

**THE
COOK'S
BOOK**

Recipes for
Keeps & Essential
Techniques to
Master Everyday
Cooking

**Bri
McKoy**





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Recipes for Keeps & Essential Techniques
to Master Everyday Cooking



Bri McKoy



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for
Jeremy

I did not know someone could believe in any human as fiercely and with as much resolve as you believe in me. It has permanently, and perfectly, changed my whole life.

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Hi!

hello!

HOW TO MAKE THE COOK'S BOOK YOUR BOOK

This book is created with recipes that teach how to cook. This book is *your* book. You're the cook. Put your name on it. Mark it up with a pen, Sharpie, washi tape, sticky notes, splattered sauce. Think of this more like a craft book, ready for you to add your own delicious mark to it.

I created this book to teach the most essential techniques for everyday cooking through sharing skills and recipes. Each recipe in this book will teach powerful cooking techniques. Every time you make a recipe, you'll learn a skill that you will use over and over again as you bring other recipes to life—even recipes that are not in this book.

The first time you use this book, move through it chronologically. Try not to skip ahead. Each skill being taught builds on the previous ones, and each recipe incorporates skills from previous lessons.





.....
*first hello
pasta,
page 144*

aperitif

YOU CAN FIND JOY AND CONFIDENCE IN EVERYDAY COOKING

Between mouthfuls of salty, lime-laced pad thai, my new husband, Jeremy, looked at me across the table full of takeout containers and said, "We should probably learn how to cook."

The audacity of the suggestion almost had me laughing out loud, and I thought maybe Jeremy should try his hand at stand-up comedy. I thought I was going to choke on my takeout from the eruption of laughter about to come forth, but I looked up to scan his face and saw how utterly serious he was. I then thought he was trying to end our marriage. Which was unfortunate because it was so new, and I really did like him. But I was not interested in learning how to cook. Ever. And I made that explicitly clear by responding with a lot of exasperation and hand-waving and high-pitched speaking that basically was me stating, "No. Next."

Maybe you've had a similar conversation or an experience when you first realized that you probably needed to learn to cook. Hopefully it was less traumatic than the conversation Jeremy and I had. Before that discussion, I had lived twenty-six years without knowing how to cook, and I found this to be an important part of my DNA. My interest was solely in the eating part. I had a lot of other talents and ways I gave back to society. Cooking was not one of them. (To be honest, this was quite remarkable given that my mom is an amazing home cook. She learned to cook from her mom, who had learned from her mom. But I'd broken that line.)

Once I calmed down and agreed that going into debt in our late twenties from ordering pad thai takeout every night could put a damper on things, I realized that maybe cooking was an idea. I mean, it wasn't a great idea, but it was still an idea.

A few weeks later, I found myself looking at cookbooks at Barnes & Noble. I wanted a cookbook for someone who did not want to cook. *You can keep your anchovy salad and your extremely involved roasted Cornish hens*, I thought. *I need something simple. Simple but satisfying! Easy but mouthwatering!*

And I found it: *The Cooking Light Cookbook*. I was delighted in my discovery and promptly purchased it. It would take me a few weeks before I realized that this cookbook was focused on healthy cooking, not a light amount of cooking. I thought *light* meant less cooking—as in light, not heavy, on cooking. But there I was in our postage-stamp size of a newlywed apartment, flipping through a cookbook I'd thought was geared toward less cooking.

Because cookbooks overwhelmed me and I did not want to return to Barnes & Noble only to stare at more cookbooks and mostly consider why every cookbook had a smiling person on the front cover (Why are they so happy in the kitchen? Who smiles like that while holding a very sharp knife?!), I made it my mission to just stick with this one cookbook.

I cooked through practically the full book. At first I followed the recipes exactly, keeping the pages in pristine condition. But as I continued to work my way through the book, I realized I had thoughts. A lot of thoughts. And I needed to record these ideas and thoughts on the recipes themselves. I felt delirious with power when I started marking up the pages: "Too salty . . . I think?" or "Meh." or "Mom loved!"

After going through that cookbook, I bought another. And then another. I was cooking so often I felt like I was really learning to cook. And in some ways I was—but I was actually just learning how to read a recipe. I lost count of the number of times I threw out a meal because I'd burned it or oversalted it or took it out of the oven still raw. There was no trying to save a recipe or figure out what went wrong. It was just bad. Next recipe, please!

