

# How to Cook *Everything*<sup>®</sup>

## Christmas

20 Festive Holiday Recipes  
AND 34 VARIATIONS

Mark Bittman

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*Everything*<sup>®</sup>

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# In Good Spirits

Since these days Christmas goes nonstop from Thanksgiving through New Year's, folks are enjoying good cooking—and eating—during the whole month of December. You don't even need to observe Christmas to embrace all the good cheer. For you celebrating may mean a big meal (or several!), hosting or taking food to holiday parties, baking treats for a cookie swap or office party, or giving homemade goodies as gifts—or probably a combination of all of these.

Sure, there's work involved, but holiday cooking can be enormously gratifying, something people look forward to all year. For many of you, the food shared over this period is a way to wish others well and express the importance of your relationships. Even folks who don't cook much can be swept up in the joy of preparing treats and envisioning wonderful menus.

But as with any labor of love, once the calendar starts filling up, it's important to get organized. This one-stop holiday cookbook will help you do exactly that, regardless of how you choose to get in the spirit.

Taking food to parties? Having a few simple make-ahead recipes can be a boon. (Remember that the most important thing to take to the gathering is your smiling presence, not perfectly decorated cookies.) [Cheese Straws](#) are my default finger food: They take less than thirty minutes to make and are always impressive. They also pair perfectly with drinks, as do the untraditional but addictive [Pickled Eggs](#). [Cookies](#) and quick breads can do double duty for serving and gifting, and the latter are a great way to incorporate seasonal ingredients (see [Pumpkin Ginger Bread with Hazelnuts](#) and [Brown Sugar Carrot Bread](#)).

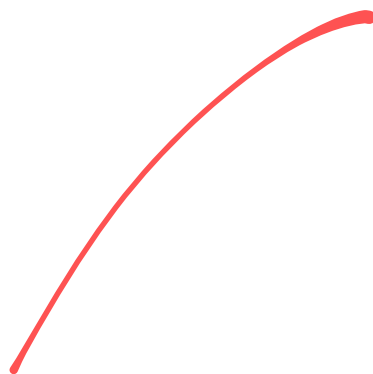
If the spirit moves you to prepare homemade gifts on a grander scale, then try putting together your own [spice blend](#) and then pairing it with a recipe that puts it to good use, like [five-spice powder](#) with [Brittled Popcorn](#). It's fast and easy to package, the flavors of home-ground spices are unbeatable, and the recipients will think of you whenever they dip into it.

The fondest holiday food memories often revolve around baking. Whether you're including the kids or preparing food with friends, it can be a great

pleasure to spend a day messing up the kitchen to make [cookies](#), [bars](#), and other goodies. In addition to decorating them however you please, consider incorporating new flavors; among the recipes and variations included in this ebook are ideas for adding [spices](#), [herbs](#), [nuts](#), [booze](#), and even wintertime [fruits](#) and [vegetables](#) into your favorite recipes to take them into all sorts of kid-friendly and adult directions.

Eventually, the sparkle of parties gives way to the holiday meal itself. It can be fun to try out the special ingredients appearing in the market at this time of year: [Creamy Oyster and Potato Stew](#) is luxury in a bowl (and a meal in itself with some crusty bread and a glass of Champagne on a cold December night). [Port-Glazed Chestnuts](#) are nutty, creamy little gems, while a [roast goose](#), [baked ham](#), or [prime rib](#) is a treat worth celebrating and a festive way to enjoy time with loved ones. With this collection you can do it all—this year, the next, or the next.

However your holiday plays out, I hope you take as much joy in the cooking as in the sharing. Whether big or small, anything you prepare is a gift to yourself and those you love—and the best way I know to get in the spirit of the season.





# Appetizers, Soup, and Salad

# Stuffed Mushrooms

**MAKES:** 4 to 6 servings

**TIME:** 30 to 35 minutes



Gorgeous appetizers, much simpler to make than you might think. Though mushrooms are notoriously dirty, they're easy enough to clean: Rinse them under cold running water or in a salad spinner. (Despite what you may have heard, this doesn't make them soggy.)

¼ cup olive oil

1 pound button mushrooms

1 egg

½ cup bread crumbs, preferably fresh

½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

½ cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

1 tablespoon minced garlic

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

**1** Heat the oven to 400°F. Grease a baking sheet with 2 tablespoons of the oil. Trim off the bottoms of the mushroom stems. Then pull on the stems to separate them, being careful to leave the caps intact. Chop the stems and combine them in a bowl with the egg, bread crumbs, cheese, parsley, garlic, and a sprinkle of salt and pepper.

**2** Stir the remaining oil into the mixture and fluff with a fork. Stuff the mushroom caps with the bread crumb mixture, then put them stuffed side up on the baking sheet.

**3** Bake until the stuffing is browned and crisp on top, 15 to 20 minutes. Let cool a little, then serve, warm or at room temperature, on toothpicks or with napkins.

**Nutty Stuffed Mushrooms.** Use chopped walnuts, pecans, or pistachios instead of bread crumbs and 2 tablespoons melted butter in the stuffing instead of the olive oil.

**Stuffed Mushrooms with Bacon Bread Crumbs.** Omit the cheese. Put 4 bacon slices in a medium skillet over medium-low heat and cook until

crisp but not too brown. After draining, chop the bacon and add to the stuffing along with the oil in Step 2.

## Boosting the Flavor of Nuts

For something that takes virtually no work, nuts really deliver, especially during the holidays, when you might need to set out a casual snack one day or bolster a buffet of finger foods the next. And when you roast and season them yourself, you know they're going to be far fresher than anything from a can or jar. Best of all, you can choose a single nut or a combination, depending on what you like and what you have handy.

To roast nuts, heat the oven to 450°F. Toss 2 cups (about 1 pound) any unsalted shelled nuts in a bowl with 2 tablespoons peanut oil or melted butter and some salt and freshly ground black pepper. Put them on a rimmed baking sheet and cook, shaking the pan once or twice, until lightly browned, 5 to 10 minutes, depending on the size of the nut. After you take them out of the oven, sprinkle with salt while they're still warm and shake the pan again.

For a hit of flavor, toss the roasted nuts with any of the ingredients from the list that follows. Some are more potent than others, so be careful (you don't want to use a tablespoon of cayenne, for example); when in doubt, taste a bit on the tip of your finger to test their strength. Cool before serving; the nuts will crisp as they cool.

1. Chopped fresh herbs
2. Freshly ground black pepper
3. [Chili powder](#)
4. [Five-spice powder](#)
5. Ground sumac
6. Cayenne or hot red pepper flakes
7. [Curry powder](#)

# Cheese Straws

**MAKES:** At least 10 servings

**TIME:** 20 minutes



Our beloved Cheez-Its were originally—of course—based on a real pastry-and-cheese cracker, commonly called *cheese straws*. Homemade, these have become my default finger food for guests, not quite as easy as [roasted nuts](#) but far more unusual and impressive. To make them you basically dump everything into the food processor; you have to cut out the straws by hand, but that doesn't take long either.

8 ounces cheddar or other flavorful hard cheese

5 ounces Parmesan cheese

2 cups all-purpose flour

Pinch cayenne

8 tablespoons (1 stick) chilled butter, cut into chunks, plus a little more for greasing the baking sheet

Few drops ice water if necessary

Coarse salt, optional

**1** Heat the oven to 450°F. Grate the cheese in a food processor, then remove from the bowl. Add the flour and cayenne to the processor and pulse. Add the butter and process to combine the butter and flour; pulse in the cheese. To mix by hand, pinch the butter with the flour mixture between your fingers (or use a pastry blender or 2 forks) until it resembles cornmeal. Then blend in the cheese the same way.

**2** Knead by hand until the dough comes together, adding a few drops of ice water if necessary. (At this point you may wrap the dough well in plastic and refrigerate for up to 2 days.)

**3** Roll the dough out into a rectangle about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick, using flour as necessary (or roll between 2 sheets of plastic wrap), then cut into strips as long as you like and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide. Put on a lightly greased baking sheet and sprinkle with the salt if you like. Bake until golden brown, 5 to 8 minutes. Serve hot, warm, or at room temperature.

# Pickled Eggs with Oranges and Warm Spices

**MAKES:** 6 eggs

**TIME:** 1½ hours, plus 1 day to marinate, largely unattended



There's nothing old-fashioned about the flavors in this classic bar snack, which makes a great partner for holiday cocktails. This could be a new standard for your snack, side dish, and garnish repertoire.

- 6 eggs
- 1½ cups cider vinegar
- 2 oranges, halved and thinly sliced (with the skin)
- 1 tablespoon whole cloves
- 1 tablespoon coriander seeds
- One 3-inch cinnamon stick
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 large onion, halved and thinly sliced

- 1 Fill a saucepan about two-thirds full with water and add the eggs. Bring to a boil, then turn off the heat and cover. The average large to extra-large egg will be ready 9 minutes later. Plunge the eggs into a bowl of ice water (or run the pot under cold running water) for a minute or so, then crack and peel.
- 2 Put the eggs in a roomy glass or crockery bowl or jar (preferably one with a tight-fitting lid).
- 3 Put the vinegar, oranges, cloves, coriander seeds, cinnamon stick, salt, sugar, and onion in a nonreactive pot with 1½ cups water and bring to a boil. Turn the heat down so the mixture bubbles gently and cook until the onion is soft and the spices are fragrant, about 10 minutes.
- 4 Carefully pour the hot mixture over the eggs and let sit at room temperature for an hour or so, until cool. Cover tightly and refrigerate for at least 24 hours before eating. The eggs will keep in the fridge for about a week.

