Cooking

New England Cooking: Seasons and Celebrations
Claire Hopley
Berkshire House
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The author entices readers into her cookbook with New England's bold flavors and honest food. You can almost smell the mincemeat pie, Indian pudding, and gingerbread, and taste the roasted venison and corn chowder. Hopley pays homage to New England's founding cooks with recipes for more than 160 dishes like these.

Hopley pushes New England's homey, wholesome cooking into the twenty-first century with recipes like Duck Breasts with Blueberry-Lavender Sauce, Cider Shortcake, and Pumpkin Chiffon Pie with a Gingernut Crust. Thirteen chapters filled to the brim with dishes like Asparagus Pesto and Pine Nuts with Penne, Portuguese Kale Soup, and Souvlaki speak to readers of the region's cultural diversity. Many recipes are imaginative, but they are grounded in the practicality that cooks expect from New England cuisine.

A resident of Massachusetts, Hopley has written about food and travel for newspapers and magazines. Her recipes are clear and easy to follow. Her take on New England's distinctive food is solid and strong with an elegant use of seasonal ingredients. Like the newspaper and magazine clippings of a seasoned home cook, bits of history, folklore and cooking information pop out at readers to inform and entertain. Lobster Bisque brings with it helpful details like what happens if you buy a lobster and it dies on the way home. Chicken Breast Clementine in a Hazelnut Crust tells us that clementines, a citrus fruit developed by an Algerian priest, Father Clement, arrive in December and disappear in January. This quote comes from a recipe for Sugary Crunch Rhubarb Tart:

“If you made a list of all the recipes you ever found for rhubarb, you would find that most of them were for pies. No wonder nineteenth-century New Englanders often called it pie plant. Lydia Maria Child, who wrote American Frugal Housewife in 1833, also called it the Persian apple. Despite this pretty name, she didn’t approve of rhubarb pies, complaining that “These are dear pies, for they take an enormous quantity of sugar.”

New England is mother to America. Whatever our heritage, she holds our history, and some of our most authentic comfort food. This generous book will awaken memories of tastes that might have faded but can’t be forgotten. Cooks from Tokyo to Tucumcari will rest easier with Hopley’s delightful offering inhabiting their kitchen.

Nancy K. Allen