Then I started a food blog, because of course I did. I started sharing my own recipes. Lots of recipes. Some people would comment and ask me what to do if something went wrong and I was like, *Um, I don't know. Read the recipe. Obviously.*

I kept cooking, and I did have some wins here and there. But still it seemed as if we were eating more fails than should be natural for a "food blogger." One evening as I was rinsing my overly salted roasted butternut squash in the sink, it came to my attention that maybe I didn't know *how* to cook. Maybe I just knew how to read a recipe. And if anything went wrong, I didn't know how to correct it or save the dish. (And yes, in case you didn't catch that, I had added too much salt to my butternut squash, then roasted it and sampled it only to discover it tasted like a salt cube. So I thought I could just rinse the salt out and serve the soggy but less salty butternut squash.)

I didn't know *why* I was adding salt. I was just adding it.

I didn't know that deglazing a pan could add incredible, restaurant-quality flavor to a dish. I was just annoyed there was stuff sticking to my pan. (Also, what even is deglazing?)

The concept of elevating a dish by adding citrus or fat was not in my vocabulary.

My chicken was served either raw or burnt. And I preferred the burnt version because at least it didn't have salmonella. I liked to call it "Dry but You're Not Going to Die Chicken." A Bri specialty.

Somewhere during this journey in the kitchen, I decided I wanted to learn *how* to cook. I obviously loved recipes; I had a whole blog full of them. But when I stepped into the kitchen there was a lot that the recipe didn't know about me. Things like . . .

- what pan I was using
- where the hot spot on my burner was
- whether I was using a gas or electric stove
- how juicy my lemon was
- what kind of salt I was using

A recipe is an excellent compass, but when we step into the kitchen, we become the navigators. The compass is only helpful if we know how to navigate our own kitchen. If I wanted to become a master navigator, I knew I needed to go beyond the recipe on the page. I was going to have to learn *how* to cook by understanding the skills and techniques that turned everyday ingredients into incredible dishes. I had a new mission.

Learning how to cook brought me more confidence in the kitchen. I still enjoy using recipes, but now I'm able to read one through and know exactly what I'm going to change or add. Confidence gives me a sense of control over my meals, but it also helps me take back control when things start to go wrong with a recipe. And thankfully, confidence is not perfection. I will inevitably burn another meal. I will still sometimes oversalt the chicken. I will occasionally forget an ingredient. But now I don't panic when

that happens. Instead, I pause to access the "cooking knowledge" file folder in my head and come up with a plan. Ten years ago I was rinsing overly salted squash in the sink. Today if I tasted that salty, roasted squash, I would turn it into a soup by throwing it in the blender and adding stock, fresh garlic, and a little bit of nutmeg and cream.

This is the difference between knowing how to read a recipe and knowing how to cook.

Confidence in the kitchen gives us the ability to pivot, to understand what went wrong and when, and then to adjust. But in addition to gaining confidence, I also found an unexpected joy in noticing and experiencing the act of cooking: washing car-

rots, slicing onions, hearing the sizzle of oil when the chicken hits the pan at the exact right moment. I began to appreciate my ingredients and tools more. I stopped to smell my ingredients and to taste along the way. I was less frazzled and more able to interact with people in my kitchen while I cooked. I realized that confidence and joy were intertwined.



Confidence
in the kitchen gives us the
ABILITY TO PIVOT,
to understand what went
wrong and when, and
THEN TO ADJUST.

And that is why I wrote this book. I want to give you the recipes and skills you need in the kitchen in order to bring more people to your table—and to do it with confidence and joy.

The key below will help you identify specific kitchen adventures I've included that will sharpen certain techniques, such as chopping an onion or properly salting salsa.

ICONS KEY



how to add extra flavor to the dish



a helpful tip about the dish



sharpening techniques through hands-on experiences



put effort on the front end of this dish

A HOME COOK'S MANIFESTO FOR EVERYDAY COOKING

- 1 YOU ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ITEM IN YOUR KITCHEN.
- 2 A RECIPE IS A COMPASS, NOT A GPS.
- 3 ADDITION IS EASIER THAN SUBTRACTION IN COOKING.
- 4 BRING ALL YOUR SENSES TO THE PARTY.
- 5 NOT ALL SALT IS THE SAME.
- 6 READ THE FULL RECIPE BEFORE COOKING.
- 7 COOK EARLY.
- 8 A SHARP CHEF'S KNIFE IS THE BEST SOUS CHEF.
- 9 MISTAKES ARE THE BEST TEACHERS.
- 10 IF YOU NEED A KITCHEN WIN, START SIMPLE.

When I first went into the kitchen to learn to cook, my only real guiding light was a recipe and Google. My only objectives were: buy groceries, cook food. But there is so much more that goes into everyday cooking, and this manifesto has become the foundation that continues to give me wins in the kitchen. It has also allowed me a safe place to land when things don't go according to plan.