# Creamy Oyster and Potato Stew

**MAKES:** 4 servings

**TIME:** 45 minutes

Adding cream to oysters is gilding the lily, but hey—the holidays are a time to indulge. Oysters have an incredibly delicate flavor and texture, which is why they're so good raw. Lightly poaching them in the warm cream—instead of blasting them over high heat—helps to preserve their natural character.

1 pound small waxy red or white potatoes, halved

Salt

3 tablespoons butter

2 large or 3 medium shallots, sliced

Freshly ground black pepper

½ cup white wine or dry sherry

2 cups cream

16 to 24 oysters, shucked, liquid reserved, those with broken shells discarded (1 quart)

1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon leaves or 2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives

**1** Put the potatoes in a large pot, add a pinch of salt and enough water to cover by 2 inches, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat so the water bubbles vigorously. Cook, stirring once or twice, until the potatoes are just barely tender at the center, 15 to 20 minutes; a paring knife will still meet some resistance when inserted. Drain, reserving 2 cups of the cooking liquid.

**2** Return the pot to medium heat (no need to wipe it out) and add the butter. When it foams, add the shallots, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, until soft and golden, 5 to 10 minutes.

**3** Raise the heat to medium-high, add the wine, and stir until it almost all bubbles away, a minute or two. Add the cream, the reserved oyster liquid and potato cooking liquid, and the potatoes. Bring the mixture just to a boil, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture thickens a little, about 5 minutes, then lower the heat so it barely bubbles.

4 Slip the oysters into the pot, cover, and turn off the heat. After 5 minutes, take a peek; the oysters should be turning opaque; if not, put the lid on for another minute or two. Stir in the tarragon, taste and adjust the seasoning, and serve.



# Fennel and Orange Salad

**MAKES:** 4 servings

**TIME:** 15 minutes



Among the most underrated vegetables, fennel has celerylike crunch and a refreshing anise flavor. Combined with orange, it really shines.

1 pound fennel (1 large or two small bulbs)

3 small oranges or tangerines

Salt

1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lime or lemon juice

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro, basil, or chervil leaves

**1** Trim and core the fennel and cut it into small cubes,  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch or so, or into thin slices (or shave it super-thinly on a mandoline).

**2** Squeeze the juice from one of the oranges, pour it over the fennel, add salt to taste and the lime juice, and let it sit (for up to several hours) while you prepare the other oranges.

**3** Peel the remaining oranges and slice into wheels; then slice in half again, removing any pits and tough, fibrous material. Add the oranges and cilantro to the fennel, toss, taste and adjust the seasoning, and serve.

## Preparing Citrus Wheels

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**1.** Before beginning to peel citrus, cut a slice off both ends of the fruit so that it stands straight.



**2.** Cut as close to the pulp as possible, removing the skin in long strips.



**3.** Cut across any peeled citrus fruit to make “wheels.”

# Poultry

# Classic Roast Turkey with Gravy

**MAKES:** At least 15 servings, plus leftovers

**TIME:** 2½ hours or more



If you cooked your first turkey for Thanksgiving, you're an old hand by now; if not, don't worry. Other holiday dinners somehow don't come with the same hype as that last Thursday in November. The simple method of roasting the bird breast side up the whole time (no turning) works perfectly well, especially if you follow the high-heat method described here, which even results in shockingly moist breast meat. Just remember to leave enough time for the bird to [defrost](#), [cook](#), and rest (this is key) before serving.

You can put some of the [stuffing](#) inside the breast cavity or let the turkey roast on its own and bake the stuffing separately. Without the stuffing, the bird will roast a little faster; in fact, without the stuffing altogether (heresy, I know, but you might consider it), this is as simple as roasting a chicken.

One 12-pound turkey

[Bread Stuffing with Fruit](#), optional

8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter at room temperature or a few tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 cup roughly chopped onion

1 cup roughly chopped carrot

½ cup roughly chopped celery

Stems from 1 bunch fresh parsley, tied together, optional

[Turkey Gravy](#)

**1** Heat the oven to 500°F. Rinse the turkey and remove the giblets. Loosely pack the turkey cavity with the stuffing if you want to stuff the bird, then tie the legs together to enclose the vent. Smear the bird all over with butter or brush it with oil, then sprinkle well with salt and pepper.

**2** Put the turkey on a rack in a large roasting pan. Add ½ cup water to the bottom of the pan along with the turkey neck, gizzard, any other trimmings, and the vegetables and parsley. Put in the oven, legs first if possible.

3 Roast until the top begins to brown, 20 to 30 minutes, then turn the heat down to 350°F. Continue to roast, checking and basting with the pan juices every 30 minutes or so; if the top threatens to brown too much, lay a piece of aluminum foil directly onto it. (If the bottom dries out, add water, about ½ cup at a time; keep at least a little liquid in the bottom of the pan at all times.) The turkey is done when a quick-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the thigh measures 155–165°F. If, when the turkey is nearly done, the top is not browned enough, turn the heat back up to 425°F for the last 20 to 30 minutes of cooking.

4 Remove the turkey from the oven. Take the bird off the rack and make the gravy while the bird rests; let it sit for at least 15 minutes or up to an hour before [carving](#) (just the amount of time it will take to whip up the gravy), longer if you don't mind it at room temperature.

## Turkey Gravy

“Gravy” is little more than thickened stock—essentially a reduction sauce—and when that stock comes from a roasted turkey, it’s pretty good stuff. It’s no wonder people love it. This makes 5 to 6 cups (enough for 12 servings), but double or triple (or quadruple, if it comes to that) as needed.

6 cups [stock](#), preferably turkey, but chicken is fine

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

5 tablespoons butter, optional

$\frac{1}{3}$  cup cornstarch, optional

**1** Remove any giblets from the bottom of your roasting pan and pour or spoon off excess fat (this is a judgment call, but leave at least some fat in there). Leave behind as many of the solids and as much of the dark liquid as possible. Put the roasting pan over 2 burners and turn the heat to high.

**2** Add the stock and cook, stirring and scraping all the brown bits off the bottom of the pan, until the liquid has reduced by about one-quarter, 5 to 10 minutes. (If you’re not using cornstarch and you want a thicker gravy, continue to reduce a little more.) Turn the heat down to medium and continue to simmer for about 5 minutes, tasting and adjusting the seasoning. Strain the liquid into a saucepan, discarding the solids.

**3** Over medium heat, stir in the butter if you’re using it and keep warm until ready to serve. If you’re using cornstarch, mix it with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup cold water, then add to the simmering gravy, stirring constantly. It should thicken almost immediately; serve hot.

## Stock Options

Great gravy comes from great stock, which is reason enough to master making your own. Sure, you can buy the canned stuff (and most gravy recipes will call for just that), but nothing beats homemade. You can use either chicken or turkey parts, though if you're serving with roast turkey, turkey stock is ideal—all you need is a couple thigh or drumstick parts, which are usually available at the supermarket.

Here's what to do: Combine 3 to 4 pounds of chicken or turkey parts with 1 large onion (don't bother to peel), 1 large carrot, 1 celery stalk (all roughly chopped), 1 bay leaf, and several sprigs fresh parsley (if you like) in a large pot with 14 cups water. Turn the heat to high and bring just about to a boil, then lower the heat so the mixture barely bubbles. Cook, skimming and discarding any foam that accumulates, until the poultry is cooked through and just starts to pull from the bone, 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the parts. Cool slightly, then strain, pressing on the meat and solids to extract more juice. Remove the meat from the bones and fat and save it for another use (like chicken or turkey salad); discard the remaining solids. Season with a small sprinkle of salt and pepper. Use the stock immediately or refrigerate (skim off any hardened fat from the surface before using) and use within 3 days or freeze for up to 3 months.



## **Timing for Defrosting Large Birds**

To defrost a turkey in the refrigerator, leave the bird in its package and set in a baking pan to catch any drippings. A faster method is to defrost it in cold water: If the bird is wrapped in paper, remove it; otherwise leave it in the original packaging. Put the turkey in the sink or a big pot filled with cold water; change the water every 30 minutes.

### **6- to 8-pound turkey**

**Defrosting time, refrigerated:** 18 to 24 hours

**Defrosting time, cold water:** 4 to 6 hours

### **10- to 12-pound turkey**

**Defrosting time, refrigerated:** 24 to 36 hours

**Defrosting time, cold water:** 8 to 10 hours

### **14- to 18-pound turkey**

**Defrosting time, refrigerated:** 36+ hours

**Defrosting time, cold water:** 12 to 16 hours

### **18-pound turkey or larger**

**Defrosting time, refrigerated:** 48+ hours

**Defrosting time, cold water:** 18+ hours

## **To Brine or Not to Brine?**

There's been a lot of talk about brining—a technique used most frequently for poultry but also for pork and even shrimp. The thinking behind brining makes sense: Submerge the bird in a saltwater solution for minutes, hours, or days, depending on its size, to promote an exchange of moisture via the process of osmosis. The seasoned water is absorbed, resulting in tastier, moister, and more tender meat.

