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Cooking

The Southwestern Grill: 225 Terrific Recipes for Big and Bold Backyard Barbecue
Michael McLaughlin
Harvard Common Press
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Although McLaughlin's book arrives in the peak of summer, it's destined for year-round discovery and inspiration. His background as a chef and restaurateur in the Southwest and author of two previous cookbooks plus many magazine articles gives McLaughlin the authority and experience to do this book well. The author says that much of what he chooses to grill is because it can be grilled not because it must be. Like a visiting relative from Santa Fe, this book will merrily elbow its way into the reader's backyard barbecue party and transform it from primitive to paradisiacal.

Much to the reader's benefit, McLaughlin is an overachiever. This book is a generous compendium of the fine points of grilling, friendly stories and information on Southwestern foods, things to grill, and of things that go with grilled food. The 200 recipes neatly divide into ten categories: appetizers, starters and snacks; sandwiches and other hand-held foods; main dish salads; fish and shellfish; chicken, turkey, and other poultry; meats; salads, beans and vegetables, and side dishes; desserts; cocktails and coolers; and salsas, sauces, and condiments.

Sunny Southwestern flavors (a mixture of Spanish, Mexican, and Central American influences) find their soulmate in grilling. With dishes like grilled mini crab cakes with mango pico de gallo, warm grilled chile-lime beef salad, herb-rubbed quail and sausage skewers with beans and salsa, or cumin tuna steaks with lime cream and salsa, this book will fan the flames of a weekend griller's smoldering desires into full-time cooking. The condiments and sauces like chipotle-peanut barbecue sauce and grill-roasted green chile tartar sauce bewitch the simplest dishes. Accompanying desserts like tequila mixed berry compote with dulce de leche and warm mango Betty a la mode will seal the affair.

Some cooks might feel overwhelmed when they open this book. Although the recipe titles are complex, the dishes are mostly simple and straightforward, perfect for quick meals. Unfamiliar ingredients like chipotle chiles, prickly pears, Chimayo chile powder, or tamarind

could be a stumbling block for non-Southwestern cooks. The extensive mail order listed at the back of the book and McLaughlin's voice scattered comfortingly throughout will reassure them.

This book will best appeal to men and women with more sophisticated tastes and a love of Southwestern flavors. It will broaden any backyard barbecuer's repertoire. In the midst of winter doldrums cooks will be able to pick it up and like a treasured love letter, feel a tingling of the sweet, bright pleasures of summer.

Nancy K. Allen