You are the most important item in your kitchen. There was a time when I thought if I had all the right fancy kitchen tools, I would achieve expert

home cook status. But a high-end stand mixer cannot tell me my dough is too dry. Only my hands can. A pricey stainless-steel pan cannot tell me my sauce is too salty. Only my taste buds can. You are the most important thing in your kitchen when it comes to bringing meals together.

A recipe is a compass, not a GPS. I used to cling to a recipe like it was the law. It didn't matter if I thought my sauce already had enough lemon juice in it—the recipe said to add the juice of the whole lemon. I was giving the recipe all the control. But there is so much a recipe does not know about us, our preferences, and our kitchens. It doesn't know how fresh our cilantro is. It doesn't know what brand of salt we're using. Think of a recipe as a compass pointing you in the right direction. You can deviate from it and still end up at your destination.

Addition is easier than subtraction in cooking. We have all oversalted something. If you haven't, you will, and it will be a great learning experience. One that might come with the perk of emergency takeout. It is so much easier to add something more to the dish than to take something away. If I'm reading a recipe and it says to add 1 tablespoon salt and I waver, I might only add $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon salt. I can always add more salt later. Same with lemon juice or red pepper flakes. Adding just a little more is so much easier than trying to figure out how to make something less salty or less spicy. (It can be done, but the easier route is addition over subtraction.)

Bring all your senses to the party. Using the senses available to you—touch, taste, hearing, smell, sight—will change everything when it comes to cooking. We're often taught to rely most heavily on our sense of taste to bring a dish together, but using all of our other senses is what levels up our game in the kitchen.

Not all salt is the same. We'll cover this more in the next section. Find the salt you love to use for cooking and learn its saltiness!

Read the full recipe before cooking. Reading the full recipe hours before you begin cooking lays a foundation for success. If I am cooking from a



A pricey stainless-steel pan
cannot tell me
my sauce is too salty.
**ONLY MY TASTE
BUDS CAN.**

recipe, I like to read the recipe the morning of, preferably while enjoying my coffee. This gives me an idea of how much time the dish will take in case I need to give myself an earlier start. Or if the recipe will come together super fast, I'll want everything ready and chopped before I even turn on the burner. This might mean I can chop all the ingredients on my lunch break or get the chicken marinating in the morning.

Cook early. A few years ago it occurred to me how ridiculous it is that we are required to cook a meal at the end of the day. This is like asking a marathon runner to start running at 5:00 p.m. after they get off work. It's not ideal. So I take a break from work to cook the full meal around 2:00 p.m. This works well with soups and dishes such as casseroles that can easily be reheated, and it's great for people who do not batch cook and who have access to their kitchen earlier in the day. I don't do this every day, but even doing it once a week helps. It especially helps in the winter months when the sun goes down so early. I cook my full meal and then put it in the refrigerator. At around 6:00 p.m., I pull it out, reheat, and serve.

If you do not have access to your kitchen throughout the day, assess if there is anything you can prep earlier before leaving the house or even the night before. In *The Lazy Genius Kitchen*, Kendra Adachi teaches about asking the magic question, "What can you do now to make life in your kitchen easier later?"¹ Even if it's only chopping all the ingredients in the morning and putting them in a container to pull out at dinner time, this small step will have you more motivated to make dinner by the time six o'clock rolls around.

A sharp chef's knife is the best sous chef. Okay, maybe having an actual trained sous chef in your kitchen would be nice. But we are everyday home cooks, not the royal family. (Unless you are the royal family, and then thank you for reading!) In this vein, I need you to listen very carefully: you might hate cooking because your knife is dull and you are spending entirely too much time sawing through your vegetables. I understand. I used to use a dull knife because I thought I was not skilled enough for a high-quality

1. Kendra Adachi, *The Lazy Genius Kitchen: Have What You Need, Use What You Have, and Enjoy It Like Never Before* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2022), 183.



We are allowed TO GET A LITTLE ANNOYED OR FRUSTRATED WHEN WE MAKE A MISTAKE IN THE KITCHEN, **BUT DON'T FORGET** IT MEANS YOU PROBABLY JUST GRADUATED FROM A COURSE YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW YOU WERE ENROLLED IN.

sharp knife. Then one day I was in my friend's kitchen and she asked me to cut up an onion. I took her knife and the first slice through the onion was so effortless I almost started crying. (That could have just been the onion, but we'll never know!) I chopped that onion in record time, and my hand didn't hurt afterward. The next day I went straight to my kitchen store, bought a high-quality knife, and have never looked back.

Mistakes are the best teachers. Some of the most powerful lessons I have learned about cooking have come through my mistakes. I graduated from Salt 101 the day I oversalted that butternut squash. I graduated from Trust Your Sense of Smell the day I burned my chicken because, yes, it *did* smell like it was burning but the recipe said to cook for ten minutes and it had only been six. My favorite course was when I graduated from Turn Down the Burner (Advanced Level) after always keeping my heat on high because *Don't I want this to cook all the way through? Isn't high heat cooking my food? Are medium and low heat even there for a reason?*

We are allowed to get a little annoyed or frustrated when we make a mistake in the kitchen, but don't forget it means you probably just graduated from a course you didn't even know you were enrolled in.