Brining a whole turkey requires a couple days in a sterile bucket and several cubic feet of prime fridge shelf space or a carefully monitored setup in an ice chest (or, if you're lucky, outside temperatures consistently in the thirties).

Brining is an undeniable hassle, but a simple salting produces almost the same result. Here's how: Liberally sprinkle both sides of the bird with a coarse, pure salt, like kosher or sea salt, and rub it in. (Adding a few herbs at the same time isn't bad either—try a couple tablespoons of chopped fresh thyme and garlic mixed with the salt.) Cover and let it rest on a platter—in the fridge if it will sit for more than an hour or so—for up to 12 hours. Then rinse the meat well, dry, and proceed with the recipe, omitting additional salt until you taste before serving.

## Timing for Roasting Turkey

All these times are approximate, but in most cases—if your turkey is fully defrosted, and your oven is pretty accurate—they'll be close, though probably on the long-and-extremely-safe side. Remember, a quick-read thermometer inserted into the meatiest part of the turkey's thigh will read 155–165°F when the bird is ready to come out of the oven (though [its look](#) and clear juices running from its vent are also good indicators). Remember, too, that the bird must rest for at least 15 minutes before being carved, and the temperature will go up another 5 degrees or so during that time.

### **8- to 12-pound turkey**

**Roasting time, unstuffed:** 2¾ to 3 hours

**Roasting time, stuffed:** 3 to 3½ hours

### **12- to 14-pound turkey**

**Roasting time, unstuffed:** 3 to 3¾ hours

**Roasting time, stuffed:** 3½ to 4 hours

### **14- to 18-pound turkey**

**Roasting time, unstuffed:** 3¾ to 4¼ hours

**Roasting time, stuffed:** 4 to 4¼ hours

### **18- to 20-pound turkey**

**Roasting time, unstuffed:** 4¼ to 4½ hours

**Roasting time, stuffed:** 4¼ to 4¾ hours

### **20- to 24-pound turkey**

**Roasting time, unstuffed:** 4½ to 5 hours

**Roasting time, stuffed:** 4¾ to 5¼ hours

### **24- to 30-pound turkey**

**Roasting time, unstuffed:** 5 to 5¼ hours

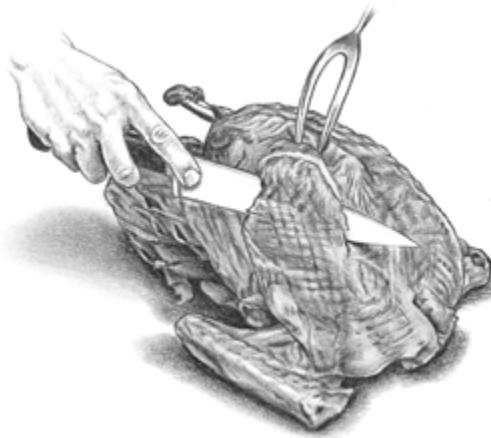
**Roasting time, stuffed:** 5¼ to 6¼ hours

# How to Carve a Turkey

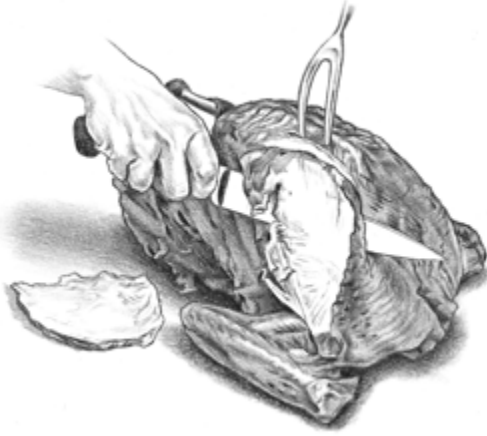
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**1.** First, remove a leg-thigh section by cutting straight down between the leg and carcass and through the joint holding the thigh to the carcass. Repeat on the other side and set aside for the moment.



**2.** Now you have two choices: The easiest is to cut thick slices of white meat from the breast while it's attached to the carcass.



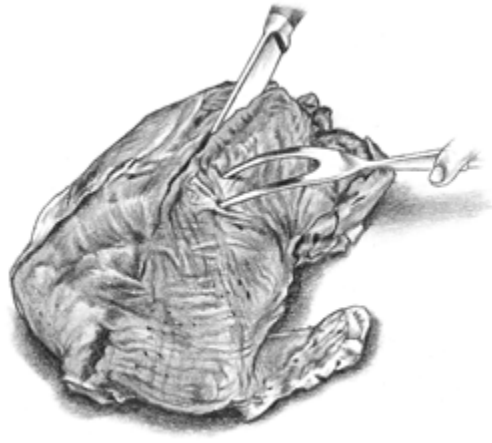
**3.** Or you can remove the breast first; see the [illustrations](#) that follow.



**4.** Cut the wings from the carcass and carve the meat from the leg-thigh section.

## Removing Turkey Breasts

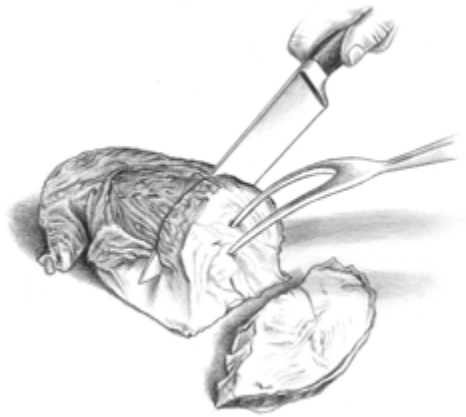
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**1.** To get the most—and the prettiest—slices of white meat, you can remove the breast from the carcass after cutting off the wings, thighs, and legs. Begin by slicing directly down the breastbone.



**2.** Keep the side of the blade pressed against the bone as you free the entire breast.



**3.** Then slice the breasts crosswise as you would a boneless roast.

# Roast Goose

**MAKES:** 6 to 10 servings

**TIME:** About 3 hours

Like duck, goose does not serve many people per pound, but don't let that fool you into thinking this isn't perfect for your holiday table. The rich, dense meat is enormously satisfying, and the skin makes the effort worth it. If you plan on serving lots of people, figure about six servings; you can easily stretch it, though, with a few side dishes. One way to extend the goose is to stuff it as you would a turkey; [stuffings with fruit](#) are best with goose, because the acidity balances the fat nicely. And you can certainly make gravy—much the same way as you would for [turkey](#)—though since the meat is richer, I don't find it essential. Just skim the pan juices and serve them alongside the bird.

1 whole goose, 8 to 10 pounds, excess fat removed

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

- ➊ Heat the oven to 350°F. Prick the goose skin all over with a sharp fork, skewer, or thin-bladed knife; try not to hit the meat (the fat layer is usually about ¼ inch thick). Sprinkle the goose with salt and pepper and put it, breast side down, on a rack in a roasting pan.
- ➋ Put the roasting pan in the oven and roast the goose for 20 minutes, prick the exposed skin again, then roast until it begins to brown, about 20 minutes longer. Turn the goose breast side up, prick again, and baste with some of the accumulated pan juices (there will be plenty). Roast for another hour, pricking the skin and basting 2 or 3 times.
- ➌ Unless the goose is already very brown, raise the heat to 400°F and continue to roast until the meat is done, about another 30 minutes. At that point all juices, including those from the center vent, should run clear and the leg bone should wiggle a little in its socket. When the bird is done, a quick-read thermometer inserted into the thigh will measure about 165°F. [Carve as you would turkey](#) and serve.



# Meat

# Baked Country Ham

**MAKES:** 15 or more servings

**TIME:** 36 hours, largely unattended



This soaked, glazed, and roasted ham is a rare treat worth the extra work, which is sporadic and spans out over the course of a couple days.

One 12- to 15-pound Virginia or other country ham

6 cups assorted chopped aromatic vegetables and herbs or scraps—onions, carrots, parsnips, celery, and parsley, for example

1 tablespoon black peppercorns

Several allspice berries

2 tablespoons cider or other vinegar

4 whole cloves, plus additional cloves, optional for decorating the ham

1 cup orange marmalade or apricot or peach preserves

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard, or more to taste

2 cups or more hard (or nonalcoholic) apple cider or white wine, optional

**1** If the ham is too big to fit into your biggest pot, saw off the shank. Any saw will do; just be patient. (Use the shank for soup; it will be wonderful.) Scrub the ham with a brush under running water, then soak it in cold water to cover for 24 hours in the refrigerator, changing the water once or twice.

