

THE  
KENTUCKY  
FRESH  
COOKBOOK

*Maggie Green*



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## What About Organic?

Certified organic food may be free of man-made pesticides and chemicals, but it can still mean big business, as evidenced by the organic cheese puffs made by a large food producer and sold at supermarkets. Being certified organic does not ensure that any food is local or from a small, quaint, family-owned farm, nor does “certified organic” imply nutritious.

Everything from apples to fruit-ring cereal is available in organic form, making it easy to misconstrue organic food as healthy food. In reality, this is not the case. A lot of organic foods on the market are highly processed and tightly packaged and have traveled a long way to reach the dinner plate. In addition, eating all organic food can be expensive, and it does not promote Kentucky farmers or Kentucky food producers or take advantage of the seasons of the Kentucky garden and orchard.

That being said, I may buy organic produce from the supermarket if something locally grown or in season isn’t available. The main reason is to reduce my exposure to pesticides and to support more eco-friendly agricultural practices. But sometimes organically raised produce isn’t available, or the cost is prohibitive. That’s why I prefer to feed my family with food grown and produced in Kentucky, as much as possible. I’ve found that the growing practices of many local farmers are often close to organically certifiable practices, but either the farmers are unable or unwilling to pay for the U.S. Department of Agriculture organic designation or they haven’t passed the time frame for eliminating synthetic fertilizers from their fields.

## The Organic Dirty Dozen

The Environmental Working Group’s *Shopper’s Guide to Pesticides* ranks forty-seven commercially raised fruits and vegetables according to the amount of pesticide residue after rinsing or peeling. The following twelve conventionally raised supermarket fruits and vegetables—dubbed the “Organic Dirty Dozen”—are the most contaminated with pesticides: peaches, strawberries, apples, blueberries, nectarines, sweet bell peppers, spinach, cherries, kale, collard greens, potatoes, and grapes. When I buy any of these fruits and vegetables from a supermarket, I buy organic if it is available.

## The Clean Fifteen

The following fruits and vegetables—dubbed the “Clean Fifteen”—had the least pesticide residue: onions, avocados, eggplant, sweet corn, pineapples, mangoes, sweet peas, asparagus, kiwi fruit, cabbage, cantaloupes, watermelons, grapefruit, sweet potatoes, and honeydew melons. For these vegetables, buying organic is not as important if the concern is strictly pesticide residue.

## Using the Recipes

Not all the ingredients in this book are *fresh* in the strictest sense of the word. I use canned ingredients, frozen fruits and vegetables, and even soda pop in a few savory and sweet dishes. If a fresh, local version of an ingredient isn't available, consider substituting a frozen or canned counterpart. The goal is fresh, home-cooked food, but not always as a result of using only fresh ingredients.

Every time I prepare a new recipe, I have to make my own judgments. That's the nature of cooking. The more experienced one gets at cooking, the easier these judgments become. Although I have written, tested, and tweaked the recipes in this book, your results will depend on how hot your oven heats, how full you fill your skillet, and a multitude of other factors. For this reason, I give clues about doneness in most recipes. I may recommend baking a cake for 35 minutes, but if the cake looks and smells like it's fully baked at 30 minutes, check it using the applicable test for doneness and proceed accordingly.

Providing recipes in a book like this one is loaded with apprehension on my part because I want everyone to be a successful cook. I want this to be a book that is read, used, and enjoyed. I suggest reading a recipe in its entirety before embarking on the cooking process. Chop and measure ingredients first so everything is ready before the cooking begins. Taste the food as the recipe proceeds. Most recipes recommend a specific quantity of salt and pepper, but in the end, food should be salted and spiced to suit one's own taste and personal preference, which may not match mine.

To me, one difference between an average cook and a good cook is the latter's attention to the details of selecting ingredients and seasoning food. That said, fresh herbs, fresh citrus juice, fresh garlic, freshly ground spices, and the judicious use of

## Shaker Pumpkin Muffins with Walnuts and Flax Seed

MAKES 8 LARGE MUFFINS

*This sweet, modernized version of Shaker pumpkin muffins is a snap to mix and bake. My father, Carl P. Kroboth, introduced me and my siblings to Shaker Village (or as we called it, “Shakertown”) back in the 1970s. As a civil engineer, he designed roads and bridges during the week, but on the weekends he loved to drive us around Kentucky (often on the very roads he designed), exploring historic sites, nature preserves, and state parks. One frequent stop was Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill. Located near Harrodsburg, this restored Shaker village (the largest in the United States) boasts 3,000 acres of farmland and more than thirty restored buildings. Other Shaker-inspired recipes in this book are Shaker Cornsticks (page 292) and Shaker Lemon Pie (page 89).*

1¾ cups unbleached all-purpose flour  
¼ teaspoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
¾ teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
2 large eggs  
1 cup pumpkin puree  
1 cup sugar  
½ cup canola oil  
⅓ cup water  
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract  
½ cup chopped walnuts or pecans  
½ cup raisins  
⅓ cup ground flax seed

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Spray a 12-cup muffin pan with nonstick cooking spray. Whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon. In a separate bowl, whisk together the eggs, pumpkin, sugar, oil, water, and vanilla. Fold the pumpkin mixture into the flour. Stir in the chopped walnuts, raisins, and flax seed. Use a large spoon or scoop to fill each muffin cup almost to the brim. Bake for 20 to 22 minutes, or until the muffins spring back when gently poked with the fingertips. Let them cool in the pan for 5 minutes and then transfer to a wire rack to finish cooling.