If you need a kitchen win, start simple. When I was learning to cook, I thought winning in the kitchen meant bringing together some kind of elaborate meal. But then I realized a kitchen win means I made a delicious meal that my family loved and I didn't lose my mind while doing it.

Kitchen wins build on each other and can make us feel more and more confident in the kitchen. So start simple. Get a store-bought rotisserie chicken to make the soup or casserole. Or take something premade, such as premarinated kabobs from the butcher shop or meat counter, and pull together a simple but delicious side dish.

A NOTE ON SALT

Personally, I think we all should have been learning about the different types of salt in high school, right after our math lessons. As an adult I've needed to know way more about salt than I've needed to break out my TI-83 graphing calculator and do trigonometry.

As I was learning to cook, I made many mistakes that resulted in TMS (too much salt). This happened because I didn't understand anything about salt. I just added it when it was called for. So I took a new approach—I became salt-shy. Sometimes I'd omit the salt altogether because of flashbacks to my ruined chicken casserole. But then I learned that salt-shy is almost worse than TMS. It turns out that salt can make or break a whole dish.

Let's start here: Food needs salt.

Salt is like the spotlight on a stage. All the characters can be there. They can know their lines and be in costume. They can even be ready to start the show. But if the spotlight isn't on, it's going to be a pretty boring show. Everything will seem very muted and hard to distinguish. But as soon as the spotlight comes on, everything comes to life.

Salt also makes food more of what it already is. It makes potatoes more potatoey, tomatoes more tomatoey, bread more bready. Butter more buttery. Eggs more eggy. Salt does not change an ingredient's makeup; it just makes the ingredient more of what it already is.

WHAT IS SALT?

Salt is a mineral: sodium chloride. In *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat*, Samin Nosrat notes that it is also one of the several dozen essential nutrients we need

to survive.¹ There are so many different varieties of salt in the world, and they each serve a different purpose.

Unless otherwise noted, I used Diamond Crystal kosher salt for all of my recipes. If you are using Morton kosher salt, you will want to cut the salt by one-third (more about this below).

Salt can get a bad reputation because many of us have had the misfortune of eating something that's oversalted. That really sticks with us, especially because sometimes too much salt can ruin a whole meal.

As previously mentioned, I have oversalted butternut squash. The route there was quite simple: I only had half the butternut squash the recipe called for, but I didn't think to cut the other ingredients, particularly the salt, in half. I ended up with what tasted like roasted salt cubes. You all, I WASHED THE ROASTED BUTTERNUT SQUASH IN THE SINK. I thought it would help remove the salt. I did not consider that I would then have soggy roasted butternut squash on my hands.

Which brings me to my next point with salt—and I will say this until my dying day: addition is easier than subtraction in cooking, especially with salt. It's a great deal easier to add more salt to a dish than it is to take salt away.

Reading a recipe that calls for what you think could be too much salt? Try adding only some of the salt and then taste. Not sure about the type of salt you have on hand? Taste the salt first! The raw salt. If your mouth tastes like saltwater after that first taste, you have very salty salt. If the salt tastes salty but pleasant and pure, you have a milder salt.

Whenever you're working with something unfamiliar, *always* taste first and err on the side of less is more.



The next time you chop a tomato, take a bite of it plain. Then sprinkle a little salt and take another bite. This is an excellent way to understand how salt makes a food become more of what it is.

1. Samin Nosrat, *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat: Mastering the Elements of Good Cooking* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 20.



Table Salt



Kosher Salt



Coarse Kosher Salt



Fleur de Sel



Pink Himalayan Salt



Sea Salt

POPULAR TYPES OF SALT

Let's talk about all the different varieties of salt and how and when to use them so they shine!

Table Salt

Table salt is for the table! It is 99 percent sodium chloride, so it is intense. When I first started learning to cook, I only had table salt on hand. This salt is very fine and extremely salty. It is best used as just a sprinkle after you have served someone their food and they want a bit more salt. If you find you only have table salt on hand for cooking, you will want to cut the salt in half if the recipe calls for kosher salt. For example, if a recipe calls for 2 tablespoons kosher salt, you will only want to add 1 tablespoon table salt. That's how much saltier it is.

