

THE SMITTEN KITCHEN COOKBOOK by Deb Perelman

On Sale: 10/30/2012

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## Introduction

Welcome. Welcome to my tiny kitchen. Wouldn't it be great if we could all fit in here? I'd make us mulled cider and gooey cinnamon squares. We could talk about pie. Jacob would probably bust out his guitar (actually, it's a ukulele, but don't tell him that) and sing "baa baa blakk shee!" because he's a total ham, and my husband would pour us some drinks. We'd have a great time.

Of course, unless you could squeeze yourself onto a fraction of a square inch tile -- grumbling, no doubt, that this was the worst party, ever -- this is probably not going to happen. I always wanted a kitchen big enough for a crowd, but instead, I chose to live in New York City, a place where the kitchens are barely usable but nobody complains because there's no reason to cook when there's a great restaurant on every corner. Besides, as my friend Jenn informed me shortly after I moved here in 2000, "ovens are for sweater storage."

And then, as if I'd missed the joke (I, um, often do), I decided to cook in my tiny kitchen anyway. I think I got my "if there's a will, there's a way" attitude from my mother. You could say there's no way you could fit the ingredients you need in two cabinets or the enormous roast you'd like to prepare in a 2/3-size oven; you could declare it impossible to prep any meal on a single 2x3-foot counter, with only a few square feet to stand on. . . or you could clear the decks, get to work and maybe pull a killer pan of brownies out of the oven. I have a hunch that our great grandmothers didn't refuse to cook because they couldn't fit their Vita-Mix on the counter. Well, perhaps other people's grandmothers. It should surprise absolutely nobody that I come from pesky stock.

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Whenever I have been asked how I got here – presumably, to a place where you'd have my cookbook in front of you, not, say, ~~my writing lair with a bay window overlooking the sea~~ my sofa with an explosion of wooden train tracks around me – I always wished I had a better kitchen story to share. "Just tell us your story!" people say, but I think that they're lying. I think that people want me to tell them a *good* story.

They want to hear that I'm a fifth generation chili maker from Texas or that I only eat food that I hunt, forage or find under the wheel of a car. That I went to cooking school and spent years on the line being yelled at by a French guy with his name over the door. Or maybe I was at a thrift store and found a collection of hand-written Hungarian recipe cards and made it my life's work to bring an old lady's cooking back to life. People want a story with drama and excitement. They don't want to hear that I've been a record store shift supervisor, a swirler of soft-serve frozen custard, an art therapist, and an IT reporter.

They don't want to hear that I just like to cook.

But I do, I really do.

That said, what drives my cooking is hardly so lofty. I never set out to build a website that would draw over five million visitors a month. I never expected to have to quit my day job just to keep it up. I never looked into a crystal ball and saw my site flash across the television screen during a Google commercial and when I read those last three sentences together, I still have to sit down until the spinning stops.

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The reality of what drives me into the kitchen — despite living in a neighborhood where I can get the most tender meatballs or the most ethereally smooth hummus delivered in 20 minutes — is something far less brag-worthy: I am picky as all hell.

And also, a little obsessive.

It's not enough for me to go to a restaurant and have a chicken dish that was mostly good but possibly in need of more acid. I have to go home and read about chicken for an hour. I have to figure out where I am most likely to find the best chicken that afternoon and then I have to buy that chicken and go home and weigh all the ingredients and make note of what size the potatoes were and exactly how far into the cooking time I turned them and the texture of the salt and the brand of the Vermouth and tweak it and make it again and again until the chicken is just as I had hoped it would be on that day I first ordered it.

And then, I have to tell you about it. I cannot possibly spend all of this time fine-tuning what I think makes for the most incredible roast chicken there could be *and then let you make another recipe*. It would seriously bum me out.

All of these things — pickiness, ~~bull-headedness~~ I mean, *obsessiveness* — can be somewhat terrible traits on their own but when I put them together, they seem to have grown into something so much better than their parts. And that, my friends, is because of you.

I may have known how to cook and known what I wanted my food to taste like when I registered the smittenkitchen.com domain name in the summer of 2006, but I didn't know a thing about the way

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people outside my head cooked until they started coming forward, through comments, and asking me questions.

“Did you mean table salt or Kosher salt?”

“Would waxed paper work too?”

“Does this still work with store brand butter?”

“How on earth am I supposed to know if a dark chocolate cookie has become ‘golden’ at the edges?”

“What if I don’t have and don’t want to buy cream of tartar?”

“I hate sifting. Can I skip it?”

“Do I have to use the really expensive olive oil for this?”

“How is this brownie different from every other brownie on your site?”

“Have you completely lost your mind? I will not spend \$10 on a box of salt!”

For six years, I have responded to every question I could possibly answer that has come up in the 150,000 comments on my site to date (I’ll admit to ignoring ones about when I’ll have another kid but only because *Mom, you are so busted*). More than any folding/whisking/butter-softening trick I’ve learned over the years, it’s your comments, this question-and-answer game that we play, that has fine-tuned my cooking by forcing me to question everything.

Having answered your questions, I also came to realize that the vast majority of them boil down to one most pressing detail: “Will this recipe be really, truly worth it?”

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I've noticed that nobody hates cooking as much as they hate the roulette of not knowing if their time, money and efforts are going to be rewarded by a recipe that exceeds expectations. And I'm no different; I don't really care if a meal is going to take more than 30 minutes to cook or if I'll have to chop three different vegetables. All I need to know is that a soup which may take a little longer and may be a little more involved will actually taste better than what I'm used to.

On the flipside, what I secretly hope when I read a cake recipe that asks me to use three different bowls is: Did this recipe's creator compare the results of this cake with one bowl, two bowls and three bowls and find that the three-bowl method was *clearly* the winning cake? Or did they just ask me to use three bowls because that's the way it's always been done?

Wouldn't it be great if you knew the answer was "yes"?

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This kitchen may be too tiny for me to throw the cooking party I've always dreamed of, but I've dragged you all in here with me and now I hope the recipes reflect it.

Here in the Smitten Kitchen, everybody agrees that cold fruit crisps make excellent breakfasts (Apricot Breakfast Crisp, p. TK) and that dropping everything to make the baked French toast embodiment of cinnamon toast (Baked French Toast, p. TK) is a perfectly respectable thing to do. That you should be able to make pizza from scratch in under an hour (Rushed Pizza Dough, p. TK), and heavenly roast chicken too (Best Flat Roasted Chicken, p. TK). That vegetarian meals shouldn't be throw-aways, but as

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luxurious as the most classic French braise (Mushroom Bourguignon, p. TK). That the addition of fresh peas makes buttery Alfredo sauce totally okay to eat for dinner again (Sweet Peas and Shells Alfredo, p. TK). That it would be awesome if your new favorite lemon bar recipe required no zesting, juicing and no more than a single bowl to assemble (Whole Lemon Bars, p. TK). And finally, that you simply cannot call a cake a S'More Cake unless you get to terrify your friends and family by whipping out a blowtorch to finish the “marshmallows” on top (S'More Cake, p. TK).

Here, I hope we don't let tiny kitchens, tight budgets, long days, fussy ingredients or people who tell you you're less of a cook if you need to look at a recipe keep us from making awesome food we're excited to eat and share.

Here, I hope that even if you weren't planning to cook tonight, at least one single thing in these pages looks so tempting that *not cooking* is no longer an option.

So, welcome. I hope you're hungry.