
Subject: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [jmeadows](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 01:23:46 GMT
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Sunshine Ask Robins

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [kolokolchiki](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 02:20:00 GMT
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Quote:One of the reasons I've never got round to posting my How to Make Yeast Bread (which I've been promising off and on now for almost three years) is because so much of it is based on feel—on experience. Every frelling bag of frelling flour is a little different, and what makes cooking fun and interesting and dangerous is learning to respond to your ingredients and when to ignore the recipe. There's a reason why so many of us old, experienced, not to say self-willed and cantankerous, cooks say of ourselves 'I can't follow a recipe'. This is pretty hard to quantify.

Have you ever looked at Tassajara Cooking by Edward Espe Brown? There are very few amounts listed anywhere. It is mostly suggestion and guidance rather than recipe, but it's honest about what it is, and I love this cookbook. The Tassajara Bread Book gives measurements in the recipes, but in the front matter, Brown goes to great lengths to point out how variable they may be. I think I enjoy Brown's cookbooks precisely because they empower me to experiment by giving me a baseline from which to begin.

Tassajara Cooking ISBN:0877730474
Tassajara Bread Book ISBN: 0877733430

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Maren](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 03:07:04 GMT
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Quote:what do mik-bars taste like?

OK, how about malak? I imagine it to be kind of like chai.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [EMoon](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 03:13:05 GMT

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So true about bread. Having tried to teach friends to make bread (they asked me; I didn't push) who turned out to have no hand for bread, I think it's all feel and maybe even innate.

My mother made incredibly good from-scratch pastry. My pastry either falls apart or resembles suede (in the unbaked form) or mortar (in the baked form.) She made great from-scratch cakes; I can barely make a cake from a mix. But bread...she made OK bread but not great. My bread...was good enough for my mother-in-law to rave over. And it was good from the first time I plucked up courage enough to try it. It's as if the ingredients tell my fingers what to do with it; I've made bread in different climates, on different continents (as a guest-present) with totally different flours...and very rarely does it go wrong. I don't think it's skill--I think I was born with 'bread hands.' When I read directions in books, it seems I'm doing it all wrong...but the bread comes out right. (But it's clear that I will never in my life make biscuits as good as my mother's. Or pie crust.)

As for other recipes...yes...it's all smell and feel. How much wine in the soup? "Enough." How much of anything? Depends on how much of other things are available...and what was substituted when an ingredient was missing. A recipe is a suggestion. I heard a TV cooking show host comments recently that the big difference between home and professional cooks is that professional cooks have to be absolutely consistent--if it's "Great Chef X's Beef Stew" the customers expect the same beef stew every time. But at home...it can be never the same twice, but always good.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins

Posted by [danceswithpahis](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 04:31:32 GMT

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This has always been one of the areas that I've wanted to have more time to experiment, since I do enjoy baking things (when I have the mental and emotional energy). My one caveat is that it has to be tricky, complicated, or at the very least, time-consuming. My first time making caramel rolls (a process involving multiple hours of work, they were the first bread-like food I'd ever made [I had to look up bread-making instructions online], and my cooking ability at the time was largely based on my ability to successfully boil water, but hey, the caramel rolls sounded like fun) they came out light and tasty and as if I'd been making them for years. My various experiments with French pastries (most of which involve various recipes combined into one, so that making all of the separate pieces involve multiple specialized cooking tools [most of which I don't have] and various ingredient lists with things not available in the country I was cooking in at the time), while not always attractive-looking, have pretty much always turned out tasting good. This, despite not knowing how to cook at all (at the beginning), and starting off my baking career in a foreign country with a stove that had two temperatures -- 1 and 1/2 (one could fiddle around with them

