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Cooking

Party Nuts! 50 Recipes for Spicy, Sweet, Savory, and Simply Sensational Nuts that Will Be the Hit of Any Gathering

Sally Sampson
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Cookbooks that are enticing, but specific, that are sensible, but exciting, are always welcome to a cook's library. This is such a book. Its audience will include not only cooks who like to entertain, but also those who cook for families of snackers. Happily, the author invents recipes that range in sophistication; consider Sherry and Sugar Glazed Pecans for preprandial hors d'oeuvres, or delicious-in-their-simplicity Lauren's Vanilla Walnuts, which Sampson makes for children.

The author has written and collaborated on several other cookbooks, including a James Beard Award nominee, and contributed cooking-related articles to Self, Bon Appétit, Mode, Food & Wine. Her introduction here, though heavy with puns, includes the few important basics of flavoring and toasting nuts: for instance, "I have discovered that subtlety is not something you generally find in a nut. Because of this, seasonings need to be strong to compensate for the dense richness of the nuts themselves." A Useful Time Chart of Lightly Toasted Nuts is included, as is the admonition that "You must, absolutely must, completely cool your party nuts before storing them, whether you store them in a bag at room temperature or in the refrigerator or freezer." (Otherwise they will soften.)

Besides the unusual recipes, which are surprisingly easy to make, Sampson graciously offers beverage suggestions, like “lemonade, beer, or Bloody Marys” while eating Salt and Chipotle Chile Almonds, or Cajun Martinis (made with pepper-infused vodka) with Cajun Pecans. Yet, cooks might like best her ideas that go beyond nibbling and sipping. She sprinkles flavored and toasted nuts in salads, over grains, and into stuffings. Curried Pecans with Orange, for example, are used to garnish butternut squash soup. Destined to be a favorite with cooks and their guests, Shellacked Balsamic Pecans are swirled into vanilla ice cream with strawberries drizzled with additional balsamic vinegar.

Although the recipes are basic (one seasons or coats the nuts before lightly toasting them), the author is knowledgeable about seasonings of the world. Some ingredients, like liquid smoke flavoring and Tabasco sauce, are reminiscent of America’s southwest, while Honey-Cardamom Almonds bring Scandinavia or Middle Eastern cuisines to mind. Sampson has provided readers with an enticing, yet specific, sensible, yet exciting, cookbook.

Sally Ketchum