**2** Put the ham, vegetables, peppercorns, allspice, vinegar, and 4 cloves in the pot and cover with fresh water. Bring to a boil, lower the heat, and simmer for 2 hours. Cool the ham in its liquid for at least another 2 hours.

**3** Drain the ham, discarding the cooking liquid. Skin the ham, then score the fatty layer in a diamond pattern. Insert a clove into each diamond if you like.

**4** About 1 hour before you're ready to serve, heat the oven to 400°F. Put the ham on a rack in a roasting pan and, in a small saucepan, heat the marmalade over low heat until slightly thinned. Stir in 1 tablespoon or more mustard. Spoon this mixture all over the ham and bake until the outer layer is crisp and brown, about 30 minutes. If you want pan juices with which to top the ham (not necessary—it will be fine with no more than good mustard), add ½ cup of cider or wine to the bottom of the pan at the

beginning of roasting and whenever it threatens to become dry. (You can make the ham up to a day or two ahead: wrap in foil and refrigerate. Reheat in a 300°F oven until piping hot; figure 10 minutes a pound.)

5 Transfer the ham to a platter. To make pan juices, put the roasting pan on 1 or 2 burners over high heat. Add 1 cup of liquid to that already in the pan and cook, stirring and scraping, until the liquid has been reduced by about half and has thickened slightly. Carve the ham and serve with pan juices, mustard, or both.

**Baked Wet-Cured Ham.** Allow about 10 minutes of cooking time per pound. Skip Steps 1 and 2. Score and stud the ham with cloves as in Step 3 if you like. Heat the oven to 350°F and proceed with the recipe.

## Prime Rib Roast for a Small Crowd

**MAKES:** About 6 servings

**TIME:** About 1½ hours, largely unattended

This is a simple roasting technique: high heat to sear the meat, lower heat to cook it through. If you want a really crisp exterior, turn the heat back to 450°F for a few minutes right at the end of cooking; this won't affect the internal temperature too much.

One 3-rib bone-in beef roast, about 5 pounds, trimmed of excess but not all fat

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 or 2 cloves garlic, peeled, optional

1 cup red wine, stock, or water

- ➊ Bring the meat to room temperature by removing it from the refrigerator at least an hour before cooking, preferably two. Heat the oven to 450°F.
- ➋ Put the meat, bone side down, in a large roasting pan. Sprinkle it liberally with salt and pepper. If you like garlic, peel the cloves and cut them into tiny slivers; use a boning or paring knife to poke small holes in the meat and insert the garlic into them.
- ➌ Put the roast in the oven and cook, undisturbed, for 15 minutes. Turn the heat down to 350°F and continue to roast for about 1 hour; check in several places with a quick-read thermometer. The meat is rare when no spot checks in at under 125°F (120°F if you and your guests like meat really rare); cook for another 5 or 10 minutes if you like it more well done, then check again, but in no case let the temperature of the meat go above 155°F.
- ➍ Remove the meat from the oven. Pour off all but a few tablespoons of the fat and put the roasting pan on a burner over high heat. Add the liquid and cook, stirring and scraping up any brown bits, until it is reduced by half, 5 to 10 minutes. Slice the roast (see the [illustrations](#) that follow) and serve, splashing a little of the sauce on the meat platter and passing the rest at the table.

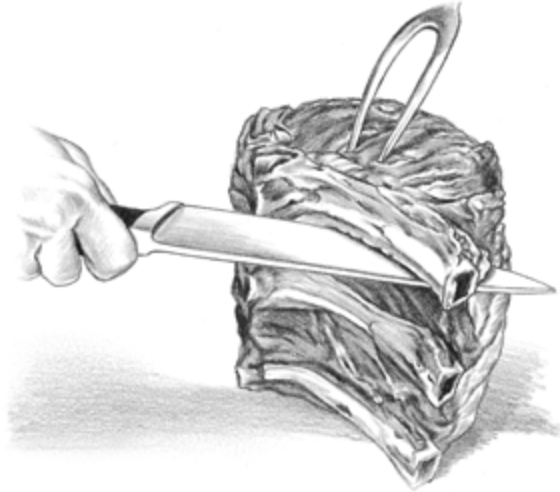
**Prime Rib for a Big Crowd.** With bigger roasts, 5 ribs or more, allow plenty of time to let the meat reach room temperature. In Step 2, use more

garlic if you like. In Step 3, increase the initial browning time to 20 minutes. After that the cooking time will be only marginally longer, but be sure to use a quick-read thermometer in several different places to check the meat. Increase the liquid in Step 4 to at least 2 cups.

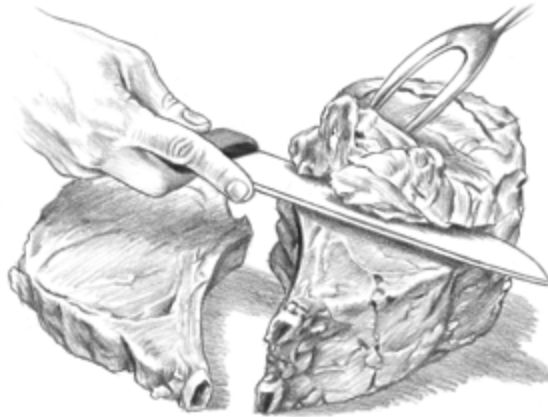
**Boneless Prime Rib.** Have the butcher tie it so that it is of roughly uniform thickness. Cook as directed, using a quick-read thermometer to gauge doneness; total weight won't matter much since there is no bone and the roast is relatively thin. A 3-pound boneless roast is almost certain to be done in less than an hour, so plan accordingly and watch it carefully; a 5- or 6-pound roast won't take a whole lot longer.

## Carving Prime Rib

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**1.** Cut close to the bone, between the ribs, for the first slice.



**2.** Unless you want huge portions, the second slice is boneless.

# Stuffing and Bread

## Bread Stuffing with Fruit

**MAKES:** About 6 cups (enough for a 12-pound bird)

**TIME:** 20 minutes, plus time to bake



This fruity twist on classic dressing is based on a wonderful recipe by James Beard. Feel free to use whole grain bread for more flavor.

- ½ pound (2 sticks) butter
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 6 to 8 cups fresh bread crumbs
- 2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves or 1 teaspoon dried
- 1 bay leaf, finely crumbled
- 1½ cups coarsely chopped pitted prunes
- 2 cups peeled, cored, and diced tart apples
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

- 1** Put the butter in a large, deep skillet or Dutch oven over medium heat. When melted, add the onion and cook, stirring, until it softens, about 5 minutes.
- 2** Add the bread crumbs, thyme, bay leaf, prunes, and apples and toss to mix. Turn the heat down to low. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Toss again; taste and adjust the seasoning. Add the parsley and stir. Turn off the heat. (At this point you may refrigerate the stuffing, well wrapped or in a covered container, for up to a day before proceeding.)
- 3** Stuff into a chicken or turkey (or goose) if you like before roasting or just bake in an ovenproof glass or enameled baking dish for about 45 minutes at 350–400°F. (Or you can cook it up to 3 days in advance and just warm it up right before dinner.)



# Fruit-and-Nut or Vegetable-and-Nut Bread

**MAKES:** 1 loaf

**TIME:** About 1¼ hours



This is the master recipe for making a whole family of [gift-worthy](#) breads, like Cranberry-Pistachio, Sweet Potato-Pecan, or Apple-Walnut—you name it. Some combinations are suggested in the variations and list that follow, but feel free to experiment (you can't really go wrong). If the fruit is really juicy (like peaches), put the pieces in a strainer and let them drain for an hour or so before proceeding. You can experiment with the seasonings as well as the fruit and nuts.

To make muffins or mini loaves, prepare the batter as directed, then divide it among greased baking molds or tins. Increase the oven temperature to 400°F, and bake for 20 to 30 minutes.

Both loaves and muffins make great gifts, so consider multiplying this recipe for big batches. (Refrigerate any remaining batter while batches are baking.) After letting the bread cool, wrap it in cellophane, and tie it with a ribbon and a copy of the recipe. Or put several muffins in a festive tray with butter and jam and bring it to the office or a friend's place for an impromptu party.

4 tablespoons (½ stick) cold butter, plus butter for the pan

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 cup sugar

1½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

¾ cup fruit juice (like orange or apple) or milk

1 tablespoon minced or grated orange or lemon zest

1 egg

1 cup raw fruit or vegetable: berries left whole, anything else peeled and grated

½ cup chopped walnuts or pecans

**1** Heat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 9 x 5-inch loaf pan.

② Stir the dry ingredients together. Cut the 4 tablespoons butter into bits, then use a fork or 2 knives to cut it into the dry ingredients until there are no pieces bigger than a small pea. (Using a food processor makes this step quite easy, but don't use the food processor for the remaining steps or the bread will be tough.)

③ Beat together the juice, zest, and egg. Pour into the dry ingredients, mixing just enough to moisten; do not beat and do not mix until the batter is smooth. Fold in the fruit and nuts, then pour and spoon the batter into the loaf pan. Bake for about an hour, until the bread is golden brown and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Cool on a rack for 15 minutes before removing from the pan.