# All I Need Is a Kitchen Table

A few years ago I hosted a New Year's Day brunch for my family. In addition to my overwhelming desire to throw a party, I extended the invitation for other reasons: my nieces were in town, and we hadn't seen them at Christmas; my sister Barbara was leaving for a four-month sabbatical at Oxford; and my sister Theresa had extended her visit to Lexington to help our mother get her house ready to place on the market. Mom had lived in the family home for more than thirty-five years, and back in the days when we were a family of ten, the house had buzzed with activity. Dad had been gone for almost five years, and with the exception of a few nights around Thanksgiving and Christmas, Mom spent most nights alone in the large three-story home. I didn't think this transition would be easy for Mom, but I hoped the move would allow her to forge ahead without the expense and burden of a large house.

The scene at brunch was pretty typical. When my family gets together, we always have a lot of catching up to do, and we usually do so as we sit around the kitchen table. So on that New Year's Day we sat around my kitchen table, shared a meal, and caught up on the family news: our cousin was having some surgery, our niece was studying abroad in France, and of course, we discussed the odds of the University of Kentucky beating the University of Louisville in basketball. Sometimes my sister Anne multitasks and crochets while she talks, but for the most part, when we're together we just sit and talk.

As Mom was packing up her stuff, getting ready to leave my house, she said, "Well, when I move I guess all I need is a kitchen table. That's the only place we ever sit." And, after further reflection, I realized she's right. An impeccably decorated living room or a roaring fire in the fireplace can't keep us away from the kitchen table. Over the years, a table has brought our family together for many reasons, and at many locations, to share meals, stories, games, and tears. After Mom moves, no matter where we gather, we'll continue to make our way to the kitchen table and pick up where we left off. We'll listen to tales about travel, and we'll discuss our plans for the upcoming year.

It's inevitable—time marches on. We grow, change, and live our lives. But one place remains—the kitchen table. It patiently waits for us to return and talk about days gone by because our nourishment comes not only from what we eat there but also from those we meet there.

# May



When I went out under the trees last night, heard the chirping of the first crickets, the dreaming trill of frogs, just as the yellow moon rested on the far hills, there seemed such peace, serenity and comfort in the unfolding night, with its soft scented air.—**HARLAN HUBBARD,**  
*PAYNE HOLLOW JOURNAL*

**A festive and fun time of year,** May is like a breath of fresh air for Kentucky, and it's one of the prettiest spring months. If Kentuckians had a favorite month, it just might be May. If Kentucky had a state holiday, it would be Kentucky Derby Day, the first Saturday in May. I didn't grow up in Louisville, but as a Central Kentucky girl and the daughter of parents who loved Kentucky bourbon, Derby Day offered an occasion to have a party, put a dollar in the basket and draw horses' names out of a hat, and drink mint juleps from sterling silver cups.

In the garden, May is a time of transition. In my part of Kentucky (hardiness zone 6), the date of the last possible frost is around mid-May, so according to my grandfather, I can safely plant tender flowering annuals and my tomato, basil, pepper, bean, and squash plants without fear of damage from a nighttime frost soon after Mother's Day. Tree fruits such as peaches and plums are not in abundance yet, but tender fruits and vegetables are harvested and grace our table—lettuce, rhubarb, asparagus, chard, and strawberries.

## Culinary Herbs

My eyes were opened to the power of fresh herbs during my culinary training at Sullivan University in Louisville. It's hard to forget the day our chef instructor sent us out to the herb garden to pick fresh thyme for a dish we were going to prepare. Learning not only to identify but also to grow and cook with herbs has been worth the price I paid for my education. Within a few days of my first fresh herb lesson, I was shopping for fresh herbs to plant in my Northern Kentucky garden. During my year at Sullivan I stayed with my sister Mary and her husband Bob for a few nights each week, and I placed my herb purchases on their front porch to get adequate sunlight until my drive back home. That evening, Bob and I sat on the porch and sniffed our way through a mix of rosemary, oregano, tarragon, parsley, chives, basil, thyme, and sage. The aromas burst forth from the leaves as we rubbed them, releasing their essential oils. We both almost had to call in sick the next day due to our near-allergic reactions to the herb-smelling session.

