The Dessert Bible by Christopher Kimball

Test Charts Are Blank!! Fantastic Book

The best part of The Dessert Bible is not the recipes--although they are wonderful--its that Kimball, the founder and editor of Cooks Illustrated, shares his discovery process. You feel as though you are standing right next to him in his kitchen while he puzzles out the best lemon bar recipe. How do you make a bar thats zippy but not too sweet? How far should a Fallen Chocolate Cake fall? Can you substitute nondairy creamer in Crème Anglaise? (A resounding no!) Step by step, Kimball walks you through his experimentations, sharing both the triumphs and the failures. Cornstarch may beautifully thicken your lemon curd but ill taste metallic. Each recipe is fronted by several paragraphs or pages of Kimballs baking process. He tells you which ingredients he tried and what happened. After each recipe are variations and a section called What Can Go Wrong? that points out common mistakes and misconceptions. The Dessert Bible covers cookies; brownies and bars; cakes, frostings, and glazes; brioche and fritters; pies, tarts, and fruit desserts; soufflés, puddings, and custards; frozen desserts; and restaurant desserts to make at home. In addition, several chapters offer tips and techniques on baking, baking sheets and pans, utensils, and kitchen appliances. If The Dessert Bible provides you with a solid knowledge of dessert making, says Kimball, you will gain the confidence to think for yourself in the kitchen, balancing a healthy mistrust of recipes (even mine) with enough common sense to rely on your own experience. -- Dana Van Nest

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Ive said before that the gang at Cooks demonstrate the nicest, most useful possible deployment of mass obsessive-compulsive disorder, and heres another user-friendly manual for the home cook. If you follow these instructions as written, barring acts of G-d, you simply cant go wrong. That said, some Amazon reviewers have asked others to give the positive and the negative aspects of cookbooks, rather than an unqualified rave or boo. Okay. Some of these recipes also appear in Kimballs The Yellow Farmhouse Cookbook, but without quite as much detail. You might not
care what the addition of corn syrup, light brown sugar, or for that matter, iron filings (I'm joking), will make to your pecan pie. However, the charts are a great way to acquire kitchen wisdom without suffering the failures that go along with experimenting. Even old hands in the kitchen will learn new tricks. Only recently did Kimball confirm for me how important the specified temperature of butter before mixing is to the successful outcome of cake batters. And he can barely contain his excitement when his silly method of adding flour to a batter turned out to be the best way of all. Kimball is not particularly interested in low-fat or even lower-fat recipes. He appears to burn off calories with the efficiency of a Bessemer converter, but that's not true of most of us. Using heavy cream or half-and-half in a simple vanilla pudding is too rich for my palate, and whole milk is plenty good. He gives offhand permission to substitute regular milk. The reader should realize that in some recipes—a delicate cake or pastry—deviation is treason. However, I'd like to see Kimball suggest a few more workable options than he does, especially for dairy-free baking. Other Amazon reviewers appear dismayed at all of the equipment called for by some very comprehensive cookbooks, including Kimball's. Allow me to say that you should begin comfortably from where you are and what you can afford, without apology. I baked quite well long before I owned a standing mixer, food processor, blender, high-quality knives and an electric sharpener, or a bread machine (which I use exclusively for mixing yeast doughs). Even the low-budget, low-tech cook can bake with fresh flour, butter, oil, nuts (taste them first!), and can spring for such not-too-costly niceties as parchment paper (which can be washed, dried, and reused), a balloon whisk, and an instant-reading thermometer. A pound bag of yeast costs far less per recipe than using individual packets, and it keeps well in the freezer for a year. A bench knife, or dough cutter, costs about five bucks and allows sticky dough to be scraped off the counter, folded over, and kneaded without adding too much flour. And yes, Mr. Kimball, I HAVE made perfect brioche by hand that way!

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