and have, say, 5/8 or 9/10 or so, but there was no correlation with actual temperatures). But give me a recipe like, oh, muffins, and I can't do it. The recipe is too simple, and it falls to pieces in my hands. Even if I have friends who take the same simple muffin recipes and create masterpieces. Cookies are another example; try to get me to make a basic cookie, and you will be sorely disappointed. Chocolate chip cookies? Doesn't work; they taste awful. How could I possibly manage something successful with a recipe that only takes 10 minutes to make? This is why I don't bake very often.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [amp15](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 05:58:58 GMT
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As a listomaniac baker who loves Sunshine, I naturally made a list of all the goodies mentioned - and then went ahead to try make some of them. :)
Of course I have no idea if they are anything like what Robin had in mind, but the Cinnamon Roll recipe is in Playing ... and I could do the same with Marat (Sour Cherry thingie), Eschatology (no baking involved), Rocky Road (oats and macadamia) and Jam-Dandies (a Danish with almond and jam filling).
I tried out a few more, but those were the outstanding ones. Aside from the story and characters that book is such an inspiration. :)

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Diane in MN](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 07:30:52 GMT
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EMoon wrote on Mon, 02 August 2010 22:13So true about bread. Having tried to teach friends to make bread (they asked me; I didn't push) who turned out to have no hand for bread, I think it's all feel and maybe even innate.

I think you're right about this. When I started making bread, it was strictly from a book--neither my mother nor anyone else I cooked with when young baked yeast goods--and I don't remember any failures. If the dough feels right, the bread comes out, and that feeling seemed obvious to me very early on. I like the fact that bread dough can be very forgiving when it comes to substitutions or additions; to me, it invites fiddling with recipes or making up new ones much more than non-yeast baking does.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Diane in MN](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 07:57:18 GMT
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I DO NOT WANT TO BE REVIEWED IN THE DOMESTIC SECTION OF YUMMY MUMMIES MONTHLY!!!

Yummy mummies . . . How many places can we go from there? Who would find the mummies yummy? And might these mummies be, in fact, mummies? Inquiring minds want to know . . . :)

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [jmeadows](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 08:00:04 GMT
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HUNGRY!!!!!!

And then Jodi ate the world. The end.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Robin](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 12:14:08 GMT
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I have a falling-apart pages-stuck-together copy of the FIRST EDITION of the Tassajara Bread book. A lot of my philosophy of cooking derived from there. :)

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Robin](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 12:15:06 GMT
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Send me an Ask Robin, would you please?

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Robin](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 12:16:16 GMT
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Yes. All of that. Hmm. I think I'll steal this one and bake another post around it. :)

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Robin](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 12:17:59 GMT
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Um. Posting recipes is always good, but please don't call them Sunshine's this or that, okay?
(And her Eschatology most certainly does include baking. :))

Thanks.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Black Bear](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 12:19:08 GMT
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Agreeing with both Emoon and Diane--my mom doesn't do yeast breads at all, ever. She taught me to make Irish soda bread, and that's about it; but when I finally screwed up my courage to try, I discovered I'm actually pretty good at it, it seems very easy to me to know when the dough is "right." Go figure.

Of course, with the heat and humidity here at the moment, I'm not baking ANYTHING for at least another month...

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Robin](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 12:20:17 GMT
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Yes, I taught myself entirely out of books because I didn't have any human beings who could help me. I had a bit of learning curve for all this stuff however--I went through the wet/bricklike yeast bread and ditto cakes and pastry--but I pretty much eventually succeeded on all of them. I have other areas of extreme lack of ability . . . :)

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Robin](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 12:25:17 GMT
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Snork. 'Yummy mummies' is a phrase over here for . . . um . . . middle to upper-middle class stay at home mums who are trying to be Nigella Lawson/domestic goddesses. It's not a very friendly term.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [amp15](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 12:56:31 GMT
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Oh no, they are all mine, and Sunshine is merely the inspiration. :)

But what kind of thingie is an eschatology? To me the association is something like the The Four Chocolates of the Apocalypse so I was thinking crunchy layers separating various creams and mousses.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Maren](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 13:12:29 GMT
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Robin wrote on Tue, 03 August 2010 08:15Send me an Ask Robin, would you please?

Sure! Just pretend my anonymity is not blown. ;)

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Krystolla](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 13:21:14 GMT
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So I'm the only one who figured that Sunshine's incredible baking skills were in part due to her, uh, special relationship with heat and "small stuff changing"? Well, and lots of practice. I figured her recipes were approximations and she could probably make cinnamon rolls out of four rotten eggs and a cashew.

