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The Farm: Rustic Recipes For A Year Of Incredible Food



Synopsis

When Ian Knauer was a cook in the Gourmet test kitchen, he quickly became known for recipes so stupendously good that they turned the heads of the country's top food editors' effortless combinations that made the best of seasonal produce or treats from the Pennsylvania farm that has been in his family since the eighteenth century. In *The Farm*, Knauer brings his creations to your kitchen. From Cold-Spring-Night Asparagus Soup to Brick Chicken with Corn and Basil Salad, the 150 recipes in this book will help you make the most of your market, garden, or CSA. They are fresh, modern spins on American classics, with ingredients anyone can obtain. Each one is simple, distinctive, and satisfying, getting the best food to the table in the least amount of time. They are both homey and sophisticated. You'll find recipes that incorporate all parts of the vegetable, like Pasta with Radishes and Blue Cheese, which incorporates the radish leaves as well as the root, and spritely Swiss Chard Salad. You'll learn how to make great food from simple ingredients you have on hand, like Potato Nachos. You'll discover recipes for less-familiar produce from your market or your backyard, such as Chicken with Garlic Scape Pesto and Dandelion Green Salad with Hot Bacon Dressing. Many of these recipes have been in Knauer's family for generations, like Pennsylvania Dutch-Style Green Beans or Cloud Biscuits. You won't want to miss his expertly tweaked renditions of his mother and grandmother's desserts: Strawberry Cream Cheese Pie, Blueberry Belle Crunch, and Mary's Lemon Sponge Pie. Whether you want to learn how to roast a pig, make your own hot sauce, or brew hard cider, *The Farm* brings artisanal cooking home, even as Knauer's vivid stories trace a year in the seasons of the farm.

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Customer Reviews

This cookbook was not quite what I had hoped for, but it's still a lovely book and has value: I saw the title on this cook book and it called to me: Even though I commute into Houston for work Monday through Friday, we live an hour away in the country. We grow our own veggies and herbs, raise chickens for eggs, pick our own fruit, visit the processing plant for sides of pork, catch our own fish, pick up shrimp and oysters at the boat dock and patronize an old-time butcher. I augment our own food with stops at an Asian market and a "regular" well-stocked food store on my route home from work. Eating fresh and cooking from scratch is an every day event for us. So I figured this was a great book for my cook book library. I pictured dog-eared, well-worn pages within a few months' time. So, of course, I was looking forward to seeing what this cook book had to offer. Even my husband was excited and anxiously awaited its arrival. Specifically, what I was looking for (always looking for...): NEW, intriguing and interesting recipes for tomatoes, zucchini, cucumber, Japanese eggplant, fresh beans and string beans, peaches, figs, pecans, eggs and ice cream. I didn't find them. Well, I found a few good recipes, even a few great recipes, but there weren't enough to make it the outstanding, inspiring book that I had hoped it would be. And for tomatoes, zukes and cukes there were only a token few recipes and they were kind of mediocre. Don't get me wrong: This is not a poor cook book, nor is it an average cook book. It's a nice read, filled with decent recipes using fresh ingredients and many great accompanying sauces and slaws. But I was expecting (and aching for) a cook book that I could rate an over-the-top six stars, but--as you can see--after nearly a month of working with this book, and thinking hard on it, I've ended up giving it (a low) four stars. Not recipe-related: From the stories the author tells as an introduction to each chapter, I find I like this guy and his family and friends. I envy him and his group of helpers and the way they pitch in and get the work done; the way the older members coach and encourage the younger ones; the way they respect the land and the old farm and its heritage. And this last point might well be the most important about the book, for this cook book surely is a beautiful tribute to the Knauer Family Farm in Knauertown, Pennsylvania, (in Warwick Township, Chester County). What I liked:--The radish butter is "to die for", (if you make it with top quality bacon) and we've been chomping our way through our radishes as quickly as they pop above the ground (but this is not a healthy recipe...)--The idea for "Master Fat" is one of those ideas where you smack your forehead and say to yourself "Why didn't I think of this?!" It's a keeper idea.--This book encouraged me to use more scallions, and I have, and I'm hooked. We are onion lovers and use Texas 1015 Sweet onions daily, but scallions are now pre-empting the onions in our Spring-time dishes.--There are some beautiful old recipes that the author has graciously passed down to all of us from his grandmother. Being a