Kosher Salt

Kosher salt is a little chunkier than table salt and does not contain additives, so it has a purer tasting saltiness. This is the salt you want for everyday cooking. Not only is it less salty but because the crystals are larger, it's easier to sprinkle over your pan. Not all kosher salts are the same, so be sure to taste the crystals to assess saltiness. If I could come into your kitchen and give you one ingredient to cook with, it would be Diamond Crystal kosher salt. Diamond Crystal has the most pure taste and is not extremely salty. Its crystals dissolve uniformly and quickly in food as it is being cooked, which means you are less likely to oversalt your dish.

Morton kosher salt is another popular brand to use for cooking but is much saltier and denser than Diamond Crystal. This means it will take more time to dissolve, so the chances are high that you'll think you did not salt your dish enough and then keep adding more. Which means your dish will be very salty.

If you love Morton kosher salt, just know that you will want to add less salt than called for in recipes that use kosher salt (including mine). For example, if a recipe calls for 1 tablespoon (that is, 3 teaspoons) salt, you will only want to use $1\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoons (slightly more than half the amount) of Morton kosher salt.

Fleur de Sel

This salt, which is known as finishing salt, is more expensive. It is actually harvested by hand using sieves. Think of fleur de sel like your most expensive purse. You don't use it every day. It only comes out on special occasions to really make a statement. My jar of fleur de sel usually lasts for months, if not a whole year.

Fleur de sel crystals are also fairly large and chunky, so a little goes a long way! But a little sprinkle can transform your whole dish. We love to sprinkle it over our salads, roasted veggies, finished steaks, and even over our charcuterie board. Every time I sprinkle something with fleur de sel, I get asked for the recipe.

Flaked Sea Salt

This salt is similar to fleur de sel in that it is also used as a finishing salt. It is a little chunkier, giving it a nice texture and crunch. People love using this salt on top of anything from baked cookies to steaks, and my favorite brand to use is Maldon. Bonus tip: sprinkle a finishing salt like flaked sea salt or fleur de sel from high above the dish for an even distribution!

Pink Himalayan Salt

This salt is mined near the Himalayas in Pakistan. It is unique because it has a pinkish hue. Most people use this salt because it is said to be packed with minerals. You can use this salt just like you would use kosher salt, but it is a bit saltier in nature, so you might want to use less than a recipe calls for.

Sea Salt

Sea salt is known for being unrefined, meaning it still has traces of minerals in it. Because of these minerals, it is also known for its health benefits and flavor. Sea salt is sold in all different sizes, from fine to coarse. If this is your salt of choice, be sure to taste and get familiar with its saltiness!

POPULAR SALT BRANDS

All the recipes in this book were tested using Diamond Crystal kosher salt. As you are getting familiar with different brands of salt and finding which one you prefer for everyday cooking, here is a helpful conversion chart. You may want to make slight adjustments based on your own preferences, but this is a great place to start.

BRAND	CONVERSION
Diamond Crystal Kosher Salt	3 teaspoons*
Morton Kosher Salt	1¾ teaspoon
David's Kosher Salt	1½ teaspoon
Pink Himalayan Sea Salt	1½ teaspoon
Table Salt	1 teaspoon

* 3 teaspoons = 1 tablespoon

While one could go wild with all the different kinds of salts, I recommend having an everyday cooking salt on hand and a finishing salt such as fleur de sel for enhancing dishes.

HOW TO ADD SALT

The type of salt you are using and when you are adding it to a dish also informs *how* to apply the salt to your food. This does not have to be complicated! Here are the top three ways to add salt to your food:

1. *Dump it in.* If you're adding salt to a dish that is in the middle of cooking, you can just plop it right into the dish and mix to continue sautéing with the food.
2. *Sprinkle from up high.* If you're adding salt to a dish that is finished and plated, sprinkle it from up high. This will allow the salt to evenly fall over the food so you don't get some bites with lots of salt and other bites with little to no salt. Use this method for salads, sandwiches, spaghetti, soups, and more.
3. *Rub it in.* If you're using salt to season raw meat, rub it in. This will cause the salt to dissolve into the meat so it's perfectly seasoned.

DEGLAZING PANS AND *thickening sauces*

DEGLAZING

When cooking, especially in a pan that is not nonstick, it's normal to have some of your food stick to the bottom of the pan. The culinary term for these browned bits is *fond*. The fond might seem annoying—tiny bits of food stuck to the bottom of the pan—but it is, in fact, quite magical. The fond has been caramelizing as it sits on the bottom of your pan, giving it a depth of flavor that can add richness to your dish. You want that fond off the pan and in your food!



Deglazing your pan isn't just great for your food. It's great for the pan because it essentially helps create less cleanup in the end.

It might seem frustrating to get stuck-on food off the bottom of the pan, but this is where deglazing comes in. With deglazing, stuck-on bits will easily release from the pan and join the rest of the food.