**Pumpkin Ginger Bread with Hazelnuts.** Different from the usual version, because the pumpkin isn't cooked and puréed first: Grate enough pumpkin or other winter squash to yield 1 loosely packed cup. Use hazelnuts. Instead of the zest, use minced fresh ginger or 1 teaspoon ground.

**Brown Sugar Carrot Bread with Almonds.** Gorgeous color: Instead of granulated sugar, use dark or golden brown sugar. Grate enough carrots to yield 1 loosely packed cup. Use sliced almonds.

## **5 Seasonal Fruit or Vegetable and Nut Combinations**

- 1.** Winter squash and hazelnuts
- 2.** Sweet potatoes and pecans
- 3.** Cranberries and pistachios
- 4.** Persimmons and almonds
- 5.** Apples and walnuts

# Sides

# Red Cabbage with Apples

**MAKES:** 4 servings

**TIME:** About 45 minutes



A must-have for Christmas dinner, easily made the day before and reheated for the big meal. The sweet-and-sour flavoring is the perfect complement to the richer main courses, especially [the goose](#).

Other vegetables you can use: any cabbage.

Other fruit you can use: pears, pitted cherries, or 1 cup pitted and halved prunes.

2 tablespoons neutral oil, like grapeseed or corn

2 pounds red cabbage, trimmed and shredded

3 whole cloves

1½ pounds Granny Smith or other apples, peeled, cored, and cut into chunks

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

½ cup vegetable stock, not-too-dry white wine, apple cider, or water, plus more if needed

1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice or cider or other vinegar, or to taste

**1** Put the oil in a large, deep skillet or saucepan over medium heat. When hot, add the cabbage and the cloves and cook, stirring, until the cabbage becomes quite soft, about 20 minutes; adjust the heat so the cabbage doesn't brown. Add the apples, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, for a minute or two.

**2** Add the stock, turn the heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the cabbage is very tender and the apples are also quite soft but not yet falling apart, 10 to 15 minutes. Add more liquid if necessary.

**3** Add the lemon juice, taste and adjust the seasoning, discard the cloves, and serve hot or at room temperature.

# Glazed Chestnuts

**MAKES:** 4 servings

**TIME:** About 1 hour



Chestnuts are synonymous with Christmastime, so show that holiday spirit with this wonderful way to prepare them whole. They'll be glazed beautifully with the butter or oil and reduced stock. And the richer the stock, the better the dish.

- 1 pound chestnuts, flat side cut (see [illustrations](#))
- 4 tablespoons ( $\frac{1}{2}$  stick) butter or extra virgin olive oil
- 2 shallots or 1 small onion, minced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup dry white wine, optional
- 1 cup stock
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

**1** Put the chestnuts in a pot with lightly salted water to cover and bring to a boil. Turn off the heat after 3 or 4 minutes. Remove a few chestnuts from the water at a time and use a sharp knife to cut off the [outer shell and inner skin](#).

**2** Put half the butter or oil in a large skillet with a lid over medium-high heat. When the butter is melted or the oil is hot, add the shallots and cook until translucent, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the wine if you're using it and cook until almost gone, about 3 minutes. Add the chestnuts, stock, and thyme and sprinkle with a bit of salt and pepper. Turn the heat down to medium, cover, and cook, undisturbed, until the chestnuts are nearly tender, about 5 minutes.

**3** Uncover the skillet, raise the heat to medium-high, and add the remaining butter or oil. Cook, stirring occasionally, until any remaining liquid evaporates and the chestnuts are fully tender, another 5 to 10 minutes. Discard the thyme sprigs, adjust the seasoning, and serve.

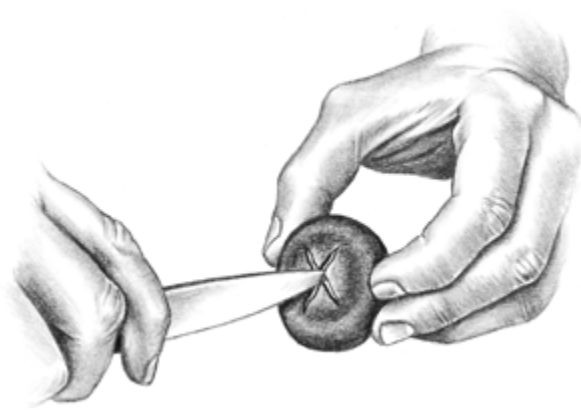
**Port-Glazed Chestnuts.** Tawny and ruby port are both delicious; ruby port will yield sweeter and more ruby-colored results: Substitute 1 cup

port for the wine and half of the stock.

**Creamy Glazed Chestnuts.** Add  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cream once the stock has evaporated; let it boil for a couple of minutes and thicken slightly. Proceed with the recipe.

## Preparing Chestnuts

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**1.** Before cooking a chestnut, score the flat side with a sharp knife, making an X.



**2.** After cooking, remove both outer shell and inner skin. If the peeling becomes difficult, reheat.



# Braised Winter Squash in Caramel Sauce

**MAKES:** 4 servings

**TIME:** 30 minutes



An excellent main dish for a vegetarian meal and a great accompaniment to roast poultry or meat. This dish employs a Vietnamese technique using sugar to create a unique sauce that perfectly balances sweet and bitter flavors. And without the customary fish sauce, it's a great addition to any holiday table.

Other vegetables you can use: sweet potatoes or yams or any waxy potatoes.

1 cup sugar

¼ cup sherry vinegar

2 tablespoons minced garlic

½ cup chopped red onion

1½ to 2 pounds winter squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into 1-inch cubes (about 4 cups)

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon minced fresh chile (like jalapeño or Thai), or to taste, or hot red pepper flakes or cayenne to taste

**1** Put a large, deep skillet with a tight-fitting lid (preferably nonstick or cast iron) over medium heat and add the sugar and a tablespoon or two of water. Cook, occasionally shaking the pan gently, until the sugar liquefies and begins to bubble, about 10 minutes. Cook for another minute or so, until the melted sugar darkens; turn off the heat. Mix the vinegar with ¾ cup water; carefully, and at arm's length, add the liquid and turn the heat to medium-high. Cook, stirring constantly, until the caramel melts into the liquid, about 2 minutes.

**2** Add the garlic and onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until they soften, about 5 minutes. Add the squash, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and stir to coat.

**3** Turn the heat down to medium-low, cover, and cook, undisturbed, for about 3 minutes. Uncover the pan, stir, and cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the sauce thickens and the squash can be pierced easily

with a fork, about 10 minutes. Stir in the chile. Taste, adjust the seasoning, and serve hot or at room temperature.

**Braised Winter Squash in Caramel Sauce with Balsamic Vinegar and Rosemary.** Instead of the sherry vinegar, use  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup balsamic vinegar and decrease the water in Step 1 to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup. In Step 3, instead of the chile, stir in 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary leaves.

# Mashed Potatoes

**MAKES:** 4 servings

**TIME:** About 40 minutes



Starchy potatoes make the fluffiest mash, but Yukon Gold or other all-purpose potatoes do well too. If you like mashed potatoes with the peel, make sure you scrub them well before cooking. If you like them lumpy, mash with a fork or potato masher; if you like them smooth and light, use a food mill or ricer. Just keep them away from mixers, food processors, and blenders, which make them gummy.

Other keys to keeping mashed potatoes fluffy: Cook them whole if possible; cook them with the peel on if possible (the peels will slip off easily after cooking, or you can eat them of course); and refrain from poking them. All of these steps reduce the tendency of the spuds to absorb water, which makes them heavier.

Once the potatoes are mashed and combined with the milk and butter, they will keep for a little while in a double boiler. For even better control over them for timing a full meal, it's easier to boil the potatoes a little ahead of time and let them sit for an hour or so (see Step 1).

2 pounds starchy or all-purpose potatoes

Salt

1 cup milk, plus more if needed

4 tablespoons ( $\frac{1}{2}$  stick) butter

Freshly ground black pepper

**1** Peel the potatoes before cooking if you like. If you're in a hurry, cut the larger ones into halves or quarters. Cut or whole, the idea is to have all the pieces about the same size. Put them in a large, deep pot and cover with cold water. Add a large pinch of salt and bring to a boil. Keep the water rolling until the potatoes are done, anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the size of the pieces and how tender you want them. The potatoes are done when a skewer or sharp knife inserted into one meets almost no resistance. (The potatoes can be prepared to this point up to an hour in advance; just leave them in a colander to drain and dry out a bit.)

② While the potatoes are draining, wipe the pot dry and put it back on the stove over medium-low heat. Add the milk and butter and sprinkle with salt and pepper.

③ When the butter is almost melted, remove the pot from the heat. Rice the potatoes or run them through a food mill set over the pot or add them directly to the milk mixture and mash with a fork or potato masher. Return the pot to the heat and stir constantly with a wooden spoon to reach the desired consistency, adding more milk if necessary. Taste, adjust the seasoning, and serve.

**“Smashed” Potatoes.** Omit the milk. In Step 3, add the potatoes directly to the melted butter in the pan and mash roughly with a fork or masher, leaving lots of lumps. Stir a few times, adding more butter if you like.