Fresh herbs grow in Kentucky nearly year-round—beginning in March, when chives shoot up from the ground, and continuing into November, when sage and rosemary still thrive in the cool air. Kentucky lies in zones 6 and 7 on the Hardiness Zone Map. This temperate climate allows the growing and harvesting of many varieties of herbs. Herbs are relatively easy to grow and don't even require a garden—they can be grown in patio containers, window boxes, or pots on a windowsill. And high-quality dried herbs can be used in cooking when fresh herbs are not in season. Dried and fresh herbs are sometimes interchangeable in recipes: use three to five times more fresh herbs than dried, depending on the strength of the herb.

Most culinary herbs are perennial, which means that they return to the garden every year. Examples are thyme, chives, tarragon, lavender, oregano, rosemary, and sage. Some herbs, such as basil and dill, are annual and enjoy only one growing season. Parsley and cilantro may return for a second growing season if the weather conditions are favorable.

Every year in May the Kentucky Herb Association sponsors its Herb Festival, featuring lectures scheduled throughout the day and vendors selling herbal crafts, products, foods, and plants. An herbal luncheon is available by reservation, as well as a forum of Kentucky authors to sign their books. Reminiscent Nursery in Burlington is a lovely spot to shop for unique herb plants to start your own culinary herb garden. For Kentucky-grown lavender, a trip to Lavender Hills of Kentucky in Bracken County makes for a rewarding Sunday afternoon drive.



## Early-Season Grilling

One of the best events of springtime is the day we open our outdoor dining room—the patio. We remove the drop cloths from the furniture, reassemble the fountain, and put up the umbrella. It's not a fancy outdoor kitchen or a covered three-season room, but it is one of my favorite places. Containers filled with annuals and the nearby butterfly bush, black-eyed susans, hostas, and ornamental grasses make it a cozy outdoor place to eat. I look forward to the first time we grill, too, but we don't necessarily have to grill to eat outdoors. There's nothing like a plate of pancakes and a cup of coffee on the patio on a warm spring morning. And if the weather isn't cooperative, we even grill outside but eat indoors.

### Safely Cooking Ground Meats

Unlike whole cuts of meat, such as steaks or chops, ground meat has an increased risk of bacterial contamination. This explains the concern about fully cooking ground meat. To dispel my fear about tainted meat, I can either grind my own meat or purchase it from reputable local markets or farmers who grind their own beef, poultry, or lamb in small batches.

The length of time it takes to fully cook a ground meat patty varies, depending on its size and thickness and the temperature of the grill. The safest way to judge the doneness of a ground meat patty is to insert a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the burger. Ground beef is fully cooked at 155°F, and ground poultry is fully cooked at 165°F.

To grill a burger, preheat the grill to medium. Use smoke chips, if desired, over a charcoal fire to add smoky flavor to the meat. My brother-in-law Mike likes to use apple wood chips, and Warren uses hickory. Place the burgers on the grill and watch them carefully. Sometime the juice and fat dripping from the burger causes a flare-up, burning the outside before the inside is anywhere near done. Keep the fire low, and cook the burger slowly. Avoid pressing down on the patty during cooking.

## Overnight Oatmeal with Yogurt and Berries

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

*Inspired by a recipe I tested for Janet Brill, this oatmeal is mixed the night before and served straight from the refrigerator. It's a refreshing way to eat fresh berries and oats.*

1½ cups quick-cooking oats  
¾ cup vanilla yogurt  
½ cup orange juice  
1 tablespoon Kentucky honey  
1 cup sliced strawberries  
½ cup fresh blueberries  
½ apple, cored and finely chopped  
¼ cup ground flax seed  
½ cup chopped walnuts  
¼ teaspoon cinnamon

In a large bowl, combine the oats, yogurt, orange juice, and honey. Let stand 5 minutes. Gently fold in the strawberries, blueberries, apple, flax seed, and walnuts. Sprinkle with cinnamon. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Serve cold.



## Sunflower Slaw

MAKES ABOUT 8 SERVINGS

*I love the crunchy house salad at the Alfalfa Restaurant in Lexington. This is my variation of it, and it makes me feel healthier every time I eat it.*

- 8 cups shredded red or green cabbage (about one 2-pound head or one 16-ounce bag preshredded cabbage)
- 4 carrots, peeled and grated
- ¼ cup olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon (about 2 tablespoons)
- 2 tablespoons apple cider or red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons Kentucky honey
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup alfalfa or broccoli sprouts
- ¼ cup salted hulled sunflower seeds

Place the cabbage and carrot in a large bowl—the bigger the bowl, the easier it is to toss the slaw with the dressing. In a small bowl, whisk the olive oil, lemon juice, vinegar, honey, salt, and pepper until thick. Pour over the cabbage and toss. Stir in the sprouts and sunflower seeds. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