So what is *deglazing*? Deglazing is "the act of adding liquid to a hot pan, which allows all the caramelized bits stuck to the bottom to release."¹

What kind of liquid should you add? I typically use liquid that is already part of the recipe. If the dish calls for chicken or beef stock, I use that. If the dish does not call for any liquid, you can use water or wine. I use red wine for dishes with beef and white wine for dishes with chicken.

You do not need much liquid. Generally, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup is enough to get the fond off the bottom. The key is how you add it. Remove any food that might

1. Alex Delany, "What Does 'Deglaze' Mean? And Do I Need a Degree to Do It?," *Bon Appétit*, February 23, 2018, <https://www.bonappetit.com/story/what-does-deglaze-mean>.

DEGLAZING



THICKENING



still be cooking in the pan. Then find a spot in your pan that has a concentration of fond and slowly pour some of the liquid in. As you pour in the liquid, use a wooden spoon to work up the fond. It will come up with little effort. Continue to do this on all the spots in your pan where there is fond.

Not only have you cleaned the bottom of your pan, but you have added a richness to your dish that will take the flavor to the next level!

THICKENING SAUCES

Have you ever brought together a delicious sauce that tastes mouthwatering but just needs a bit more thickness? Allowing the sauce or gravy to thicken can help it adhere better to the noodles or meat. A delicious sauce that is not thickened can sometimes look a little sad.

Thankfully, there is a simple way to thicken anything from soups, stews, and sauces to gravies. It is a mixture of one part water and one part cornstarch (or arrowroot powder, which is a paleo option for those with dietary restrictions).

The great thing about cornstarch/arrowroot powder is that it's tasteless and won't mess with the flavor of your sauce. Also, you can add it at the very end. Here are some important things to know when thickening anything:

1. To make the thickener (usually referred to as *slurry*), be sure to mix together equal parts water and cornstarch/arrowroot powder.
2. Be sure the water and cornstarch/arrowroot powder are thoroughly mixed together and clump-free. (If I am thickening a soup, I tend to do 1 tablespoon arrowroot powder and 1 tablespoon water. If I am thickening a sauce, I start with 1½ teaspoons arrowroot powder with 1½ teaspoons water.)
3. You want to add the slurry to the sauce while it is still on the heat.
4. When adding the slurry, be sure to stir your dish rapidly so the mixture is evenly incorporated, or you will have just a blob floating around in your dish.
5. After you thoroughly incorporate the slurry into your dish, let it simmer on the stove for 2–4 minutes and watch it thicken!

EXTRA-CREAMY CHICKEN PICCATA

This dish is the star of thickening sauces. At the end of cooking this meal you will have a mouthwatering sauce, but it will need to be thickened. Once you learn this skill, you'll never look back.



This dish comes together very quickly, so make sure you prep everything before sautéing the chicken.

PREP TIME: 15 MINUTES • COOK TIME: 25 MINUTES • SERVES 4

1 pound fettuccine or other pasta of choice (or serve with veggies for gluten-free)
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon butter
2 large boneless, skinless chicken breasts (2–3 pounds total), halved horizontally to make 4 cutlets (or instead use 4 boneless, skinless thighs)
2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
¼ cup white wine or chicken stock, for deglazing
1 shallot, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup chicken stock
½ cup heavy whipping cream or half-and-half
⅓ cup finely grated fresh Parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons capers, drained
juice of 1 lemon
1½ teaspoons cornstarch or arrowroot powder (optional)

- 1 If using pasta, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Follow package instructions to cook until al dente.
- 2 Place a sauté pan on medium-high heat and add 1 tablespoon oil and 1 tablespoon butter. Allow butter to melt and bubble.
- 3 Season chicken with 1 teaspoon kosher salt.
- 4 Add the chicken to the pan and cook about 5–6 minutes on each side, depending on the thickness of your chicken. Once chicken is done, remove to a plate and cover with a piece of foil.
- 5 Take ¼ cup white wine or chicken stock and deglaze the pan by slowly pouring the liquid in and using a wooden spoon to scrape up the browned bits.
- 6 Add the chopped shallot and let cook for about 2 minutes until softened. Add the garlic. Sauté until the garlic is fragrant, about 1 minute.

GLUTEN-FREE OPTIONAL, GRAIN-FREE

7 Reduce heat to medium and add the stock and cream. Bring the sauce to a gentle boil. Season with the remaining 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Add in the Parmesan cheese and capers and allow the sauce to simmer for about 2 minutes, until it thickens.

8 Stir in the lemon juice and allow to simmer for 1 minute. (Note: If your family doesn't like lemon, start by adding only half the juice and taste from there. Remember, addition is easier than subtraction!) Taste and add any salt or additional lemon juice to your preferences.

