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Opening Extract from...

Mrs Beeton

How to Cook

220 Classic Recipes for the Modern Kitchen

Written by Isabella Beeton
and Gerard Baker

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220 CLASSIC RECIPES
FOR THE MODERN KITCHEN

ISABELLA BEETON & GERARD BAKER

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INTRODUCTION

When Isabella Beeton first published *Beeton's Book of Household Management* in 1861, Britain was still a rural society in which large numbers of people were involved in farming and many grew their own fruit and vegetables at home. As a result, most households ate very simply, in tune with the seasons. The repertoire of home cooks was small and economy was vital, so the emphasis was on getting the most out of each and every ingredient.

But change was already underway. Just as the Industrial Revolution moved people from the country to the cities, the development of modern transport networks, refrigeration and kitchen appliances brought a world of food to our fingertips. Yet, sadly, those same developments led to a steady decline in the numbers of people cooking at home, and a loss of the basic skills and techniques that were taken for granted 150 years ago.

With today's renewed interest in seasonality, traceability and sustainability, the resurgence of forgotten or underused ingredients and the increased numbers of people cooking at home for economic reasons, Mrs Beeton's expertise is more relevant than ever. The recipes celebrated in this collection are both timeless and delicious, and offer the perfect opportunity for both new and experienced cooks to rediscover good, old-fashioned home cooking.

The author

Today, most of us have a mental image of Mrs Beeton as a matronly figure – brisk, efficient and experienced in the kitchen. In fact, Isabella Beeton was young and recently married, juggling working outside the home with running her household and coping with the demands of a husband and young family. Having worked on it through her early twenties, she saw her book published at the age of 25 and died just three years later.

Isabella was born in London, grew up in Epsom and began her married life in Hatch End (which was then on the outskirts of London). Although she wrote of housekeepers, butlers and valets, her world was far from the big country houses of the preceding century, and although it is likely that she had some help in the kitchen, she almost certainly managed her home and most of the cooking herself. Her book was inspired by an awareness of the challenges faced by women like herself, and a wish to use the knowledge and experience she had gained to help other young women in her position:

What moved me, in the first instance, to attempt a work like this, was the discomfort and suffering which I had seen brought upon men and women by household mismanagement. I have always thought that there is no more fruitful source of family discontent than a housewife's badly cooked dinners and untidy ways. Men are now so

well served out of doors, at their clubs, well-ordered taverns, and dining-houses, that in order to compete with the attractions of these places, a mistress must be thoroughly acquainted with the theory and practice of cookery, as well as be perfectly conversant with all the other arts of making and keeping a comfortable home.

There is no question of Isabella Beeton having written all the material herself. As a young woman with limited experience of running a home, she would not have been able to compile so authoritative a text without help. What she did have was an understanding of the kind of information that women like herself wanted to have at their fingertips – and with that in mind, she used her position as editor of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* to pull together the best recipes and advice from a wide range of sources.

For the matter of the recipes, I am indebted, in some measure, to many correspondents of the 'Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine', who have obligingly placed at my disposal their formulas for many original preparations. A large private circle has also rendered me considerable service. A diligent study of the works of the best modern writers on cookery was also necessary to the faithful fulfilment of my task. Friends in England, Scotland, Ireland, France, and Germany, have also very materially aided me.

Having gathered together her source material, Mrs Beeton then set about sorting it into as accessible and comprehensive a form as possible. She was among the first revolutionary food writers to style recipes in the format that we are familiar with today, setting out clear lists of ingredients and details of seasonality, time taken, average cost and portions produced (this last being entirely her invention). She also offered notes on how to source the best food for her recipes – placing particular emphasis on such old-fashioned (or, in our eyes, surprisingly modern) ideas as the use of seasonal, local produce and the importance of animal welfare.

In essence, her success was in identifying that her own needs were shared with her readers'. And her book clearly found an audience: it sold in huge numbers from the outset and has been in demand, in its various incarnations, ever since. It is easy to see why. Mrs Beeton's core themes – buy well, cook well and eat well – are as relevant today as they were 150 years ago.

The ingredients

Up to the building of the first railways, food distribution in Britain was essentially local. When Mrs Beeton was writing, the suburbs of our major cities still contained market gardens – London was once ringed with them – and the surrounding countryside provided supplies for the cities' ever-increasing populations, with historic drove roads and market routes funnelling animals to population centres.

However, this was a time of massive social, technological and agricultural change. Four-crop rotation techniques had been adopted from Europe under the influence of Charles 'Turnip' Townshend 100 years earlier, increasing agricultural yields and allowing greater animal productivity. At Ballindallach castle, within sight of the fishermen in the Junction pool, the breed we now know as the Aberdeen Angus was being developed by Sir George Macpherson-Grant, and other advances in animal and plant breeding were gathering pace.

