

HOLIDAY GIFT BOOK ROUNDUP

BY GWEN ASHLEY WALTERS

It's fertile ground for a new crop of food books celebrating gardens, farms and the art of eating locally. We've plowed through a handful of new arrivals and serve up these delights just in time for the holidays. We also went back to last season to take a fresh look at ex-Tucsonan Barbara Kingsolver's first nonfiction narrative, the bestselling *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, now available in paperback.

Blue Eggs & Yellow Tomatoes: Recipes from a Modern Kitchen Garden by Jeanne Kelley

Facts: Running Press, hardcover, 352 pages, \$35

Photos: Nearly every page; glossy food porn—there is no way our attempts at replicating the dishes will turn out half as sexy

Recipes: 150 plus bonus recipes, like preserved lemons, in sidebars

Give to: Your favorite cookbook collector or your friend who reads *Bon Appétit* magazine cover to cover, as the author is a 20-year contributor

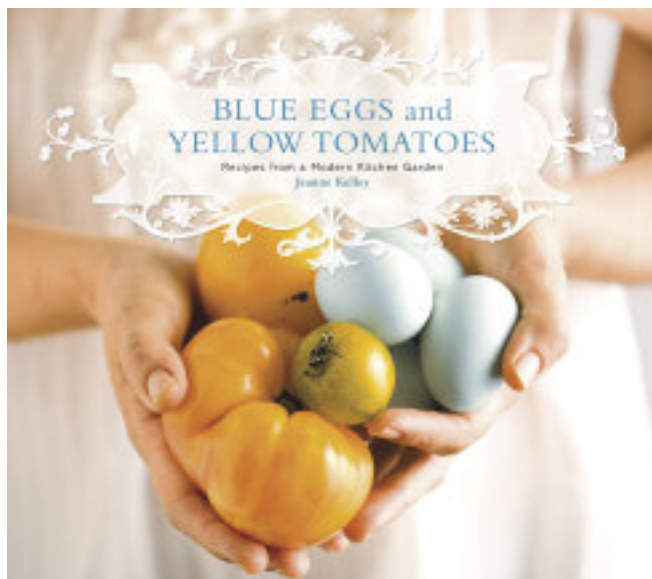
The cover of this nearly four-pound book appeals to our nostalgic side with dirt-kissed hands holding ugly yellow tomatoes and pale, blue-green eggs. Oversized and heavy, it's a little awkward taking it into the kitchen to work with, although the pictures and recipe descriptions are compelling. I found recipes in every section that I would like to try. The recipe categories are interesting, too: appetizers and small plates; soups (13 recipes); salads, sandwiches and tartines (open-faced sandwiches); pizza and pasta; fish and poultry; meats—beef, buffalo, pork, lamb and rabbit; desserts and sweets; and finally, breakfast and brunch.

Most of the recipes feature trendy ingredients: Burrata cheese, Fuyu persimmons, farro, Iberico cheese, rose water, tamarind, membrillo (Spanish quince paste). Many of them are ethnically or globally influenced—Vietnamese beef pho, sopa de limon, Moroccan chicken skewers and Beames-de-Venise cake.

Kelley's recipes are well written, with simple but thorough instructions. The few recipes printed on pastel-colored checkered backgrounds are hard to read, but that's a minor nuance. The bigger obstacle is taking such a beautiful book into the spill-and-stain zone of your kitchen.

I do think her recipe introductions are full of interesting and educational information. Her target audience is clearly those who love to entertain and embrace the idea of made-from-scratch recipes with at least some ingredients from either a backyard garden or the bounty of farmers' markets. I picked up a package of dates this weekend at our Downtown Phoenix Public Market and, using the book's index, found four recipes that include dates, including a simple red onion and orange salad with a curry vinaigrette, and bacon-wrapped roasted dates.

More info: jeannekelleykitchen.com



The Heirloom Tomato Cookbook: From Garden to Table: Recipes, Portraits, and History of the World's Most Beautiful Fruit by Amy Goldman with photographer Victor Schrager

Facts: Bloomsbury USA, hardcover, 272 pages, \$35

Photos: 250 and stunning. Cut them out, frame them and give as gifts for your garden friends

Recipes: 55

Give to: Your academic friends, your myopic gardener friend, your favorite tomato farmer

The amount of research behind this art-cum-food book is mind-boggling, but shouldn't surprise any fans of seed preservationist Amy Goldman. This is Amy's third collaboration with renowned still-life photographer Victor Schrager, having written similar books on melons and squashes with equally beautiful photographs.

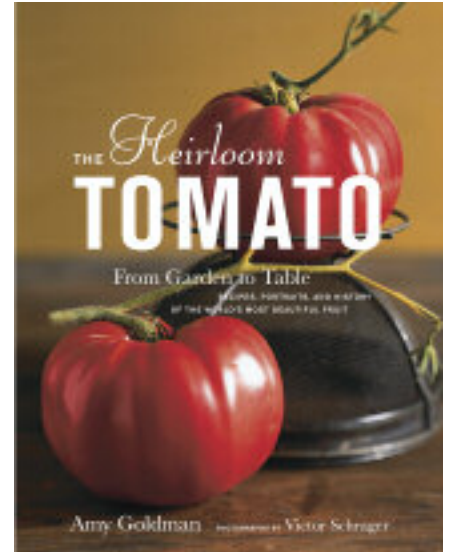
What surprises me most is that not all tomatoes are grown for eating. Many are grown simply for ornamental purposes, or what Goldman terms as "pet" tomatoes. Scanning this book, I realize how little I know about tomatoes. Goldman says there are more than 5,000 cultivated varieties, and she has drilled deep on 200 of them, divided into eight horticultural groups based on the shape and size of the tomatoes.