9 If you would like a thicker sauce, in a small dish mix 1½ teaspoons cornstarch (or



Why salt pasta water and when?
Salting your pasta water will allow the noodles to soak up some of the salt, giving them excellent flavor. Add half a palmful of salt to your water once it is boiling, right before you add the pasta.

arrowroot powder) with 1½ teaspoons water. Add mixture to sauté pan while it is still on the heat and mix to combine. Allow the sauce to thicken for a few additional minutes.

To serve, place chicken on top of pasta or steamed veggies and spoon sauce over it.



TIP: Chicken is always fully cooked when it registers at 165°F with a meat thermometer. To check the temperature of your chicken, place the tip of the thermometer into the middle of the thickest part of the chicken.



HOMEMADE COCONUT CHICKEN BANH MI

This popular Vietnamese dish is one of my favorites. Our local Vietnamese restaurant shut down during the pandemic, and my cravings got a little out of hand, so here we are. It's the finishing touches that make this sandwich unforgettable and teach the art of adding flavor at the end.



The baguette is part of what makes a banh mi so delicious. It's crusty on the outside and soft on the inside with a touch of sweetness. Look in your grocery store for take-and-bake demi baguettes (they are usually sold in a package of two).

PREP TIME: 15 MINUTES (2+ HOURS MARINATING) • COOK TIME: 20 MINUTES • SERVES 4

FOR THE CHICKEN AND MARINADE

1 cup (8 ounces) canned coconut milk
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 teaspoon fish sauce
2 teaspoons kosher salt
1 tablespoon coconut sugar
juice from 2 small limes
2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs

FOR THE DRESSING

1 cup mayonnaise
juice from half a lime
1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
1 teaspoon kosher salt

FOR THE QUICK-PICKLED VEGGIES

1 carrot, julienned
1 cucumber, julienned
1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar

FOR SERVING

slices of jalapeño (optional)
fresh mint
fresh cilantro
sliced green onions
crusty baguette or lettuce wrap

FOR THE MARINADE

1 Combine all ingredients for the marinade and add to a large dish or resealable plastic bag. Add the chicken thighs and cover or seal. Place in the refrigerator and marinate overnight or for at least 2–4 hours.

FOR THE DRESSING

1 Combine all ingredients in a small bowl and mix to combine. Place in the refrigerator. Can be made several hours or days in advance. Will last in the refrigerator for up to 7 days.

FOR THE QUICK-PICKLED VEGGIES

1 Using a vegetable peeler, julienne (long thin slices) the carrot and cucumber (you can do this by using the julienne blade side of the peeler and just running it down the length of the carrot and cucumber).

2 Add cucumber and carrot to a small jar with a lid. Add the rice wine vinegar. Secure lid and shake to combine, then refrigerate. Can be done several hours or days in advance. Will last in the refrigerator for up to 7 days.

FOR THE CHICKEN: GRILL METHOD

1 Preheat grill to medium-high heat. Rub the grill grates with oil. Remove any excess marinade and place chicken thighs on the grill. Close the lid.

2 Grill for 4–5 minutes. Flip and grill for another 4–5 minutes with the lid closed. Chicken is done when it reaches an internal temperature of 165°F.

3 Remove chicken to plate and cover with foil to rest for about 5 minutes, then slice.

FOR THE CHICKEN: STOVETOP METHOD

The marinade on this chicken really does best when grilled, but if grilling is not an option, please follow these tips and instructions.

1 In a large nonstick sauté pan, add 1 tablespoon olive oil and heat over medium-high heat.

2 While the pan is heating, line a large plate with paper towels. Remove chicken from the marinade and place on the paper towel. Cover with another sheet of paper towel to remove excess marinade from the chicken. (This step is important as the marinade has sugar in it and is quite heavy—the chicken will not cook properly without this step.)

3 Once the sauté pan is heated, add the chicken. Cook for 5 minutes. Flip the chicken and cook for an additional 4–5 minutes. Chicken is done when it reaches an internal temperature of 165°F.

4 Place the chicken on a plate and cover with foil. Let rest for 5 minutes before slicing.

To serve, spread a good dollop of the dressing over the inside of bread. Add the sliced chicken followed by the fresh jalapeños (optional), pickled vegetables, and fresh herbs (mint, cilantro, and green onions). Close sandwich and slice into quarters.

TIP: Follow the package instructions to heat the baguette. Cut the baguette lengthwise down the middle, making sure not to slice all the way through the loaf.

TIPSY BRAISED SHORT RIBS WITH MASCARPONE MASHED POTATOES

We are searing these beef short ribs, and I promise you, the effort in the beginning is going to have a major payoff. This is a perfect way to learn how you can add flavor right at the beginning of cooking!

