

Top cookbooks of 2013 had singular focus

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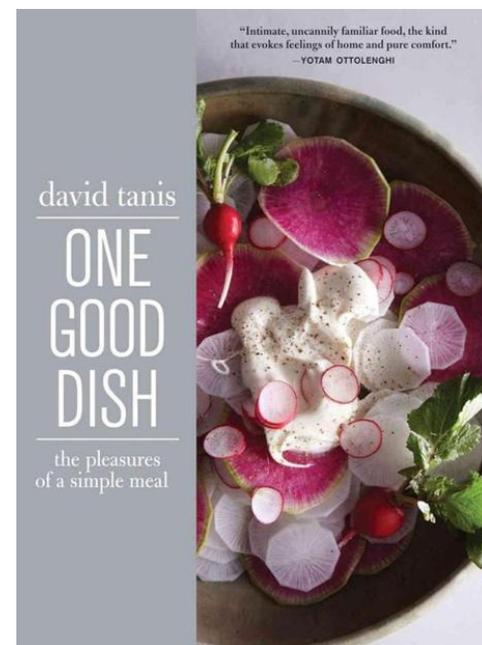
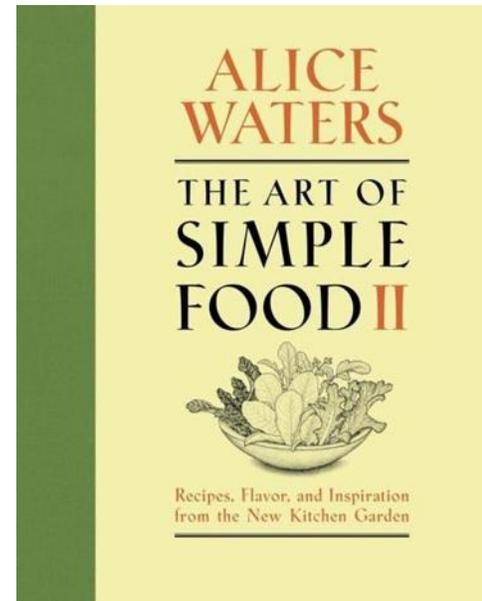
It was a quiet, quality year in cookbooks, with fewer releases grandstanding as press-stopping events and more books featuring tightly focused topics. Indeed, the cook searching for good value in this year's books will find it everywhere. At a price point rarely breaching \$35, you still can't argue with the unbeatable combination of the informative, the entertaining, and the giftworthy that a classic cookbook offers.

The best of 2013 centered on a single technique, a single subject, or a single place, and lavished attention on those virtues and foibles. While catch-all books and volumes trading on their celebrity could be found here and there, it was the more modest efforts that will shape the year's lasting contribution to the cookbook genre.

Single-subject books for everyday cooking abound, from the leafy and green to the defiantly larded. Alice Waters brought out her second volume of **"The Art of Simple Food"** (\$35) with a celebration of kitchen gardens and botanical variety. Joe Yonan, food editor of the Washington Post (and former Globe writer) takes his "Serves 1" savoir-faire to **"Eat Your Vegetables"** (\$24.99), forever ending the loneliness of the six-pack (or the yogurt) in a single person's fridge. And contrarian Michael Ruhlman, having barely finished washing off from a charcuterie book, turns his fat-goggles onto the chicken with the delightful **"Book of Schmaltz"** (\$25).

Amid a torrent of good family dinner cookbooks, Kathy Brennan and Caroline Champion's **"Keepers"** (\$26.99) is a standout, showcasing one crowd-pleaser after another. Veteran author Andy Schloss reminds everyone that the slow cooker isn't the only path to a hearty cold-weather dinner in his accessible review of gentle-heat techniques, **"Cooking Slow"** (\$35).

Former Chez Panisse chef and New York Times food columnist David Tanis shares vividly crafted treasures in his stylish book **"One Good Dish"** (\$25.95). And the popular quarterly Kinfolk offers up an arty, moodily shot volume in its first cookbook, **"The Kinfolk Table"** (\$29.99), whose clean lines and intimate kitchen portraits cry out for real estate on the coffee table.



Ethnic and regional cookbooks made a particularly strong showing this year. Amy Thielen's "**The New Midwestern Table**" (\$35) brilliantly redefines the region and its foodways for a new generation. "**Latin American Street Food**" (\$35) by Sandra Gutierrez makes a thorough study of a genre many only encounter at food trucks.

"**The Complete Indian Regional Cookbook**" (\$25), by Mridula Baljekar, provides an ambitious, reference-y counterpoint to Raghavan Iyer's very accessible "**Indian Cooking Unfolded**" (\$25). And Louisa Shafia's "**The New Persian Kitchen**" (24.99) offers a refreshingly brisk update of a classic cuisine.

Baking books were baroque this year, filled with seminars on French pastry and baker's percentages. But there are a couple of splendid volumes for avocational rather than vocational bakers too: Alice Medrich's "**Seriously Bitter Sweet**" (\$25.95) is a meticulous update of her classic 2003 chocolate book, and Tammy Donroe Inman's "**Wintersweet**" (\$30) transforms the dried fruits and citrus of the coldest season into soul-warming confections.

It may seem, in these days of instant online expertise, that you have only to Google your way to dinner. There's something to be said for that at 7 p.m. on a Thursday. But people who enjoy cooking for itself tend to fall in love immersively. For them (and for good cooks everywhere), even a quiet cookbook year is a bonanza.

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