

American Profile

Celebrating Hometown Life

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Creating Family Heirloom Cookbooks

by Apryl Chapman Thomas

When it comes to family gatherings, people have fond recollections of the food, whether it's grandmother's chocolate pie or an aunt's cheese casserole. After all, memories are made and stories are shared over a good meal.



Creating a family cookbook is a great way to spend time with your children and preserve family tradition.

David Mudd

To help preserve those memories, more and more people are creating family heirloom cookbooks. It's as easy as collecting your favorite recipes and memories and putting them down on paper for children to enjoy for generations.

"Everyone in the family always thought it would be great to have mother's recipes collected in one place—she had quite a reputation as a cook," says Rosemary Boyd of Laguna Beach, Calif. "When she passed on, it seemed like a way to honor her and keep her memory alive."

Boyd divided her mother's recipes into traditional sections, such as appetizers, snacks and beverages. Using desktop publishing software, she even designed and printed the cookbook herself. "The front cover is a close-up of pecan pies and cranberry bread—some of mom's Thanksgiving goodies," she says. "On the back cover, I included a photo of my mom."

Get the kids involved

Family heirloom cookbooks are relatively easy to create and can be a fun family project. It's a great way to get children involved in learning about their family history.

Before you begin, decide how big and detailed you want

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the cookbook to be. You may want it printed and bound or simply held in a three-ring binder so more recipes can be added. You also may want to include sections—such as heirloom recipes, popular recipes of different eras and current family favorites—as well as background stories about the recipes and photos of family members during meals and in the kitchen.

“I found preserving our family’s ‘food heritage’ by collecting recipes and creating a heirloom cookbook to be a rewarding project,” says Mary Emma Allen of Plymouth, N.H. “My daughter, husband and I, with the assistance of two cousins, developed a cookbook for the Allen family. Some recipes relate to modern habits and traditions; others might date back to great-grandparents. The recipes bring together the fond memories of several generations.”

Getting started

Once you’ve decided on what you want to include in the cookbook, the next step is to contact relatives, round up the recipes and begin organizing them. You may opt to add a table of contents and foreword about the cookbook that includes the project’s importance to you.

“I used my family cookbook a lot when I first got it,” says Rebecca Murphy of Augusta, Ga. “There are a few comfort foods that I still have to look at the recipe for, but for most part, I know it by heart. I will absolutely pass it on to my children. Many of the recipes were already passed down for generations. I want my children to have that continuity to family members who came before them—those they were never able to meet.”

Apryl Chapman Thomas is a freelance writer in Athens, Ga.

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