

Learn to Cook 25 Southern Classics 3 Ways: Traditional, Contemporary, International

Jennifer Brulé

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A casual tone and serious passion bring a storied heritage to the family table.

Chef and television personality Jennifer Brulé appeals to home cooks with a comfort-food theme and creative variations, with *Learn to Cook 25 Southern Classics 3 Ways*. Regional fare becomes a flavorful palette for experimentation.

Brulé, who is also a recipe developer for magazines, shows a genuine understanding of the way real cooks learn. Her book introduces an original recipe, then demonstrates ways to adapt it through lower fat ingredients, different preparation methods, and savory seasonings. This proves to be a simple, clever way to organize the work, allowing beginners to see how an expert takes an idea and runs with it.

Classic Cheese Grits are slimmed down in a modern version that uses broth in place of milk and cream, which leads to a Northern Italian Polenta. Classic Golden Fried Fish inspires a baked version using a quinoa crust, and later, Thai Fish Cakes. Without worrying over being authentic, international dishes, including a Swiss Älplermagronen (Alpine macaroni), lend global panache to some of the chef's favorites.

Each recipe includes a closeup of the food, spirited comments that reveal a personal connection to the dish, practical tips—such as how to make okra less slimy—and flourishes that enhance the final result. From staples of the potluck table (deviled eggs) to dinner party main courses (pork tenderloin topped with chimichurri), the majority of these recipes are hearty without being too decadent.

An egalitarian view of the kitchen makes this an especially welcoming title. Butter and trendier, health-conscious coconut oil both have a place. If Asian fish sauce adds punch to oven-fried green tomatoes, why not? If paprika adds depth and not only color, in it goes. Brulé takes the fear out of playing with food, freely admitting that it's fine when certain baked items turn out paler than their fried counterparts. Perfection takes a backseat to taste.

Packed with only seventy-five recipes, this lively introduction to Southern cookery encourages making connections across place and culture. A casual tone and serious passion bring a storied heritage to the family table.

KAREN RIGBY (Fall 2016)

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