques and even party-planning tips.

2

BETTY CROCKER'S NEW COOKBOOK
BETTY CROCKER
Hungry Minds; out of print (1996)

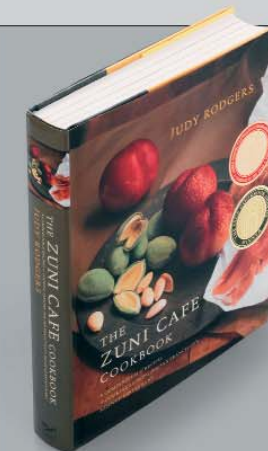
Like an American Delia Smith, this book is great for basic breads, sauces and egg recipes such as mayonnaise and soufflés. It has step-by-step photos of techniques, tips on substitute ingredients and for when things go wrong, and a conversion table. It's also spiral-bound with a wipe-clean cover: why can't more books follow this format? Of course, it uses American measurements, but this is no problem once you've armed yourself with a set of measuring cups.



4

THE ZUNI CAFÉ COOKBOOK
JUDY RODGERS
Norton; £25 (2002)

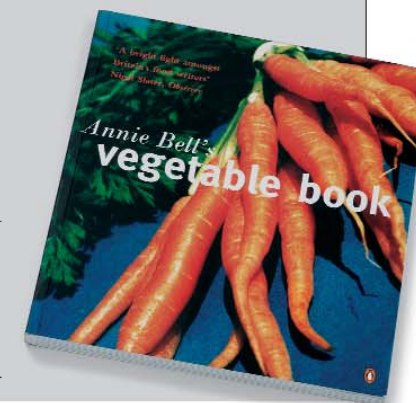
Zuni Café is a San Francisco institution and its chef-owner Judy Rodgers is a classic Californian cook: earnest, idealistic and slightly obsessed. This book has real depth; Rodgers has no qualms about going into detail on absolutely everything. There are 50 pages on topics such as seasoning and measuring before you even get to the recipes, of which there are hundreds, all deliciously pure and uncluttered. This book will inspire you to look at familiar ingredients in a new way, and to cook with passion.



5

ANNIE BELL'S VEGETABLE BOOK
ANNIE BELL
Penguin; £9.99 (1997)

Pick any vegetable and you'll find here a feast of original ideas for cooking it. Particularly useful for dealing with seasonal gluts, the book is sensibly set out, with veg in alphabetical order. For each, there's info on buying and preparing, fast and not-so-fast recipe options and extra ideas. And the recipes are lovely: not just side dishes but real celebrations of each ingredient. Moreover, there's not a scrap of meat in sight, so this is extra-handly for vegetarians.

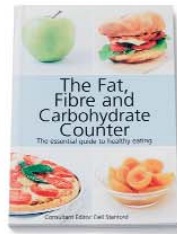


Essential reading

The most useful for... FRENCH

Bistro Cooking by Patricia Wells
Kyle Cathie; £12.99 (1989)

Wells has made the area of informal French cuisine her own. In this, her first cookbook, she features French food we want to eat: not Michelin-starred, sauced and sabayoned, but simple, homely and pure-flavoured. Look no further for perfect remoulade, soupe à l'oignon and ratatouille. Most of the recipes are from experienced cooks in real bistros, adding to the authenticity.



The most useful for... HEALTHY EATING

The Fat, Fibre & Carbohydrate Counter, ed Dell Stanford
Merehurst; £2.99 (1999)

OK, so it's hardly a cookbook, but for understanding food's nutritional value (not just produce but manufactured foods, too), this is invaluable. Besides listing carbs, fat, fibre and calories for loads of foodstuffs, it tells you how to read nutritional info labels, how much fat you really need and tackles issues such as butter versus margarine.