Then again, maybe I have too much/too little faith in bakers. Mostly it all seems like sorcery.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [anne_d](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 13:36:17 GMT
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Robin wrote on Tue, 03 August 2010 05:25Snork. 'Yummy mummies' is a phrase over here for . . . um . . . middle to upper-middle class stay at home mums who are trying to be Nigella Lawson/domestic goddesses. It's not a very friendly term.

Oh, you mean the ones who let their spoiled-brat offspring run wild in the market while they talk on their cellphones? I get the picture.

Many attempt to be Nigella, but few succeed...

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [equus_peduus](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 14:59:48 GMT
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Am I the only one here whose mother actually taught her how to bake things rather than forcing one to learn out of a book and experimentation because said mother didn't bake much/at all?

Though while my mother makes a very much excellent strawberry shortcake (actually she makes (or used to make) a lot of very excellent baked goods), she seems to think that I'm better at most baking than she is. She makes *me* do the cakes, pies, cookies, muffins, bread (well, the latter mostly gets bread-machined now-a-days). Or maybe she just wants the end product without doing the work :p Not that I mind - other than my chocolate experiments, I mostly don't bake for myself any more, and I *like* baking. But I've always followed recipes for baking. Cooking, I make it up, but baking I follow recipes. But I do agree - you have to know when to keep going with kneading, or when to stop mixing the muffin batter, or how much pastry-handling you can get away with - and it's something that is a combination of learning-by-doing and *feeling* in the mix. I had a roommate a few years ago who made molasses-oatmeal bread - but she NEVER kneaded it enough, so while it always tasted really good, it also always fell apart, and she could never figure out why.

danceswithpahis wrote on Mon, 02 August 2010 21:31This has always been one of the areas that I've wanted to have more time to experiment, since I do enjoy baking things (when I have the mental and emotional energy). My one caveat is that it has to be tricky, complicated, or at the very least, time-consuming.

I find this interesting. I do enjoy somewhat complicated recipes from time to time - but I generally find that while they come out pretty darn good, they're just not *quite* worth the effort involved. I'd much rather throw together a 7-minute batch of cookies (+8 minute baking time). OTOH, doing all the convoluted fiddly steps can be a lot of fun in and of itself, if you're not trying to get something else done at the same time because you didn't think that it was going to take as long as it did.

Have you ever made croissants? Not that difficult, really, but very time consuming (every 10 minutes - take the dough out of the fridge, roll it out, layer it with butter, fold it and roll it a couple times, and stick it back in the fridge... repeat too many times...). I like most breads because you can ignore them for a couple hours while they rise, then come back and do the next step.

Quote:mik-bars

Am I the only one, for some reason, that despite the number of times I've read that book, thought they were MILK bars? This explanation makes much more sense.

Quote:Trust me: ‘thank you’ is never inadequate to a storyteller about her stories. All right then - Thank you, Robin. Two of my three most favorite I-just-want-one-book-to-read-right-now books are yours. :)

(And since EMoon is also around here... Thank you too - one of my two favorite I-want-a-whole-series-to-read-again series is by you.)

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [mayasings](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 15:37:16 GMT
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you are so not the only one who read them as MILK bars, lol!

I swear for the first few *years* of reading Hero (this isn't cause it took me years to read it but because I had to reread it again and again of course) I naturally thought they were milk bars, though it did seem kinda strange to me to give milk bars to a horse... but what do I really know about horses?

it was only a few years ago that I noticed the difference. smart of me ;)

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Jeanne Marie](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 16:57:02 GMT
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amp15 wrote on Tue, 03 August 2010 07:56The Four Chocolates of the Apocalypse

Love this...so much potential!
Smiles,
JM

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [amp15](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 19:32:16 GMT
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It's a real recipe, that I unfortunately lost in a computer crash some years ago.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Melissa Mead](#) on Tue, 03 Aug 2010 23:59:03 GMT
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mayasings wrote on Tue, 03 August 2010 11:37you are so not the only one who read them as MILK bars, lol!

