Do we really need more recipes for beef stew, polenta, and ratatouille? If they’re the work of famed restaurateur and food activist Alice Waters, undoubtedly. In The Art of Simple Food, Waters offers 200-plus recipes for these and other simple but savory dishes, like Spicy Cauliflower Soup, Fava Bean Purée, and Braised Chicken Legs, as well as dessert formulas for the likes of Nectarine and Blueberry Crisp and Tangerine Ice. In addition, readers learn (or become reacquainted with) the Waters mantra: eat locally and sustainably; eat seasonally; shop at farmers markets. These are the rules by which she approaches food and cooking, and hopes we will too. Organized largely by techniques, the book is a kind of primer, designed to free readers from recipe reliance. Some readers may look askance at advice that they search out sources for locally produced food, for example, given the everyday exigencies of shopping and getting
meals on the table. Yet it is precisely the need to remake our relationship to food that, Waters contends, determines the ultimate success of all our cooking and dining, not to mention our health and that of the planet. This relatively small book has a large message, and good everyday recipes to back it up. --Arthur Boehm

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Personal Review: The Art of Simple Food: Notes, Lessons, and Recipes from a Delicious Revolution by Alice Waters
To begin with, I live in Thailand, and so almost all of the seasonal advice in this book is useless --- except for the general idea, which is all-important: buy high-quality ingredients when they are in season. In Thailand, that would translate to wait for the hot season before gorging yourself on mangoes, or mango-with-sticky-rice. Most Thai fruits have seasons when they are at their best, so pay attention.

This includes the basic idea of dont just go to the market and buy an onion. Some folks see an onion and grab it instantly, checking off that chore. Others inspect the onions carefully, waiting until they see a really gorgeous (and delicious-looking) batch. If all the onions look like junk, it might be time to put off onion soup to another day!

I have tried just one recipe so far: Braised Chicken Legs. It was very good, and I already know how to make it better next time. Talk about simple! Four chicken legs run about $2 over here, and then add garlic, onion, tomato, some chicken stock, plus a bay leaf and a pinch of rosemary. Youre probably looking at a total cost of $3-$4, and this recipe fed three people! Next up is probably the Chard Frittata, which will become a Spinach Frittata over here.

My biggest surprise: I think I have actually found a replacement for my venerable James Beard Cookbook. This book is better, and its just jammed with recipes. I also think that it dusts How To Cook Everything. Of course, on nights when Im cooking Thai food, this book is pretty much useless, except for the general advice noted above.

----- REVIEW UPDATE ----- 

The Spinach Frittata was devoured instantly, and very yummy. I made the Braised Chicken Legs with my changes: first, throw in some cayenne or hot pepper (NOT A LOT, just a hint!). Second, add some chopped potatoes and turnips to the final braise. Third, put in some salt and pepper before it goes for its 45-minute final cooking. Results: everyone loved it! This may be the best chicken I have ever cooked in my life, or at least tied
with that lovely Persian dish, Fesanjan. (Walnuts and pomegranate juice, oh yum!)

This book is a real winner!!!

Highest recommendation!

----- ANOTHER UPDATE!---------

By the way, Alice Waters agrees about the salt. For most meat, if you intend to salt it, you might as well salt it when you bring it home. This will accomplish two things: first, it will retard spoilage, but more important, it will make the meat taste seasoned rather than salty.

So, for steak au poivre, buy some yummy steaks, salt them when you get home, put them in the fridge, and then take them out 2-3 hours before cooking and rub ground pepper into them. The 2-3 hours will ensure that the meat is not chilly when it goes into the pan, and will enable the pepper to get into the meat and flavor it.

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