The power of the British Empire meant that in many instances food could be imported more cheaply than it could be produced. Processed foods were also beginning to appear on the market – and being seized upon with enthusiasm by a new generation of women who, unlike their forebears, could not afford staff and had to manage the kitchen, as well as the rest of the household, themselves.

The change in the nature of our food supply was underway. Developments in pesticides, fertilisers and machinery changed the face of farming by the middle of the twentieth century, with a constant stream of workers being forced off the land and into the cities, where they would gradually lose touch with their food and the way in which it was produced.

In the background, voices have always challenged the direction in which our national food production has developed. When Eve Balfour championed low-input mixed farming techniques and campaigned to set up the Soil Association in 1946, she was considered a radical pioneer. Today, the organic and slow food movements work to protect traditional farming methods all over the world. There is hope, too, for many of our traditional animal breeds, which are being revived by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust.

And consumers are increasingly concerned about the provenance of their food, too. More and more of us are now rejecting exotic and well-travelled foods in favour of the fresher, tastier, more nutritious ones that we can find (or grow) in our own backyards. We are choosing to shop at farmers' markets and farm shops and patronise our local butchers, fishmongers and greengrocers rather than just buying everything at the supermarket. Seasonal vegetables and locally produced organic meats, smoked fish, cheeses – the sorts of things that we are increasingly seeking out – would all have been very familiar to Isabella Beeton. In a sense we have come full circle.

The recipes

The original book was written with an awareness of household economy that we can take lessons from today. Because we have access to so much so easily, we often forget to consider how to get the most out of each ingredient – yet maximising flavour and nutrient value and minimising waste is as relevant in the twenty-first century as it was in 1861.

However, the recipes themselves have needed careful adaptation. Many of the ingredients that may seem at first glance quite universal – flour, butter, yeast and apples, to give just a few examples – are so different today from those varieties Mrs Beeton would have been familiar with that using

them in the original way can give quite different results to those intended. For those reasons, quantities needed to be not only converted but checked and altered. And all those cases where Mrs Beeton advised adding salt or sugar or honey or spices 'to taste' needed to be pinned down in real quantities, always keeping in mind both flavour and authenticity.

In many instances, recipes have been altered only as much as is necessary to give a truly authentic result. the portable soup on page 33, for example, is a faithful and very Victorian recipe, and certainly merits trying today.

In the case of many of the meat and fish dishes in particular, the modern recipes are amalgamations of more than one Beeton recipe or suggestion. Where a Victorian cook would have happily chosen a plain meat from one chapter and a sauce from another, we tend to prefer the convenience of having everything in one place. The grilled mackerel with gooseberry sauce on page 65, for example, can be found in the original book only as a gooseberry sauce which is suggested as an accompaniment for mackerel. Mrs Beeton did not put the two together as a complete dish.

In a few other cases, a recipe has been inspired by a flavour combination mentioned in passing by Isabella in her original book, although she did not herself offer a recipe for it. This is the case with the lamb chops braised with spring vegetables on page 138, which arose from a simple note that peas and asparagus work well with lamb chops. In these cases, thought has been given to how Mrs Beeton might have combined the ingredients, in order to produce a dish that she would, hopefully, have been happy to include in her own edition.

Cooking methods, too, were in some cases not replicable and in others simply no longer the best way of achieving the desired results. A significant factor in this is that the domestic oven was in its infancy in 1861, and Mrs Beeton was not able to make full use of it in her book. Most kitchens would instead have been equipped with old-fashioned ranges, and there is much mention of setting things before the fire, turning and basting. Roasting meat, which we now consider a simple process, required constant attention 150 years ago, and even toasting bread was a laborious process deemed worthy of several paragraphs.

Oven temperatures, therefore, have all had to be deduced from a mixture of reading between the lines, comparing modern recipes, and testing, testing, testing.

In the process of updating the book it became clear that some of Mrs Beeton's recipes were forerunners of dishes that we are now familiar with under a different name. In these cases, the name of the dish has also been modernised. For that reason you will find here among other things eggs Florentine (see page 193), a plum crumble (see page 243) and a Victoria sandwich cake (see page 302), in spite of the fact that those dishes were in fact probably all invented – or at least named – after Isabella Beeton's death. The essence, nonetheless, comes from her.

The legacy

After Isabella Beeton died early in 1865, her book took on a life of its own. It was endlessly enlarged and added to, and eventually lost almost all trace of the woman whose name it bore. In any one of the many twentieth-century editions of *Mrs Beeton's Cookery and Household Management*, most of the recipes are entirely modern: they are neither rooted in, nor do they take their inspiration from, Mrs Beeton's original work.