I swear for the first few *years* of reading Hero (this isn't cause it took me years to read it but because I had to reread it again and again of course) I naturally thought they were milk bars, though it did seem kinda strange to me to give milk bars to a horse... but what do I really know about horses?

it was only a few years ago that I noticed the difference. smart of me ;)

Me too. I thought they were like Milk Bones, but for horses.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Catlady](#) on Wed, 04 Aug 2010 00:23:52 GMT
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I've always felt they sounded like a perfect sort of snack food. Enough like real food to fill you up, sweet enough to be interesting... and since they're in Damar, not filled with twenty-six syllable ingredients to give them their sweet-enough-to-be-interesting taste.

And I've always pictured Killer Zebras as pinwheel cookies, though probably much more artistic than the ones I make, which do NOT resemble pinwheels. (Or zebras.)

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [shalea](#) on Thu, 05 Aug 2010 05:53:17 GMT
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equus_peduus wrote on Tue, 03 August 2010 10:59Am I the only one here whose mother actually taught her how to bake things rather than forcing one to learn out of a book and experimentation because said mother didn't bake much/at all?

No, you're not the only one. I don't make up the bread recipe my mother taught me very often nor my grandmother's pie crust but I make biscuits* at least monthly**. My sister is the Queen of Pound Cake, though I'm not bad at it. If I'm baking cookies, odds are they're chocolate chip.

* The southern-US sort.

** With my own personal variations. Butter, not margarine. Sometimes with cheese.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [shalea](#) on Thu, 05 Aug 2010 05:54:36 GMT
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mayasings wrote on Tue, 03 August 2010 11:37you are so not the only one who read them as MILK bars, lol!

No, not at all. I think my copy of Sword actually has a typo at one point where they're actually spelled "milk" bars.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [abigailmm](#) on Thu, 05 Aug 2010 06:46:03 GMT
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mayasings wrote on Tue, 03 August 2010 11:37you are so not the only one who read them as MILK bars, lol!

In his last decade my father suffered from ataxia, which, besides messing up his balance, made his speech difficult to understand, and may have affected his cognition, though that wasn't clear. He was sitting at the dining table at my house one evening, looking out the window, and he said, "It says 'milk'."

"What?" we said.

He kept insisting that he saw the word milk somewhere out the window. As there was just a green yard, without even any litter of any papers, we were mystified. Eventually, I put my head right down beside his, and looked where he was pointing. Indeed, I saw "milk." Across the yard was a

row of nandinas. They have many leaves, narrow pointed things about 1 cm x 5 cm, that grow in a somewhat scattered, non-dense way. From his particular position, 9 leaves overlapped in a formation that formed an M, an L, and a K. There was not actually an I, but the perception was indeed that it said 'milk'.

Tom had gotten rather frustrated as we couldn't tell what he was talking about, and he was unable to explain himself more clearly. Once we all saw it, he was vindicated.

The bushes continued to say "milk" for a week or so, till uneven growth moved the leaflets and destroyed the formation.

Subject: Re: Sunshine Ask Robins
Posted by [Annagail](#) on Thu, 05 Aug 2010 15:19:48 GMT
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Quote:Am I the only one here whose mother actually taught her how to bake things rather than forcing one to learn out of a book and experimentation because said mother didn't bake much/at all?

Nope. My mom taught me baking, too- although I think I make better piecrust than she does at this point. I've been trying to figure out if one could "artisanise" my favourite bread recipes- the family recipe is a molasses rye that is HEAVENLY but I rather wonder what it would be like if it was let to sour a little, or made with some kind of starter. I also love my honey-oatmeal bread, but think it would be better with more of a crust and also made with a starter. I'm a little hesitant to fiddle with them that much, though, because they WORK now and I want them to work again.

I love good biscuits (also Southern-US variety). I think buttermilk biscuits should get made this weekend at my house.

I make one kind of cookie because they're so good that I can't see wanting another kind. (Ok, I see the attraction of peanut butter cookies, but still!) They're basically chocolate chip with oatmeal and nuts and spices and they're chewy. HEAVEN.

~Annagail, who wants lunch NOW