For each, she lists the size, weight, shape, exterior and flesh colors, flavor, texture, best uses, plant habit/leaf type/yield, maturity (number of days from transplant to appearance of the first ripe fruit) and origin. She also gives synonyms, which nearly every single tomato has at least a few, and seed sources. The photographs are numbered so that every tomato is pictured, generally next to the plant's bio. I told you it was mind-boggling.

The front section of the book goes into explicit detail on how to grow tomatoes, with accompanying photographs to drive some of her points home. The back of the book contains a collection of 55 recipes, from soups to main dishes to condiments to a couple of desserts and even drinks, including an herb- and garlic-infused tomato water recipe. (If you've never tasted it, I highly recommend you try it next summer when you have an abundance of ripe, garden tomatoes as it is hard to describe, but unbelievable to taste. It is like biting into a fresh tomato without the bite.) Her recipes don't specify which particular heirlooms to use, but instead tell you what color or shape tomatoes are best.

Anyone who wants to explore the possibility of growing heirloom tomatoes in their own backyard will find this book more than enough to begin the journey.

More info: rareforms.com



TOMATO CHIPS

A beautiful sight. Tomato chips of many colors and sizes are fun as a garnish.

Yield: 1 pound

1 cup pure olive oil
2 tablespoons finely minced garlic
3 pounds assorted tomatoes, sliced ¼ inch thick
2 tablespoons salt
2 teaspoons fresh-ground black pepper
¼ cup finely chopped thyme

In a sauté pan, warm the olive oil over medium-low heat until it begins to ripple slightly at the bottom of the pan, no higher than 140 degrees. Add the garlic and remove from the heat. Infuse the olive oil for 2 hours. Strain out the garlic and reserve the oil.

Preheat the oven to 250°. (If using a dehydrator, follow the manufacturer's instructions.)

Line two rimmed baking sheets with Silpat mats.

Brush the sliced tomatoes with the garlic oil. Season with the salt, pepper and thyme. Place the pans in a single layer and bake for

1 hour, then lower the temperature to 200°. Continue baking for 3 to 5 hours (or longer, depending on the moisture content of the tomatoes) until the chips are dehydrated and crisp. If not eaten immediately, the chips should be stored in an airtight container.

From The Heirloom Tomato Cookbook: From Garden to Table: Recipes, Portraits, and History of the World's Most Beautiful Fruit by Amy Goldman (reprinted with permission).

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life by Barbara Kingsolver

Facts: Harper Perennial, softcover, 400 pages, \$14.95

Photos: none

Recipes: a handful

Give to: the choir, er, friends who embrace or are thinking about embracing a more green life

Kingsolver's ode to a year of eating locally is sometimes preachy and condescending. The rest of the time it's just entertaining and funny. One minute you laugh and relate, and the next you feel guilty about buying a box of crackers, especially if that box is wrapped in nonbiodegradable plastic.

Kingsolver and her husband and two daughters returned to her husband's farm in Virginia, and made a pact to eat as locally as possible for a year (and presumably beyond, although the book is based on the family's decision to try it for a year).

Husband Steven Hopp and late-teen daughter Camille both contribute articles sprinkled throughout author mom's main text. I really enjoyed young Camille's fresh take on her new life, as she has inherited her mom's quick wit, without the preachy tone. Half way through the "experiment," Camille left for college and continued to write about her frequent trips back to the farm and about her experiences at Duke University, and the hilarious predicaments that sometimes resulted from her continuing to honor the eat local mantra. The book's recipes are also contained within Camille's sections, and always relate to the story she is telling even if the recipe is borrowed from another source.

Hopp's contributions are informative, but meant to scare us into submission, I think, with lots of facts about the horrors of industrial farming, the scarcity of water, the dangers of pesticides and the amount of energy we waste. I'm not saying we shouldn't be aware of what is going on in the real world, and I learned a great deal from his commentary, but after catching on to his purpose in the book early on, I started dreading turning the page and finding another one.

Barbara Kingsolver manages to soften her preachy tone after the first third of the book, and it only pops up rarely after that. What's most enjoyable to read are the funny and heart touching stories she relays about the youngest daughter, Lily, and Lily's love affair with chickens. We get a glimpse of the cycle of life through mom's descriptions of how the family incorporated chickens, just for eggs in the beginning and for meat later, as Lily was determined to raise money for a horse, and quickly figured out that chickens raised for meat would fetch more than the eggs.

Kingsolver has said she wrote the book, in part, to inspire others to think about where their food comes from, and I think the book accomplishes that goal. Not everyone has a 100-acre fertile farm to call home and so following exactly in Kingsolver's family's footsteps isn't practical for most of us. But for anyone who has wondered what it would be like to chuck the city life and move to a farm, this book offers an engaging look at what that might be like.

More info: kingsolver.com

Gwen Ashley Walters is a cookbook author, food writer and self-professed cookbook addict -- her library contains more than 400 cookbooks. Gwen also writes restaurant reviews and two monthly columns for "PHOENIX" magazine.