What has been sadly lost in the many, many, editions of the book that have been published in the past 150 years is the spirit of the original. The picture of British food that Isabella painted in the first edition was about to change wholesale, and her book was destined to change with it. The aim of this latest book is to reverse those changes: to return to real, wholesome, traditional British food, which Mrs Beeton might be proud to recognise as her own – and to put to rest the matronly image.





SOUPS

Soups can be delicate and light – think of the vegetable soups of spring and summer – or substantial and rich, like the more complex, often meatier, soups of winter. Whatever the type of soup you are making, your aim is to capture the character of the main ingredient, be it a vegetable, meat or fish.

A base for a soup is usually made by stewing some vegetables in oil or butter before adding stock or milk to cook the ingredients. This should give the soup base a deep, intense flavour, which can be reinforced and freshened up with vegetables added toward the end of cooking. Peas or asparagus, however, should only be added at the last minute and cooked for a very short time to preserve their colour and flavour.

It is a common misconception that all soups need to be cooked for a long time. This is only the case when tougher cuts of meat are being used. Generally, a soup is cooked as soon as the vegetables are tender and suitable for pureeing.

When making a puréed soup, a jug blender or liquidiser is essential for achieving the smoothest result. Add the soup in small batches to the liquidiser or jug blender then run the machine for 2–3 minutes between additions. Pass the soup through a fine sieve or chinois (see glossary) into a clean pan before reheating or chilling over ice. The soup can then be finished with a little seasoning to taste and perhaps a small addition of cream or unsalted butter can be whisked in to enrich it. Remember, though, when making soups, to use seasoning lightly. A soup does not require the same level of salt as a sauce, so when tasting, be careful not to over-season.

STOCKS

These words are as true today as when Mrs Beeton wrote them: good stocks are the essence of good cooking. Stocks are the foundation of so many dishes, so it is worth ensuring that they contain only the best ingredients. Take care never to over-season stock. Many recipes call for stocks to be reduced, so a stock that starts off already slightly salty will result in a very salty finished dish.

Unlike in Mrs Beeton's time, ready-made stocks in liquid or powdered form are now widely available. However, they are rarely based on prime ingredients or made with the care you would take when making your own. Ready-made stock almost never has the body of homemade stock – a quality that derives from using gelatinous meat and bones to make the homemade version – so will give a completely different result to the recipes it is used in. Many ready-made stocks are also salty, and so not suitable for reducing.

Cold water, rather than hot, should be added to stocks as it encourages fat to rise and solidify, making it easier to skim from the surface.

Wine, if you use it, should be of drinking quality and not dregs or anything past its best.

Salt should only be added at the end. As you reduce the stock it will intensify the natural salts within the ingredients, so you should never add salt until the stock is fully reduced and you have tasted it. You can always add more seasoning at a later stage, if desired, but you cannot repair over-salted stock.

Stockpots

It is most efficient, and worthwhile, to make stock in large quantities, and for this you will need a large, stainless steel stockpot. A pot of 25–30cm in diameter that will hold 17 litres can be accommodated by most domestic hobs.



JELLIED GAME STOCK

* Makes 2 litres * Preparation time 1 hour 45 minutes * Cooking time 8 hours

The backbones of game birds can be bitter, so do not use them in stocks. When using giblets, always check them for green or yellow stains. These indicate contamination with bile, and any affected parts should be cut off and discarded.

**750g pheasant carcass
(backbone discarded) or
other game bones and meat**

750g pork rib bones

2 tbsp sunflower oil

**2 large onions, roughly
chopped**

1 carrot, roughly chopped

1 stick celery, roughly chopped

**1 garlic clove, peeled
and sliced in half**

2 bay leaves

1 thyme sprig

500ml white wine

special equipment

**1–2 roasting tins and
a large stockpot**

Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas mark 6. Place the bones in a large roasting tin, drizzle with the oil and toss to coat. If you cannot fit the pieces in a single layer use 2 tins. Place in the oven and roast, turning every 20 minutes, until well browned. After 1 hour add the chopped vegetables, garlic and herbs, turning everything occasionally so nothing burns.

After 30 minutes remove from the oven, pour off and discard any fat, and then place the contents of the roasting tin into a stockpot.

Add the wine to the roasting tin or tins and use a wooden spoon to scrape any sediment from the bottom, warming the tins over a low heat to dissolve the juices if necessary, then pour everything from the roasting tins into the stockpot.

Add enough cold water to cover the bones to a depth of 10cm. Bring the stock to a simmer and skim off any fat or scum that rises to the surface. Then turn the heat down to low and leave the stock to simmer very slowly for 6 hours. When cooked, strain the stock through a very fine sieve or chinois into a large bowl, cover and chill.