**Garlicky Mashed Potatoes.** Peel 1 or 2 heads of garlic (or even 3 if you’re a fanatic) and boil them along with the potatoes. If you want a stronger garlic mash, add a teaspoon or a tablespoon of minced garlic along with the milk and butter.

**Mashed Sweet Potatoes.** Substitute sweet potatoes for the all-purpose potatoes. Add 1 tablespoon cinnamon or 1 teaspoon nutmeg for extra flavoring and sweeten with a little maple syrup to taste if you’d like.

## **More Ways to Flavor Mashed Potatoes or Sweet Potatoes**

If you want to try new flavors for your holiday meal, mashed potatoes (or sweet potatoes) are a great palette to start with. Beyond milk and butter, there are infinite ways to customize them. Some involve simply adding ingredients to the finished mash, while others require incorporating seasonings earlier in the process. You can mix and match as you like of course, but be careful not to fuse too many strong flavors.

### **Add to the butter as it melts (Step 2):**

- Chopped fresh onion, any kind: up to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup
- Minced fresh shallots: up to  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup
- Roasted garlic, peeled: 1 or more heads
- Minced or grated fresh ginger: 1 to 2 tablespoons
- Minced fresh chile (like jalapeño or Thai), or hot red pepper flakes or cayenne, to taste
- Grated fresh or prepared horseradish: 2 tablespoons or more to taste

### **Stir into the mashed potatoes as they heat (Step 3; reduce the milk to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup, you can always add more later):**

- Chopped fresh light herbs like parsley, mint, chives, basil, or cilantro: up to 1 cup
- Grated cheese, virtually any that will melt, like Parmesan, Gruyère, Cheddar, Jack, or Gouda: up to 1 cup
- Fresh goat cheese: up to 1 cup
- Cream cheese: up to 1 cup
- Sour cream: up to 1 cup
- Traditional pesto or any herb purée: up to 1 cup
- Chopped nuts, any kind: up to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup

- Chopped pitted olives: up to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup
- Ketchup (sounds crazy but it's delicious):  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup or so
- Barbecue sauce:  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup or so
- Mustard: up to  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup
- Crumbled bacon or sausage, any kind: up to 1 cup

**Use to top mashed potatoes at the table:**

- A dollop of sour cream and a sprinkling of minced chives or other fresh herbs
- A spoonful of pesto or any herb purée or sauce
- A ladleful of [gravy](#).

# Desserts

# Aunt Big's Gingersnaps

**MAKES:** 4 to 5 dozen

**TIME:** About 40 minutes, plus time to chill



Not too sweet—in fact, bordering on savory—these gingersnaps are super-crisp, the kind that stick in your teeth. “The dough is also great undercooked,” says my friend Sally, who is Aunt Big’s niece. Try these with [Vanilla or Maple Buttercream Frosting](#) or drizzle with [Orange Glaze](#). An added bonus: kids will enjoy helping to make and decorate the [Gingerbread Men](#) variation.

½ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened  
1 cup sugar  
1 cup molasses  
1 heaping teaspoon baking soda  
3½ cups all-purpose flour  
1 heaping tablespoon ground ginger  
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon  
Pinch salt

- 1 Use an electric mixer to cream together the butter, sugar, and molasses until smooth. Mix the baking soda with 2 tablespoons hot water and beat into the dough.
- 2 Combine the flour, spices, and salt in a bowl. Add the dry ingredients to the dough and beat well. Shape the dough into 2 long logs, wrap in wax paper, and refrigerate for several hours or overnight (or wrap very well in plastic and freeze indefinitely; you can proceed to Step 3 with still-frozen dough).
- 3 Heat the oven to 350°F. Slice the cookies as thin as you can and bake on ungreased baking sheets until golden around the edges, about 10 minutes, watching carefully to prevent burning. Use a spatula to transfer the cookies to a rack to cool. Store in a tightly covered container at room temperature for up to several days.



**Gingerbread Men.** For softer cookies, remove the dough from the oven when the center is still puffy and soft. Shape the dough into a disk and remove from the refrigerator about 15 minutes before rolling it; heat the oven. When the dough is slightly softened, roll it out as thinly as possible; hand-cut if you're brave or use a gingerbread man cutter. Bake as directed, then cool. Decorate, if you like, with small candies and [Vanilla Glaze](#). Store in a tightly covered container at room temperature for up to several days.

**Molasses-Spice Cookies.** Add  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg,  $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon ground cloves, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon ground allspice along with the spices in Step 2.

# Refrigerator (or Rolled) Cookies

**MAKES:** At least 3 dozen

**TIME:** 30 minutes, plus time to chill



Refrigerating this dough gives you a stiff consistency that's perfect for rolling and cutting out Christmas cookies. Alternatively, you can roll the dough into a log and then slice off rounds. Make batches of dough ahead of time, freeze it, and they're cookies-on-call, ready to be sliced off the log or thawed, rolled, and cut. Generally, rolled cookies are more crumbly and less chewy than drop cookies. But if you want them on the chewy side, underbake them by a couple of minutes, removing them from the oven while the center is still a little soft.

The dough can be varied endlessly (a great time-saver for those neighborhood cookie swaps); add chopped nuts or dried fruit, shredded coconut or grated lemon zest to the finished dough. Top with [Vanilla Glaze](#) and sprinkles; smear with any [Buttercream Frosting](#); or drizzle with [Orange Glaze](#).

½ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened, plus butter for the baking sheets

1 cup sugar

1 egg

3 cups all-purpose flour, plus flour for the work surface

Pinch salt

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 tablespoon milk, or as needed

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

- 1 Use an electric mixer to cream together the butter and sugar; add the egg and beat until well blended.
- 2 Combine the flour, salt, and baking powder in a bowl. Add the dry ingredients to the dough, adding a little milk at a time as needed to make the dough just soft enough to handle. Stir in the vanilla.
- 3 Shape the dough into a disk (for rolled cookies) or a log (for sliced cookies), wrap in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours and up to 2 days (or wrap very well and freeze indefinitely).

4 Heat the oven to 400°F. Cut the dough disk in half. Lightly flour a work surface and a rolling pin and roll gently until about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick, adding flour as necessary and turning the dough to prevent sticking. Cut with any cookie cutter. (To slice, simply cut slices about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick from the chilled or frozen log.)

5 Bake on lightly greased baking sheets, until the edges are lightly brown and the center set, for 6 to 10 minutes. Cool for about 2 minutes on the sheets before using a spatula to transfer the cookies to a rack to finish cooling. Store in a tightly covered container at room temperature for no more than a day or two.

**Peanut Butter Cookies.** In Step 1, cream  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup peanut butter with the butter and sugar. You can use smooth or crunchy peanut butter as you like. You can also add about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chopped peanuts (try those with salt for an interesting change), along with the vanilla, in Step 2.

**Rosemary Sugar Cookies.** A sophisticated cookie that will please adults and kids: Substitute 1 teaspoon finely minced fresh rosemary (or  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon crushed dried) for the vanilla extract. Proceed with the recipe; sprinkle the cookies with coarse or raw sugar halfway through baking.

**Brown Sugar and Salt Cookies.** Use a nice sea salt or similar: substitute brown sugar for the white sugar. Proceed with the recipe; sprinkle each cookie with just a tiny pinch of sea salt halfway through baking.

# Brittled Popcorn

**MAKES:** About 8 servings

**TIME:** About 30 minutes, plus time to cool



A classic and simple candy that can be whipped up in no time and [varied](#) with the addition of different nuts, seeds, and spices. Eat it straight or chop it up and sprinkle it on ice cream. The brittled popcorn gives you nice clusters of crunchy popcorn, while the nut brittle variations result in the more traditional flat pieces. And since this recipe makes some extra popcorn, you can snack while you make the candy.

2 tablespoons neutral oil, like grapeseed or sunflower

½ cup popping corn

Butter for greasing the pan

2 cups sugar

Pinch salt

- ❶ Put the oil in a large, deep saucepan (6 quarts or so) with a lid over medium heat. Add 3 kernels of corn and cover. When the 3 kernels pop, remove the cover and add the remaining corn. Cover and shake the pot, holding the lid on as you do so. Cook, shaking the pot occasionally, until the popping sound stops, about 5 minutes.
- ❷ Grease a large baking pan, preferably one with a low rim, with butter.
- ❸ Put the sugar and ⅓ cup water in a small saucepan over low heat. Cook, without stirring, until the sugar dissolves and starts to color. (If you like, use a brush dipped in water to wash the sugar crystals off the sides of the pot.) Keep cooking until the caramel turns golden but not dark brown, anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes. Put 4 cups of the popcorn into a big heatproof bowl.
- ❹ Drizzle the hot sugar syrup over the popcorn, sprinkle with salt, and toss to coat—you must work quickly so the sugar doesn't harden. While warm, spread the mixture onto the prepared pan, breaking up the large chunks. Let the brittle cool, then break it into pieces or leave it as is. Store in a covered container for several days.