collector of old recipe cards and old recipes in general, I know that these are not easy to part with and are hard to come by.--There is a tangy Pennsylvania Dutch-style sauce for green beans, golden in color, and made with milk, vinegar, brown sugar and onions. It is luscious (and almost too good for green beans).--The strawberry and sour cream ice cream recipe is different from any I've found online or in a book. I am tweaking the recipe a bit, but it's great as is. (We love to make ice cream.)--The Rhubarb-Sour Cream Crostata Pie is superb.--There are plenty of swiss chard, corn and radish recipes. I have mixed feelings about:--The claim that these are "recipes for a year of incredible food" since it implies more recipes than there are, and because I'm already struggling to find recipes in the book for things I can make from what I have at hand (in our gardens or in our freezers).--There are substitutions offered for some hard-to-find ingredients--and they don't always work well. For instance: In the Mustard Garlic Chicken Paillards with Spring Peas and Lemon, I substituted (as suggested) frozen peas for fresh. It was a mistake. I should have gone with another green veggie because the frozen peas brought the whole dish down. I will use this recipe again, because it was otherwise very good, and I'll try it with baby limas or just go with sugar snap peas.--There is a good representation of all kinds of greens, maybe too many?--Grilling instructions will be inadequate for beginning grillers: "Preheat the grill." Is about the extent of the directions you'll receive. This doesn't bother me because I've been grilling for more years than I'd like to say, but many inexperienced grillers will be left in a quandary.--There seems to be an abundance of what I would call "blah" recipes: Green beans with garlic chips, garlic pesto roast chicken, a BLT sandwich, a Lebanon baloney sandwich (more a tribute to his Grandfather than a real recipe), chilled corn soup, simple white bread recipes, braised lamb shanks, grilled romaine, a green goddess dressing, chicken with a ton of garlic. I could add many more. Maybe I feel that way because I am a very experienced home cook. Other cooks may be very happy with these simpler recipes: They are perfectly fine recipes, just simple and somewhat basic.--There are other recipes that lack depth: For instance there is a chicken stew and dumplings, and the chicken is cooked in water--not broth--and I found that the resulting flavor was not what it could be. There are others. What I didn't like, (but maybe you will):--I will never make an all-parsley salad. Never.--I will never cook a 2 1/2" thick rib eye steak in a pan on the stovetop.--I will never have the opportunity to roast a whole pig. (Maybe I should never say never...but...) Between pictures, story and recipe, there are eight pages dedicated to this activity. In this particular book, I think that's a few too many pages.--Same with the canning section: I don't need another recipe for canned tomatoes, tomato sauce or ketchup. Plus I don't can now; I do refrigerator and freezer pickles because it keeps the kitchen cooler.--Definitely not enough tomato, zucchini and cuke recipes. I said it above and feel it necessary to say it again. There are

only a minimum, only a token few.--I will never find garlic scapes or ramps in my neck of the woods.**The potential buyer of this cook book should take into consideration that while most recipes contain ingredients readily available across the country, the veggie recipes feature plants and herbs that grow on this particular Pennsylvanian farm. So, you won't find a recipe for okra or one for watermelon. You'll find walnuts and apples, not pecans and peaches. And the foraging chapter is geared to the north and foraging in the south will be different. And while there's meat from the local butcher or from the fields surrounding the farm, you won't find a single recipe that includes fish or other seafood--well, anchovies are in there somewhere. You will find a few recipes for ramps, garlic scapes, wild mushrooms and critters that you won't find down south. Substitutions are provided for regional items you might not be able to find (except ramps and garlic scapes, for which there are no suitable subs).

It does seem as if farm-to-table cookbooks have become as ubiquitous as dandelions. Ian Knauer's *The Farm: Rustic Recipes for a Year of Incredible Food* is an appealing entry with an engaging narrative about working a farm that belonged to his Pennsylvania grandparents. I suspect that the photography, by the Canal House series writers Melissa Hamilton and Christopher Hirsheimer, is every bit as gorgeous as the black and white proofs in my review copy seem to promise. And now to the recipes (including two for dandelions). I won't review a cookbook without making a serious effort to try a range of recipes. Knauer's choices are an eclectic bunch, from a recipe for baking powder biscuits straight out of his grandmother's recipe box (Crisco!) to a recipe for a roast chicken basted and finished with wheat beer. The biscuits were light and tasty, the chicken perfectly pleasant, with plenty of liquid to moisten the leftovers. Likewise, a rhubarb crostata was nice, if unexceptional, while short ribs with dried fruit was on the rich and heavy side. Guests took seconds on the tart but not the ribs. Raisin-caper broccoli was good, but does the world need another recipe for lemon pudding cake or molasses raisin cookies? I think I liked the Dandelion Greens with Garlic, Pine Nuts, and Golden Raisins the best of all. I doubt I'll reach for this book very much. My go-to cookbooks when the garden is bursting are Marian Morash's sensibly arranged (by vegetable) *Victory Garden Cookbook*, Deborah Madison's *Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone*, and Alice Waters's *The Art of Simple Food*. What I like about these three books is that so many of the recipes are delicious and simple, whereas some of the non-Grandma ones in *The Farm* strike me as a bit contrived. It must be difficult to write a new cookbook that focuses on seasonal produce that is so good that it needs little adornment (unless it's the woodchuck, the subject of one amusing recipe). The truth is that beautiful produce in season and the hard-working home gardeners that labor to

produce it deserve a minimum of fuss.M. Feldman

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