

Southern from Scratch: Pantry Essentials and Down-Home Recipes

Ashley English

Johnny Autry, Photographer

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Drawing from her Appalachian roots and degrees in nutrition, Ashley English's *Southern from Scratch* shows how to stock your kitchen with whole-food goodness, from sweet treats in the freezer to sparkling jars of home-canned pickles.

Once an advocate of a low-fat, vegetarian diet, English evolved a seasonal, slow-foods approach that includes meat but eschews processed products, just like her Nanny and Mamaw did.

Accented with atmospheric color photographs, the cookbook lays out fifty base recipes for preserves, homemade apple cider vinegar, dairy products, and plenty of tempting desserts that rely on natural sweeteners for "a kiss of sweetness, instead of a smack upside the head." Traditional Southern ingredients are highlighted, as are uncomplicated instructions for traditional food preservation techniques like hot-water-bath canning and lard rendering.

Recipes are prefaced with homey, often humorous introductions that recall family lore, Southern culinary history, or treasured kitchen memories. English has a light, down-to-earth writing style that makes the idea of whipping up a batch of pies or home-curing a side of bacon seem like a snap. Several ideas for using recipes are included, so after those jars of Pickled Okra are cooled you can chop them into salads, crown Pecan Coins slathered in Pimento Cheese with them for a quick canape, or use them as stirrers for Spicy Bloody Marys.

Many recipes are whole-food improvements of Southern icons like hush puppies and sonkers, a North Carolina fruit-cobbler cousin. English's recipe for ambrosia is a particularly welcome reiteration of this usually cloying dessert, utilizing a combination of fresh fruit chunks, homemade sour cream, lemon verbena, and coconut. Others recipes show off her creativity, as in Brussels Sprouts Salad enrobed in Apple Butter Vinaigrette.

This volume is an inspiring resource for homesteaders, but even urbanites will like the ideas for putting up seasonal abundance, Southern style. This book is full of tempting foods that will have you reaching for your wooden spoon, cast-iron skillet, and claw hammer (for knocking together another pantry) all at once.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (May/June 2018)

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