

Prairie Home Cooking

Judith M. Fertig

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400 Recipes that Celebrate the Bountiful Harvests, Creative Cooks, and Comforting Foods of the American Heartland

Bon Appetit recently noted, “The cooking rooted in the middle of America has finally been ‘discovered’...Not only is this food delicious, but it offers an edible history of the settling of our country as well.” In her cookbook, Fertig offers a comprehensive look at the cuisine of the American Midwest. European immigrants settled this region of the country during the nineteenth century and brought with them traditional recipes from their home countries. Gathered together in this book are foods with German, Scandinavian, Bohemian, French and Italian roots; recipes from the Shakers, the Amish, the Mennonites and the Native Americans; as well as dishes from restaurants in the Heartland and the author’s own family.

The book is divided into twelve chapters with headings such as “A Prairie Pantry”, “The Meat Course”, “Noodles, Dumplings and Savory Pies” and “Dessert At Last”. Most recipes are simple and delicious-sounding, with short lists of basic and harvest-fresh ingredients. There are recipes for fruit butters, mincemeat, jams and jellies. The chapter on meat contains at least four recipes for steak—both pan-fried and grilled—and three for pot roast. The dessert chapter is filled with descriptions of fruit pies and home-made ice cream.

Interspersed throughout the book are anecdotes about Midwestern food: near Cincinnati, the Catholic Telegraphic Register publishes a schedule of chicken dinners held at churches in the Ohio countryside. These dinners are open to the public, and visitors drive for miles to eat fried chicken, potatoes, gravy and an abundance of pies. Fertig also cites authors like Laura Ingalls Wilder, who described her family’s joy at opening a barrel of oysters after a severe winter; and Calvin Trillin, who made Arthur Bryant’s Barbecue in Kansas City famous by calling it “the single best restaurant in the world.”

The foods found in this book are simple and familiar—baked beans, macaroni and cheese, dinner rolls and peach cobbler. They are dishes that many Americans take for granted. Fertig reminds the reader of the many immigrant cultures that created American cuisine. Included with her recipes are short descriptions of each dish’s heritage; the result is a cookbook that is both appetizing and historical.

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