Once cold, skim any fat from the surface. Pour the stock back into the cleaned stockpot and bring to a boil over a high heat. Reduce to approximately 2 litres, skimming as necessary. Remove the stockpot from the heat and leave to cool. Then chill until cold, pour into re-sealable 250ml containers and freeze for up to 2 months.

To use, allow the stock to thaw out then dilute with an equal quantity of water before using in game soups, braises and casseroles.





JELLIED BEEF STOCK

* Makes 2 litres * Preparation time 1 hour 15 minutes

* Cooking time 12 hours 30 minutes first day, 4 hours second day

This stock is best started early in the morning so that it has plenty of time to cook. It can then be cooled overnight and reduced the following day to give a rich, unctuous stock.

5kg beef or veal bones

4 tbsp oil

1 large carrot, roughly chopped

1 stick celery, roughly chopped

1 large onion, roughly chopped

3 garlic cloves, peeled

1 bay leaf

**100g large mushrooms
or mushroom trimmings,
roughly chopped**

1 tomato, roughly chopped

300ml light red wine

1 pig's trotter, split in half

small bunch thyme

1 small tarragon sprig

1 tsp black peppercorns

special equipment

**2 roasting tins and
a large stockpot**

Preheat the oven to 220°C/gas mark 7. Arrange the bones in the roasting tins and place in the oven. Roast for 1 hour, turning occasionally so that they brown evenly, then remove them from the oven and pour off any melted fat – you can save this to make roast potatoes (see page 179).

Place the oil in the stockpot and set it over a medium heat. Add the carrot, celery and onion and cook, stirring, for about 10–15 minutes, or until well caramelised.

Add the garlic, bay leaf, mushrooms and tomato and continue to cook until the mixture is almost dry and beginning to stick to the pan. Add the red wine and continue cooking until it has reduced by half, scraping all the sediment from the bottom of the pan. Add the trotter to the pan along with 2 litres of cold water, then add half the roasted bones. Give everything a good stir before adding the remaining bones and another 4 litres of cold water, or enough to cover the bones well.

Turn the heat to high and bring the stock to a simmer, but do not allow it to boil. Skim to remove any scum that rises to the surface, and add the herbs and peppercorns. Continue to simmer without boiling for 12 hours, skimming as necessary. Strain the stock through a very fine sieve or chinois into a large bowl and allow it to cool overnight.

The next morning, remove and discard any fat, and pour the stock back into the cleaned stockpot. Bring to a boil and reduce, skimming as necessary, until you are left with 2 litres. Remove the stockpot from the heat and leave to cool. Chill until cold then pour into re-sealable 250ml containers and freeze for up to 2 months.

To use, allow the stock to thaw out then dilute with an equal quantity of water for a full-flavoured beef stock.

CLARIFYING STOCKS

*** To clarify 2 litres of stock * Preparation time 10 minutes * Cooking time 20–30 minutes**

Clarification is a method used to clear stocks that have clouded or need to be refined for use in a consommé. Mrs Beeton noted that, 'when [a stock] is obliged to be clarified it is deteriorated both in quality and flavour', yet she did include a recipe for clarifying stocks, which calls for a simple mixture of egg whites and water, in her book. This updated recipe uses a similar method, but retains the flavour by using a mixture of minced, lean meat of the same type as the stock being clarified, plus vegetables, herbs and spices. You need to start with cold stock so that the egg white solidifies gradually, trapping particles from the stock as it does so.

**2 litres cold chicken
or beef stock (see
pages 22–23 or 19)**

**120g egg white (about
3 large or 4 medium
egg whites)**

**30g carrot, peeled and
roughly chopped**

**50g onion, peeled and
roughly chopped**

**20g celery, trimmed and
roughly chopped**

**20g leek, trimmed and
roughly chopped**

**200g lean, minced
chicken or beef**

few thyme sprigs

1 bay leaf

1 garlic clove, peeled

1 tsp black peppercorns

Place the cold stock into a large saucepan. Put the egg white, vegetables and meat in the jug of a food processor and pulse to chop to a coarse paste.

Turn the heat under the saucepan to high and whisk the vegetable and egg paste, the herbs, garlic and peppercorns into the stock. Bring to a gentle simmer over a high heat, whisking again once or twice as it warms. At no point should the stock be allowed to bubble.

As the stock reaches a simmer, the egg and vegetables begin to form a thick scum on the surface. Reduce the heat to low and keep the stock just under a simmer. The surface layer will thicken and set, trapping all of the sediment and debris.

After 10 minutes, remove the pan from heat and break a hole in the egg crust large enough to fit the bowl of a ladle through. Very carefully ladle the stock out through the hole and into a muslin-lined sieve suspended over a large bowl.

Cover and chill immediately and use as required. This will yield approximately 1.8 litres, and can be frozen for up to 2 months.

