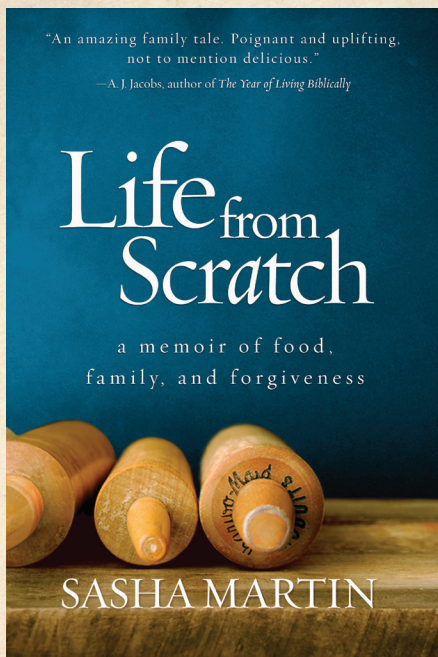


One woman's attempt to cook her way to happiness and acceptance



It was a culinary journey like no other: Over the course of 195 weeks, food writer and blogger Sasha Martin set out to cook—and eat—a meal from every country in the world. As cooking unlocked the memories of her rough-and-tumble childhood and the loss and heartbreak that came with it, Martin became determined to find peace with her past. In this heartfelt, brutally honest memoir, Martin reveals the power of cooking to bond, to empower, and to heal.

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Roasted Acorn Squash with Arugula and Goat Cheese

This unusual salad is adapted from Francis Mallman. To streamline the recipe for home cooks, I swap his campfire-roasted pumpkin for a more manageable oven-roasted acorn squash (a grill works well here, too).

Enough for 4
2 acorn squash
Olive oil
Salt and pepper

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

1 handful fresh mint leaves, finely chopped (about 2 tablespoons)
1 handful fresh oregano leaves, finely chopped (about 2 tablespoons)
¼ cup red wine vinegar
½ cup olive oil
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper

FINISHING TOUCHES:

1 small bunch (2½ ounces) baby arugula
8 ounces aged goat cheese, like bûcheron

Preheat the oven to 400° F. Cut the squash in half and remove any seeds and strings. Brush the cut ends liberally with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast for 45 minutes to an hour, or until browned and a fork pierces the flesh with no resistance.

Meanwhile, whisk together ingredients for the vinaigrette in a small bowl.

Transfer the roasted squash to serving plates. While still steaming, fill the cavities with baby arugula and crumbles of goat cheese. Spoon on vinaigrette to taste, and toss, scraping the warm squash flesh into the greens. Eat immediately.



Hot Algerian Lasagna

This dish blends traditional Italian lasagna with chickpeas, potatoes, ground lamb, and a healthy dose of cayenne pepper. For a more budget-friendly and leaner version, ground chicken or beef may be substituted.

Enough for 8 to 10

FOR THE FILLING:

Olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 pound ground lamb
A couple cloves garlic, crushed
½ teaspoon ground cumin
¼ teaspoon ground caraway
1 tablespoon harissa, prepared
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or more to taste
Salt
1 heaping tablespoon tomato paste
1 15-ounce can tomato puree or sauce,
plus an 8-ounce can (2½ cups total)
1 15-ounce can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
2 medium Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and
½-inch diced (about 2 cups or 10 ounces diced)
½ cup water, or as needed

FOR ASSEMBLY:

15 ounces ricotta
2 eggs
2 cups (½ pound) shredded
Gruyère
2 cups shredded mozzarella
1 pound no-boil lasagna sheets



In a large skillet over medium-high heat, sauté the onion in a couple glugs of olive oil until golden. Add the lamb, and brown for a good 5 to 10 minutes, breaking it into small chunks with a wood spoon along the way. Reduce heat and stir in the garlic, cumin, caraway, harissa, cayenne, and salt. Cook for a few minutes, until fragrant. Add tomato paste, 15 ounces of puree, chickpeas, cubed potatoes, and ½ cup water. Increase heat to bring to a bubble. Cover and simmer until potatoes are just tender—about 15 to 20 minutes, adding extra water if needed. Check seasonings, adding more salt and cayenne if desired.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a small bowl, mix ricotta with eggs and 1 cup Gruyère cheese. Add salt to taste.

