

What's Cooking?

Our Favorite Cookbooks Tested by Larry Cox

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Hush My Mouth, Southern Recipes That Are Quick and Easy

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Quick-Fix Southern: Homemade Hospitality in 30 Minutes or Less by Rebecca Lang (Andrews McMeel, \$16.99)

Quick-Fix and Southern are two concepts that aren't usually found together. The new cookbook by Rebecca Lang is an exception in that it serves up 115 Southern dishes that can be prepared in 30 minutes or less. I am pleased to report the recipes I tested from this collection exceeded all of my expectations.

I grew up in a Southern family that loved to eat. Every occasion we could, we gathered around the kitchen table and feasted on such favorites as fried green tomatoes, drop biscuits, mustard greens, platters of ham or beef, okra fritters and on Sundays, fried chicken. Desserts usually consisted of a cobbler, a pie or two, and sometimes even homemade ice cream. An afternoon of working on the ranch often included such tasty diversions as pimento cheese sandwiches, chocolate cake, and ice box pickles.

Rebecca Lang, a contributing editor for Southern Living magazine, is the author of the Mary Mac's Tea Room cookbook that highlighted recipes from one of Atlanta's most popular restaurants. In addition to teaching cooking classes, the Athens, Georgia-based homemaker is a contributing editor for myrecipes.com. Her Quick-Fix Southern cookbook is certain to be popular with cooks, especially ones who love good regional foods but don't have the time to spend most of the day over a stove or in the kitchen.

The recipes are grouped into ten main themes: Rise and Shine; Sipping on the Screened Porch; Appetizers and Snacks; Picnics and Packables; Salads, Soups, and Sandwiches; Tailgates and Gatherings; Busy Weekend Suppers; Comforting Casseroles; Girls' Night In; and Southern Sweets. There is also a helpful chapter covering the basics of cooking quickly in the South.

In addition to being quick without sacrificing flavor, each recipe is simple to make and user-friendly. There are expert cooking tips and even tidbits of Southern history. Rebecca's advice is whether you're serving a nibble to whet the appetite or as a heartier first course, serve a dish that is both delicious and unforgettable. Her excellent new cookbook will help even novice cooks do just that.

Three recipes were tested. Perhaps as a tip of the hat to my childhood, I made three dishes that I remember from my grandmother's kitchen: Fried Green Tomatoes, Sweet Potato Biscuits, and Pralines. All three were tasty and took much less time than the more involved recipes I've tried in other collections.

The Quick-Fix Southern Cookbook is authentic, accessible, and highly recommended.

Fried Green Tomatoes

Serves 8

Ingredients:

Vegetable oil

1 c cornmeal

4 large green tomatoes (about 2 lbs)

1 c all-purpose flour

1 tsp salt

½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

2 large eggs

¼ c buttermilk

In a large skillet, pour the vegetable oil to a depth of ¼ inch. Heat the skillet over medium heat until a pinch of cornmeal sizzles when sprinkled in.

While the oil heats, peel and slice the tomatoes into ½-inch-thick slices.

Combine the cornmeal, flour, salt, and pepper in a large mixing bowl. Combine the eggs and buttermilk in a smaller mixing bowl.

Coat each tomato slice with the cornmeal mixture; dip thoroughly in the egg mixture, and return to coat a second time in the cornmeal mixture. (This second coating is a critical step)

Carefully place about half of the coated tomato slices in the hot oil and fry for 3 to 4 minutes per side, or until golden brown. Repeat with the remaining slices and serve.

A green tomato is simply one that is unripe. At this stage, they are much more firm and tart than when they ripen and that is why they hold up so well during the frying process.

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