

Understanding the NY Times Cooking Section

Dave Salorio



NYT Recipes – an introduction



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- In this case also: “Tell me what you read and I’ll tell you what you eat”

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- 3 Purposes:
 - Get a sense of how NYT writers describe food and cooking
 - Describe the content of the newspaper’s cooking section
 - Create a new method for recommending recipes to readers

Recipe Example: “Spicy Red Lentil Soup with Chorizo and Kale”

This recipe, adapted from “The Alaska from Scratch” Cookbook,” by Maya Wilson, transforms a brothy lentil soup into a spicy, warming main dish with the addition of fresh Mexican-style chorizo and chopped kale. This simple winter dinner also features carrots, which grow unusually sweet in Alaska's summer light and temperatures, and are a root-cellar staple. Sweet or spicy Italian sausage works well as a substitute for the chorizo.

Featured in: [Finding Produce In Alaska's Long Winter Takes Wiles And Luck.](#)



Meredith Heuer for The New York Times

Topics

- The best topics came from using
 - WordNetLemmatizer to simplify the text
 - Tf-idf Vectorizer to get the 'bag of words' prepared
 - NMF to model
- 10 topics with 10 features:
 - **Salad:** salad, oil, olive, olive oil, green, dressing, garlic, lemon, pepper, herb
 - **Baked Goods:** cake, chocolate, frosting, layer, batter, pan, dessert, chocolate cake, moist, day
 - **Mediterranean:** tomato, sauce, pasta, tomato sauce, summer, fresh, cheese, bread, eggplant, fresh tomato
 - **Technique, Pie & Fruit Desserts, Meat, Beans & Soups, White & Sweet Potatoes, Dairy Desserts, Grains**



Mapping “Spicy Red Lentil Soup with Chorizo and Kale” to new Topics

- Maps to 5 Main Topics
- Salad
 - salad, oil, olive, olive oil, green, dressing, garlic, lemon, pepper, herb
- Fruit Desserts
 - pie, dough, butter, wa, sweet, fruit, sugar, flour, crust, drink
- Beans & Soups
 - bean, green, soup, green bean, white, black, white bean, black bean, pea, red
- Fresh Mediterranean
 - tomato, sauce, pasta, tomato sauce, summer, fresh, cheese, bread, eggplant, fresh tomato
- Sweet And White Potatoes
 - potato, mashed, sweet potato, mashed potato, sweet, cheese, soup, gratin, sour cream, butter

Recommender- Current NYT Version vs Text Analysis

- Using the recipe for “Spicy Red Lentil Soup with Chorizo and Kale”
- Manually tagged:

Mexican, Soups And Stews, Chorizo, Kale, Red Lentil, Easy, Main Course, Winter

- Website suggests recipes with similar tags:



- Text Analysis method uses topics and cosine similarity to find similar recipes

You Might Like

Risotto With Spring Carrots and Leeks

MARTHA ROSE SHULMAN

YIELD Serves four to six

TIME 45 minutes

You can get carrots and leeks year ‘round in the supermarket. In the spring, though, new carrots and leeks, fresh and sweet, come to farmers’ markets, and they’re perfect for this risotto.

Featured in: [Risottos Perfect For Spring Vegetables](#).

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If You Like Salty Dog

SARA BONISTEEL

YIELD 1 drink

TIME 5 minutes

The Salty Dog is a Greyhound cocktail with salt — hence the name. Craig Claiborne first brought the recipe to *The Times* in 1968 for a Fourth of July barbecue feature. While his version calls for adding salt to the drink, other recipes salt the rim of the glass instead; see the variation below.

 Save To Recipe Box



You Still May Not Like the Top Recommendation

Roasted Asparagus Frittata

MARK BITTMAN

YIELD 2 servings

TIME 25 minutes

Asparagus begs to be roasted; this recipe was developed after roasting a couple pounds and using them in a bunch of different dishes over a few days. This was the favorite, and frankly, the uber-favorite was this in a sandwich.

[More spring recipes.](#)

Featured in: [Spring's Opening Act](#).

🕒 **LEARN:** [How to Cook Asparagus](#)

🕒 **LEARN:** [How to Cook Eggs](#)

🔖 Save To Recipe Box



But You Might Like the Third Recommendation

Albertine Cocktail

ROSIE SCHAAP

What I want now are cocktails reflective of the changing of seasons: a little moody and weird, both as bitter and as sweet as autumn itself, and as evocative and transporting as a Kurt Weill song. They're suggestive of the Weimar Republic era from which his music emerged — drinks I could imagine Sally Bowles knocking back.

Featured in: [Come September](#).

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Improving the NY Times' Recommendations

- Don't stop tagging
- Incorporate topic modeling to find non-obvious tags