PREP TIME: 20 MINUTES • COOK TIME: 4½ TO 5 HOURS • SERVES 5-6

FOR THE SHORT RIBS

- 2 tablespoons high-heat oil such as avocado oil or vegetable oil
- 4-5 pounds bone-in short ribs, at least 1½ inches thick
- 5 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 2½ teaspoons freshly cracked black pepper, divided
- 2 yellow onions, quartered
- 4 stalks celery, halved crosswise
- 3 carrots, halved crosswise
- 10 cloves garlic, smashed
- 3 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 (750 ml) bottle dry red wine such as a cabernet sauvignon
- 2 cups beef stock
- 8 sprigs fresh thyme
- 10 sprigs fresh parsley
- zest from one lemon, grated
- 1½ tablespoons cornstarch or arrowroot powder (optional)

FOR THE MASHED POTATOES

- 7 medium (about 5 pounds) russet or Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and chopped
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 11 tablespoons butter, softened
- 8 ounces mascarpone cheese or cream cheese
- 1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper



Not all grocery stores carry bone-in short ribs. Be sure to ask the butcher at the meat counter or make a trip to your local meat market.

GRAIN-FREE

FOR THE SHORT RIBS

- 1 Preheat oven to 275°F.
- 2 Pat the short ribs dry. Mix 4 teaspoons salt and 2 teaspoons pepper together and sprinkle evenly over the meat.
- 3 In a large dutch oven over medium-high heat, add oil. Working in batches, brown short ribs on all sides, about 2 minutes per side. Move ribs to a platter.
- 4 Pour out excess oil/fat from dutch oven, reserving about 2 tablespoons in the pot.
- 5 While still over medium-high heat, add onions, celery, carrots, and garlic to the pot and cook, stirring often, until onions are browned, about 5 minutes.
- 6 Add the tomato paste, stirring to coat the veggies. Allow the paste to cook for about 1–2 minutes so it caramelizes (it will get darker in color).
- 7 Deglaze the pan by slowly pouring in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the red wine, scraping up all the browned bits.
- 8 Add the short ribs back to the dutch oven with any accumulated juices on the platter. Stir in the remaining wine and bring to a boil.
- 9 Lower the heat to medium and simmer until wine is reduced by half, about 20 minutes.
- 10 Stir in stock. Be sure the meat on the short ribs is covered in liquid. Add thyme and parsley. Bring to a boil, cover, and transfer to the oven.
- 11 Cook until short ribs are tender, about $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 hours.

12 Transfer short ribs to a platter. Discard the veggies and fresh herbs (they have imparted all their flavor and are now just sad). Spoon fat from the surface of sauce and discard.

13 Place the dutch oven over medium-high heat and season the sauce with remaining 1 teaspoon salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper. To thicken, if desired, make a slurry with equal parts cornstarch (or arrowroot powder) and water. Mix thoroughly. Slowly add to the simmering sauce while stirring vigorously. Allow the sauce to thicken for about 3–5 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in the lemon zest and then taste for any seasoning adjustments.

FOR THE MASHED POTATOES: STOVETOP

- 1 Add the potatoes to a large pot. Cover with water and bring to a boil over high heat. Once the water is boiling, add a generous pinch of salt, reduce heat to medium-high, and allow the potatoes to cook for 20 to 25 minutes or until fork tender.
- 2 Drain the potatoes in a large colander. Place them back into the dry pot and put the pot on the stove over low heat.
- 3 Pour in the heavy cream. Mash the potatoes over low heat until desired consistency. (For truly creamy potatoes, use a ricer or mash in a stand mixer with the cream.)
- 4 Add the butter, mascarpone cheese, salt, and pepper. Mash to combine.
- 5 Taste and add any additional salt to your liking. Top with a few pats of butter and freshly cracked black pepper. Cover until ready to serve.

FOR THE MASHED POTATOES: INSTANT POT

- 1 Place 4 cups of water into the IP. Add peeled potatoes. Secure lid and set valve to "Sealing." Cook on high pressure for 12 minutes.
- 2 Allow to naturally release for about 5 minutes, then move valve to "Venting" to release the steam. Drain water from potatoes and place them back in the IP.
- 3 Follow steps 3–5 of stovetop method.

In a bowl or plate with curved edges, add a scoop of mashed potatoes. Place 1 short rib on top. Drizzle with sauce. Enjoy!



These are most delicious when the short ribs are made the day before. Cook as instructed above but hold off on removing the short ribs from the sauce. As soon as the short ribs come out of the oven, allow the pot to cool and then cover and place in the refrigerator overnight. When ready to enjoy, remove the lid and scrape off the fat that has settled on the top. Warm in the oven at 350° for 30 minutes and then finish making the sauce.