To assemble lasagna:

Spread a glug of olive oil and half the remaining tomato puree on the bottom of a 9 x 13-inch (3-quart) casserole. Next, add a layer of lasagna noodles, a quarter of the ricotta mixture, a quarter of the lamb mixture, and 1/2 cup mozzarella cheese. Repeat three times. Finally, end with a layer of noodles and remaining puree sprinkled with remaining Gruyère and mozzarella. Cover with aluminum foil and bake 55 minutes. Remove foil, and bake 5 minutes further to brown. Let rest a good 30 minutes before slicing.

Dark Chocolate Guinness Cake with Baileys Buttercream

Jet-black, ultra-moist cake topped with pure white frosting makes this Irish confection resemble a real pint of Guinness.

Enough for 8 to 10

FOR THE CAKE:

12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) butter,
plus more for cake pans
1 cup Guinness Extra Stout
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
¾ cup unsweetened cocoa
1½ cups sugar
1¼ cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
2 large eggs

For the cake:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a small saucepan, heat the butter until just melted, then whisk together with Guinness, vanilla extract, and cocoa. While the Guinness mixture is cooling, grease and line the bottoms of two 8-inch cake pans with rounds of parchment paper. Whisk together the sugar, flour, and baking soda in a large bowl. Pour the Guinness mixture into the dry ingredients, and then whisk in the 2 eggs. When the batter is shiny and smooth, pour it into two prepared cake pans. Lick the whisk when no one is looking. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until a skewer comes out clean. Cool completely.

For the buttercream:

In a stand mixer, whip the softened butter until fluffy. Add the powdered sugar on low speed, then increase to medium-high, and drizzle in just enough Baileys to get the buttercream loose and fluffy. The key to making whiter frosting is to whip it 5 to 10 minutes, scraping occasionally.

To assemble the cake:

Run a knife around the edge of the cake pans to loosen and turn out cakes. Level the layers with a serrated knife, if needed. Spread about a third of the buttercream on the bottom cake layer. Top with the second layer. Wiggle them around until they line up just right. Thinly spread another third of the frosting mixture over the top and sides of the cake to make a crumb coat. This will seal in the crumbs so chocolate flecks don't ruin the white frosting. Refrigerate to set—about 30 minutes or overnight if desired. Once the crumb coat is firm to the touch, add the final third of the frosting to the cake—top first, then sides. Spread it around evenly. Slice and serve with an extra cold pint of Guinness.

FOR THE BUTTERCREAM:

¾ pound (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
1 pound powdered sugar, sifted
2 to 4 tablespoons
Baileys Irish Cream



Masala Chai

With coffee shops on every corner, I sometimes forget how easy it is to make my own spiced tea. Although I greatly dislike the cloying sweetness of premixes, this recipe can be adjusted to personal tastes.

Makes a good 1 ½ quarts

6 cups prepared black tea, tea leaves removed

SPICE BLEND:

10 cardamom pods, lightly cracked

1 teaspoon fennel seeds

10 black peppercorns

1 or 2 cinnamon sticks

1 large knuckle unpeeled fresh ginger, sliced in 3 or 4 coins



FINISHING TOUCHES:

Up to ¼ cup sugar

Up to 1 cup milk

Tumble the prepared black tea and spices into a medium pot. Bring to a bubble, cover, and cook 10 to 15 minutes, or to desired strength. Remove from heat. Stream in some sugar and milk (my preference is a touch of sugar and all the milk). Strain. The spices have done their work—lay them to rest in the garden. Serve the chai steaming hot in the winter or ice cold in the summer.