**Nut Brittle.** The classic, any way you like it: Substitute 2 cups nuts for the popcorn. [Roasted nuts](#) are best (especially hazelnuts and peanuts, which can also be peeled if you like). In Step 3, spread the nuts and sugar syrup mixture on a baking sheet. Cool, then break into pieces. (If you like, you can score the brittle with a knife when it has solidified slightly but not yet turned hard; that way, it will break into even squares.)

**Chocolate-Nut Brittle.** An excellent holiday treat to give away: Make the preceding Nut Brittle variation. Drizzle the brittle with some melted semisweet, milk, or white chocolate after the brittle has cooled fully but before you break it into pieces. Put it in the refrigerator or freezer to harden, then break it up.

## 6 Other Things to Add to Brittle

Mix and match as you like—sesame seeds with five-spice powder and macadamia with coconut are both good, for example—but keep it simple so the flavors don't muddy.

1. 2 cups nuts (I like salted nuts in brittle, but you can go either way): peanuts (classic, of course), almonds, walnuts, pecans, macadamia, cashews, or pistachios
2. 1 cup seeds: white and/or black sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, or poppy seeds
3. 2 cups unsweetened shredded coconut
4. 2 cups chopped dried fruit: raisins, dates, cherries, pineapple, or apricots
5. 1 to 2 teaspoons ground or crushed spices: cinnamon, [five-spice powder](#), allspice, nutmeg, cardamom, or black or pink peppercorns
6. ¼ to ½ cup crushed espresso beans

## Spice Mixtures as Gifts

Everyone enjoys receiving homemade goodies at this time of year. Cookies are traditional and lovely, but if you want to mix it up a bit, try mixing your own spice blend; your loved ones will think of you each time they reach for a pinch. The flavor far surpasses store-bought versions, and you can easily double or triple the quantity—useful when you need gifts for the whole gang. Look for small jars—or just tie a ribbon around a pretty plastic bag—and attach your favorite recipe for them to test.

**Chili Powder.** Perfect for dusting on [Cheese Straws](#) or [roast nuts](#) or even sprinkled on some vanilla ice cream for a kick.

Put ½ cup ground ancho, New Mexico, or other mild dried chile, 2 teaspoons cayenne (or to taste), 2 teaspoon black peppercorns, 2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons cumin seeds, 2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons coriander seeds, and ¼ cup dried Mexican oregano in a skillet over medium heat. Toast, shaking the pan occasionally, until the mixture is fragrant, 3 to 5 minutes. Grind in batches in a spice or coffee grinder until powdery. Store in a tightly covered container for up to several weeks. Makes about 1 cup.

**Fragrant Curry Powder.** A mild and complex spice mix, perfect when you're looking for loads of flavor without heat. Try sprinkling some on [roast nuts](#) or stirring into [Mashed Potatoes](#).

Use ½ teaspoon nutmeg pieces, seeds from 10 cardamom pods, 6 whole cloves, two 3-inch cinnamon sticks, 1 tablespoon black peppercorns, ¼ cup cumin seeds, ½ cup coriander seeds, 4 bay leaves, 4 dried curry leaves (optional), and 2 teaspoons ground fenugreek. Put all the ingredients except the fenugreek in a medium skillet over medium heat. Cook, shaking the pan occasionally, until lightly browned and fragrant, just a few minutes; for the last minute of cooking, add the fenugreek. Cool, then grind to a fine powder in a spice or coffee grinder. Store in a

tightly covered opaque container for up to several months. Makes about 1 cup.

**Five-Spice Powder.** The name doesn't lie—only five ingredients in this Asia-inspired mixture. Sichuan peppercorns make this spice blend unforgettable. This tiny fruit pod (it's not really a peppercorn but the flowers of a small tree) has an unusual smoky, citrusy flavor. Use this in stir-fries, on [roasted nuts](#), and even sprinkled on desserts, like [Refrigerator \(or Rolled\) Cookies](#) and [Brittled Popcorn](#).

Combine  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup Sichuan peppercorns or black peppercorns, 24 star anise, 2 tablespoons cloves, four 3-inch cinnamon sticks, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup fennel seeds; add in batches to a spice or coffee grinder and grind to a fine powder. Store in a tightly covered opaque container for up to several months. Makes about 1 cup.



# Boozy Apple Cake

**MAKES:** 1 9 x 13-inch cake (12 to 16 servings)

**TIME:** About 1 hour



This toffee-style soaked cake is gooey, fruity, and relatively familiar, whether you finish it with the bourbon or vanilla cake soak. (If you prefer a more traditional approach, simply substitute [Vanilla Buttercream Frosting](#).) The recipe makes a large cake, perfect for entertaining. And as we know from carrot cake, you can get excellent results using vegetables in cakes, so be sure to check out the nontraditional variations.

12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) butter, softened, plus butter for greasing the pan

2 medium apples peeled, cored, and quartered

1½ cups sugar

2½ cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

4 eggs

½ cup milk

[Boozy Cake Soak](#)

**1** Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 9 x 13-inch pan with a little butter. Put the apples in a blender or food processor with ½ cup of the sugar and pulse a few times to purée. You should have about 1 cup. (Save any extra for another use, like to flavor yogurt.)

**2** Combine the flour, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl. In a separate bowl, use an electric mixer to beat the 1½ sticks butter and the remaining 1 cup sugar until creamy. Add the eggs one at a time and beat until light and smooth. Beat in the apple purée. Mix in about a third of the flour mixture, followed by about half of the milk; add another third of the flour, followed by the rest of the milk, then finally the last of the flour. Stir gently until the batter just evens out.

**3** Turn the batter into the prepared pan and bake for 45 to 50 minutes, until the middle is set (your fingers should leave only a small indentation when you gently press the cake). Meanwhile, prepare the cake soak. Leave the

cake in the pan. Cool for about 10 minutes, then pour the cake soak all over the top; let it sit for at least an hour before serving. Store at room temperature, covered with wax paper, for up to 2 days; use plastic wrap and it will keep for an extra day or so.

**Beet Cake with Orange Glaze.** Substitute 2 medium raw beets for the apples (peel and quarter them before puréeing). Instead of the cake soak, prepare 1 recipe [Orange Glaze](#) . Proceed with the recipe, except instead of finishing with the soak, let the cake cool completely, then glaze.

**Parsnip or Carrot Cake with Vanilla Buttercream Frosting.** Another sweet vegetable that should get more play in desserts: Substitute parsnips (or carrots) for the apples and add ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg to the dry ingredients if you like. Prepare 1 recipe [Vanilla Buttercream Frosting](#). Proceed with the recipe, except instead of finishing with the soak, let the cake cool completely, then frost.

**Fennel Cake with Grapefruit Glaze.** With a subtle anise flavor: Substitute finely chopped fennel for the apples, grapefruit zest for the lemon zest, and prepare 1 recipe [Grapefruit Glaze](#) instead of the cake soak. Proceed with the Beet Cake variation above.

## Boozy Cake Soak

If you've never soaked a cake before, you're missing a real treat. The process turns it into something else entirely, almost like a pudding, only with more structure. This soak is for adults only. Using real vanilla beans here is key; the rich flavor can't be replicated by vanilla extract. That doesn't mean you can't use vanilla extract, but don't expect the same results.

For an even boozier version, combine the sugar, butter, and vanilla; cook and let sit, then add the alcohol.

- 1 cup bourbon or Calvados, whiskey, brandy, cognac, limoncello, or any compatible liquor
- 1 cup sugar
- 4 tablespoons ( $\frac{1}{2}$  stick) butter
- 2 vanilla beans or 2 tablespoons vanilla extract

**1** Put the liquor, sugar, and butter, and vanilla extract in a small saucepan. Or if using vanilla beans, split the beans in half lengthwise and use a small sharp knife to scrape the seeds into the butter mixture; add the pod. Cook at a slow bubble, whisking frequently, until the sugar is dissolved and the liquid is slightly thickened, about 10 minutes. Let it cool to room temperature, then remove and discard the pod.

**2** Use as directed in the preceding recipe. Or put the soak in a jar and refrigerate for a day or two; bring to room temperature before using.

# Double-Chocolate Bars

**MAKES:** About a dozen squares

**TIME:** 40 minutes



Somewhere between a brownie, a cookie, and fudge.

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened, plus a little butter for the greasing pan

3 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar

1 egg

Pinch salt

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup all-purpose flour

1 cup chopped white, milk, or semisweet chocolate

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup chopped walnuts or pecans, optional

**1** Heat the oven to 350°F. Grease an 8- or 9-inch square baking pan or line it with aluminum foil and grease the foil.

**2** Melt the butter and unsweetened chocolate over low heat. Transfer to a bowl and use an electric mixer to beat in the sugar until very smooth, then beat in the egg, scraping down the sides of the bowl every now and then if necessary.

**3** Add the salt, then gently stir in the flour, chocolate chunks, and nuts if you're using them. Pour into the prepared pan and bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until just barely set in the middle (if it looks like they're baking unevenly, rotate the pan about halfway through the baking). It's better to underbake the bars than to overbake them. Cool on a rack before cutting. Store, covered and at room temperature, for no more than 1 day.

