



Choosing Sides: From Holidays to Every Day, 130 Delicious Recipes to Make the Meal

Tara Maaraza Desmond

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Salads, veggies, breads, oh my! The sheer variety of sides presented in this eye-catching cookbook will have home chefs scrambling to the kitchen.

Tara Mataraza Desmond's dedication to an eclectic mix of side dishes, along with a clever title and colorful photographs, gives *Choosing Sides* a distinctive edge on the market.

Accompanying each recipe is an "Alongside" list of other recipes in the cookbook that complement the dish. Additionally, "Main-Course Pairings" suggest ideas for compatible main dishes, although those recipes are not in the book. The author discusses aspects of planning a menu—such as appropriate mixes of flavor, theme, texture, color, and nutritional balance—for novice cooks to consider. Short narratives relate memories and insights from friends and family about preparation of featured side dishes, including mashed potatoes, potato salad, and Irish brown bread.

The author answers many useful questions and offers practical advice; for instance, the number of grinds of a pepper mill that equals one teaspoon, the reasons for using unsalted butter instead of salted butter, and the varieties and best uses of salt. Her instructions for prepping portions of a recipe ahead of time are especially helpful for home cooks planning to serve elaborate meals for larger groups.

Desmond confesses to a special interest in salads, and that section features harmonized tastes, with dressings that can be used interchangeably with those salads or other foods. For example, Sweet Balsamic Vinaigrette pairs well with greens, cheese, fruits, and bacon or pancetta.

"Potlucks and Parties" features recipes that serve more than the average family of four and can be prepared in advance. Frittata di Pasta, Neapolitan spaghetti pie, is ideal for children who balk at eating anything more esoteric than spaghetti with the simplest tomato sauce. Desmond introduces this recipe with this remark: "My neighbor, Anna, packs a wedge of this frittata in her kindergartener's school lunch box because her own Italian mother did the same for her when she was young."

Choosing Sides offers variety that will satisfy multiple taste preferences. Foods currently popular with health and environmentally-conscious cooks include Warm Kale Cannellini, Lemongrass Vermicelli, Za'atar Chickpea Mash, and Cumin-dusted Fried Plantains.

Although these recipes may require more planning and prep time than some home cooks desire, those interested in adding variety to everyday and special-occasion meals will love this cookbook.

MARGARET CULLISON (Winter 2014)

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