

Title:

How to create a family heirloom cookbook

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Summary:

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Article Body:

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A family heirloom recipe book is a wonderful way to combine favorite dishes and family folklore. According to Cheryl Wolf, a performance artist and graphic design instructor at The New England Institute of Art, "Family recipes are a valuable resource for a family history. I have built an entire performance around my family's recipes and the stories they evoke! "Breaking bread" together is life-affirming. What better way to reach back and bring personal history to the present?"

Wolf adds, "A family recipe is also a family history, and can be a wonderful work of folk art." For example, she says, take the opportunity to not only write down family recipes for generations to come, but include famous family stories (every family has them), photos and memorabilia as well.

But how to turn family culinary gems into actual recipes? Try these few tips: "Start with a family letter, asking everyone to send back one or more of their 'specialties' by a particular date. Ask those who can to reply by email so you can cut and paste recipes right into your final document."

If you have a relative who never writes down recipes (it seems like all the best recipes are never written down), but rather cooks by "a dash of this, a little bit of that," consider having someone in your family be the "helper," and prepare the dish along with them. The "helper" should measure, guesstimate, and generally keep track of how the dish is prepared, including cooking times and temperatures. The "helper" should also be sure to ask about consistency, color, texture and doneness. "This last bit of information is always the most important part of passing along a recipe." Once you have a written recipe, prepare it again according to the directions, and adjust the recipe as necessary to get as close as possible to the original.

When you are asking for recipes, provide everyone with a similar format. For example, ask family members to list the ingredients to be used in order, together with the quantities. Lay out the steps that are needed in order to make the item, and always add little comments about what to look for as the dish is prepared, and when it is done. It can be a lot of work, especially with recipes that were never written down. But ultimately it's worth it because you will be saving an important -- and delicious bit of your family's history.

Once you have the recipes, you will want to create a look for your cookbook that reflects your family. A simple way to do this, is to include family mementos or old photos, along with the recipes. A simple way to share one-of-a-kind memorabilia is to take them to a local copy center and make color copies.

"You can use the color copies you make as background, and print a recipe over the photo, or have the recipe on one page, and a photo on the facing page. You can also create a collage using items such as blue ribbons (won for a cooking), tickets stubs or airplane tickets from a favorite trip that produced a great recipe,"

For text, use simple fonts like Times Roman or Arial so that they are easy to read for all ages. Save decorative fonts for recipe titles or chapter headings. Consider creating a box -- with shading and borders -- for the recipe itself so that there is enough contrast between the recipe and any background artwork you use.

Write an introduction about the cookbook, its organization and how family responded to the project. Be sure to date the book and have a table of contents so family and friends can easily find a favorite recipe. Here are a few of these suggestions for organizing recipes:

* by category, for example, appetizers, soups, salads, entrees and desserts

* by family, for example, grandmother, aunt and uncle, or cousin recipes

* by holiday, for example, favorite dishes for the 4th of July, Thanksgiving or Labor Day

To keep recipes easy to read and clean, consider putting them in plastic sleeves (available in craft and office supply stores) and then in 3-ring binders. "This way, you can add a new recipe every year."

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