**Chocolate Peppermint Bars.** Great for the holidays: Add  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon peppermint extract and/or  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup crushed peppermint candies or candy canes; stir into the batter along with the salt in Step 3. Proceed with the recipe.

**Chocolate Cranberry or Cherry Bars.** Bits of sweet-tart dried fruit contrast with the rich chocolate: Substitute dried cranberries or cherries for the nuts.

**Chocolate Swirl Bars.** Cream cheese is swirled into the batter: Add 8 ounces softened cream cheese,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup additional sugar, and another egg; beat them together until soft and well combined. Proceed with the recipe, putting the chocolate batter in the pan as directed in Step 3, then adding the cream cheese mixture in dollops; use a knife tip to swirl it into the batter.

## Decorating Holiday Treats

For holiday cookies, or any dessert where you want to add richness, flavor, moisture, and sweetness. Decorating should be fun: Mix and match the icings to vary flavors and colors and don't forget other fun decorations (like jimmies and colored sugar), as well as chopped nuts, grated citrus zest, and even a finishing sprinkle of coarse salt or spice mixture.

To decorate the cookies, wait until they are cool; then just leave them on the rack so the excess glaze drips away. Pour from the tip of a spoon to coat or move the spoon back and forth to quickly drizzle a zigzag pattern (a nice effect on the [Double-Chocolate Bars](#)).

Before packing cookies and bars for gifts, let the icing and other decorations set and harden a bit. Sturdy jars and tins provide the most protection, with the benefit of being airtight. The gooiest treats are best arranged in single layers, or stacked with sheets of parchment, tissue, or wax paper in between. Or you can fill a seasonal platter or cookie tray and wrap the whole thing in cellophane and ribbon.

**Vanilla Glaze.** Perfect for decorating [Gingerbread Men](#). Combine  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cream, milk, or a combination,  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, 3 cups confectioners' sugar, and a pinch of salt. Beat until combined and smooth; it should be about the consistency of thick maple syrup—just pourable. Add more sugar to make the glaze thicker; tint with a few drops of food coloring if you'd like. Use immediately or store, covered, in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

**Orange or Grapefruit Glaze.** Nearly any citrus can be used (tangerine and blood orange are both nice). Use 1 tablespoon zest and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup fresh juice; combine these with 3 cups confectioners' sugar, a pinch of salt, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon vanilla extra if you want, and beat until smooth. It should be just

pourable (like thick maple syrup) or thicker if you want to spread it on or sandwich it between cookies. Add more sugar to make the glaze thicker. Use immediately or store, covered, in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

**Vanilla Buttercream Frosting.** There is no easier frosting, and it's flexible enough to pair well with just about any cake, cupcake, or cookie. Cream is best here, but you can use milk if you prefer. Use a fork or an electric mixer to cream 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter. Gradually work in 4 cups confectioners' sugar, alternating with 6 tablespoons cream or milk and beating well after each addition. Stir in 2 teaspoons vanilla extract and pinch of salt. If the frosting is too thick to spread, add a little more cream, a teaspoon at a time. If it's too thin (unlikely, but possible), refrigerate; it will thicken as the butter hardens. Tint with a few drops of food coloring if you'd like.

**Chocolate Buttercream Frosting.** Use [Vanilla Buttercream Frosting](#) as a starting point. Add 2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, melted over very low heat in a double boiler (or microwave) and cooled, to the mixture after adding about half of the sugar.

**Maple Buttercream Frosting.** Thinner than the usual buttercream; use for cakes or spread on pancakes, waffles, and French toast. Use [Vanilla Buttercream Frosting](#) as a starting point. Substitute  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup maple syrup for half the confectioners' sugar. Omit the vanilla. Proceed with the recipe, then refrigerate the frosting to solidify it somewhat before using.

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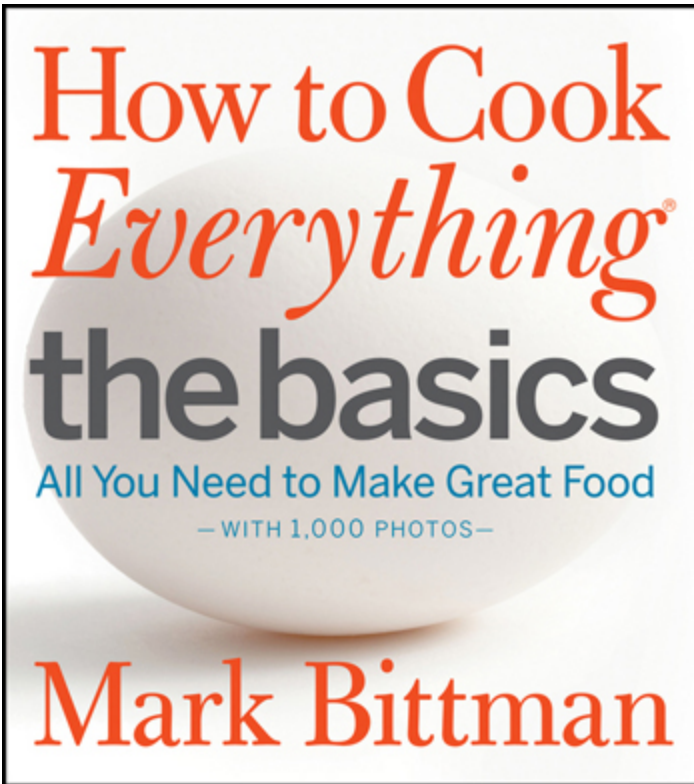
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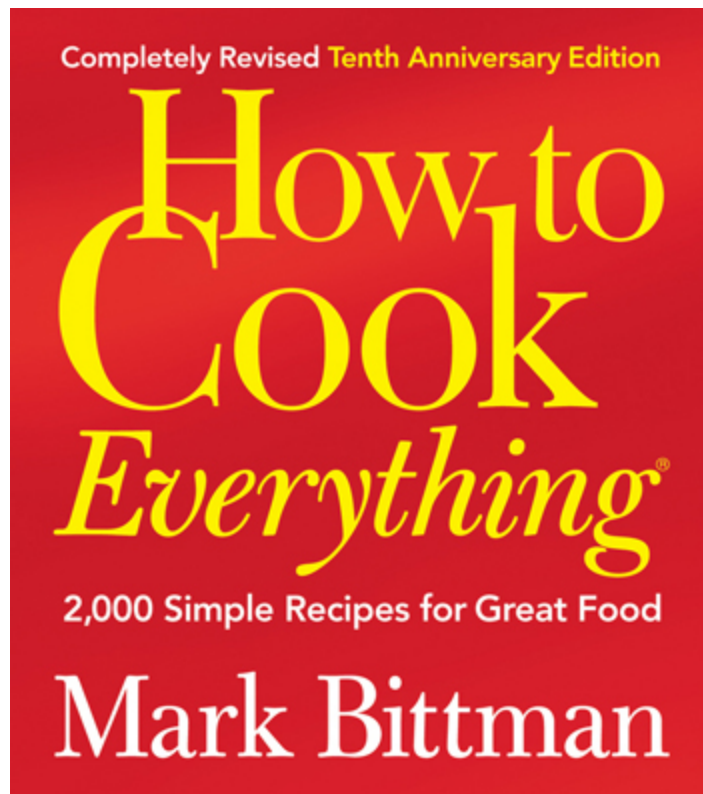
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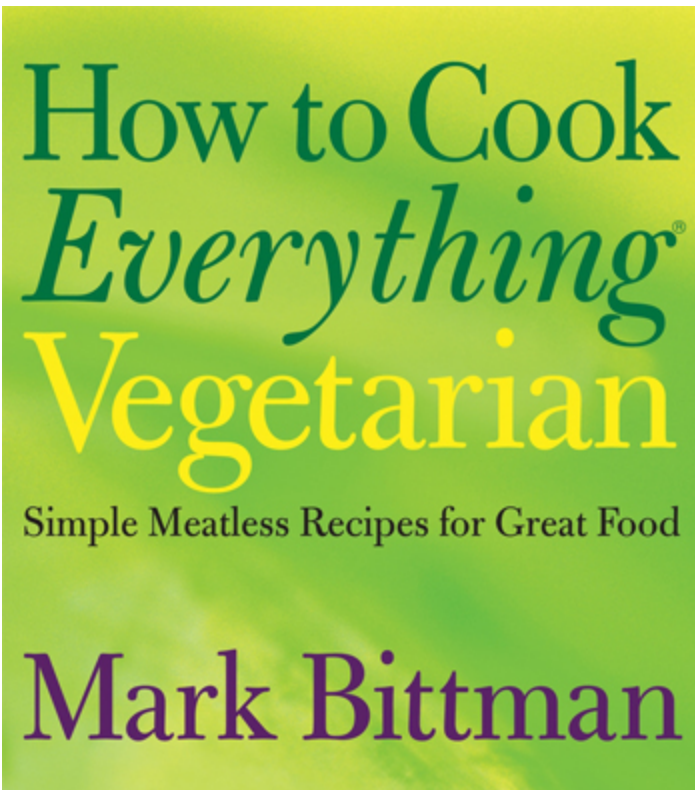
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