The most useful for... FLAVOURING

Herb & Spice by Jill Norman
Dorling Kindersley; £14.99 (2002)

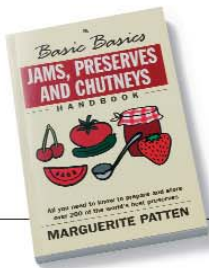
A great guide to every herb, spice and flavouring mix you're ever likely to find, with exhaustive info and crystal-clear pictures. Like all the best cookbooks, it's liberating: should you find yourself with a jar of nigella seeds or pink peppercorns, it tells you not only what they're usually used for, but also which flavours they go well with, enabling you to create your own recipes.



The most useful for... PRESERVING

The Basic Basics Jams, Preserves & Chutneys Handbook by Marguerite Patten
Grub Street; £7.99 (1995)

Despite the fact that preserving uses few ingredients and relies on a handful of basic principles, it's full of pitfalls – so a no-nonsense guide is crucial. Patten's writing is pin-sharp with a pleasantly schoolmarmish tone that leaves you in no doubt about what's what. The book also contains virtually every jam, jelly, conserve, curd, marmalade and pickle recipe you'll ever need.



The most useful for... VEGETARIAN

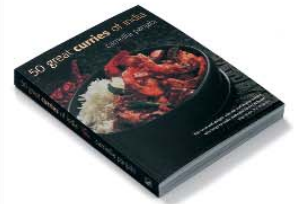
Great Vegetarian Food, ed Debbie Quick
APC Books; £11.99 (2001)

These recipes from *Australian Women's Weekly* are simple and full of the light, fresh flavours of Aussie cooking. It's a sensible volume, with low-fat and super-speedy recipes, stir-fries, nutrition analyses and advice on constructing meat-free menus. What's more, as the recipes are from the AWW, you can be sure they've been tested obsessively.

The most useful for... CAKES

Mary Berry's Ultimate Cake Book
by Mary Berry BBC; £14.99 (1994)

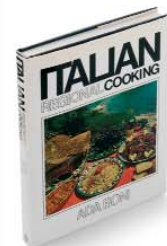
Forget millefeuilles, baklava and caramel birds' nests, this book is all about honest-to-goodness scrummy cakes. It's the tome you want for school fêtes and garden parties, Christmas and birthday parties: we're talking Victoria sponge, millionaire's shortbread and lemon meringue pie. Berry has been baking for decades so she really knows what she's talking about. Long live the butterfly cake!



The most useful for... INDIAN

50 Great Curries of India by Camellia Panjabi
Kyle Cathie; £8.99 (1994)

Panjabi demystifies Indian cooking, explaining, say, the role of souring ingredients, thickening agents, and colour. Her writing on spices is brilliant, revealing how the order in which they're added can have a huge effect on a dish. Few Indian food fans will need to look beyond her repertoire of recipes from across the subcontinent.



The most useful for... ITALIAN

Italian Regional Cooking by Ada Boni
Godfrey Cave; out of print (1969)

You may not have heard of this book, but every Italian chef has. Boni was hugely influential in her homeland and this has every classic recipe you'll need: from gnocchi to veal scallopini and ribollita. The recipes are arranged by region and Boni lists both their English and Italian names. The photos may be gloriously dated; the writing is not.

AND
FINALLY...
THE MOST
USELESS
COOKBOOK
WE'VE EVER
COME ACROSS

Larousse Gastronomique

Hamlyn; £60 (first edition, 1938)

If you're a historian or a pub quizzer, Larousse may be useful; if you're a cook, it's not. Some might argue that this culinary encyclopaedia is not strictly a cookbook, but it markets itself as such ("an all-time classic cookbook," it says on the back cover) and contains hundreds of recipes. These are laid

out in annoyingly dense blocks and do not include all the information you need; the size of dishes and tins are noticeably absent, for instance. Even as a reference work, it's overrated: esoteric and stuffy, it pitches itself as a universal guide, but is heavily biased towards all things French. If you've shelled out £60 then carted the hulking great thing home, you deserve more.

