



On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen

By Harold McGee

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Harold McGee's *On Food and Cooking* is a kitchen classic. Hailed by *Time* magazine as "a minor masterpiece" when it first appeared in 1984, *On Food and Cooking* is the bible to which food lovers and professional chefs worldwide turn for an understanding of where our foods come from, what exactly they're made of, and how cooking transforms them into something new and delicious.

Now, for its twentieth anniversary, Harold McGee has prepared a new, fully revised and updated edition of *On Food and Cooking*. He has rewritten the text almost completely, expanded it by two-thirds, and commissioned more than 100 new illustrations. As compulsively readable and engaging as ever, the new *On Food and Cooking* provides countless eye-opening insights into food, its preparation, and its enjoyment.

On Food and Cooking pioneered the translation of technical food science into cook-friendly kitchen science and helped give birth to the inventive culinary movement known as "molecular gastronomy." Though other books have now been written about kitchen science, *On Food and Cooking* remains unmatched in the accuracy, clarity, and thoroughness of its explanations, and the intriguing way in which it blends science with the historical evolution of foods and cooking techniques.

On Food and Cooking is an invaluable and monumental compendium of basic information about ingredients, cooking methods, and the pleasures of eating. It will delight and fascinate anyone who has ever cooked, savored, or wondered about food.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Before antioxidants, extra-virgin olive oil and supermarket sushi commanded public obsession, the first edition of this book swept readers and cooks into the everyday magic of the kitchen: it became an overnight classic. Now, 20 years later, McGee has taken his slightly outdated volume and turned it into a stunning masterpiece that combines science, linguistics, history, poetry and, of course, gastronomy. He dances from the spicy flavor of Hawaiian seaweed to the scientific method of creating no-stir peanut butter, quoting Chinese poet Shu Xi and biblical proverbs along the way. McGee's conversational style—rich with exclamation points and everyday examples—allows him to explain complex chemical reactions, like caramelization, without dumbing them down. His book will also be hailed as groundbreaking in its breakdown of taste and flavor. Though several cookbooks have begun to answer the questions of why certain foods go well together, McGee draws on recent agricultural research, neuroscience reviews and chemical publications to chart the different flavor chemicals in herbs and spices, fruits and vegetables. Odd synergies appear, like the creation of fruity esters in dry-cured ham—the same that occur naturally in melons! McGee also corrects the European bias of the first edition, moving beyond the Mediterranean to discuss the foods of Asia and Mexico. Almost every single page of this edition has been rewritten, but the book retains the same light touch as the original. McGee has successfully revised the bible of food science—and produced a fascinating, charming text.

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From Scientific American

"In 1984, canola oil and the computer mouse and compact disc were all novelties... [and] the worlds of science and cooking were neatly compartmentalized." A lot has changed in 20 years: magazines and books now discuss the science of cooking, and culinary schools offer "experimental" courses that investigate the whys of cooking. So McGee, a writer who specializes in the chemistry of food and cooking, has completely rewritten his 1984 classic, expanding it by two thirds into a book that weighs in at almost 900 pages. He offers thorough, scientific explanations of countless topics, including why brining your turkey is not a good idea, why food wrapped in plastic often tastes like plastic, why you should never refrigerate tomatoes. And he continues to display, as one admirer said of the first edition, "a scientist's skill and a cook's heart."

Editors of Scientific American

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review In the two decades since McGee's *On Food and Cooking* (1984) first appeared, it has reigned as the standard authority on gastronomical science, that area where science and art, technique, and aesthetics intersect. For the benefit of consumers everywhere, McGee has carefully revised and updated his magisterial achievement, adding new data from the latest scientific discoveries and reformatting the text to enhance its appeal to eyes grown accustomed to hypertext. This revised content encompasses such newly popular fruits as the Meyer lemon and the carambola. Recently marketed vegetables such as *romanesco* and *arracacha* appear. A table of descriptors for accurately categorizing aromas given off by fruits and vegetables rivals the controlled vocabulary established for wine. For the librarian, McGee provides useful, readily accessible information about individual foods, both animal and vegetable, cooking and preserving processes, and the chemistry and physics underlying them. For the armchair reader, McGee's prose style flowers into narrative text that makes every egg, every nut, every vegetable, every steak, and every spice a character in the intriguing, involving story of what we eat. *Mark Knoblauch*

Users Review

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