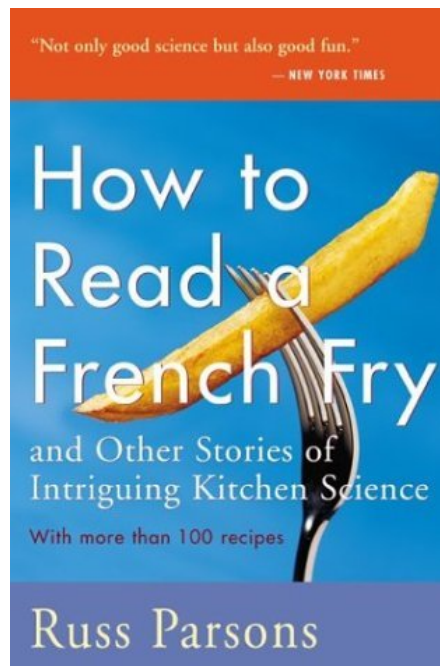




How to Read a French Fry: And Other Stories of Intriguing Kitchen Science

Russ Parsons

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In a book widely hailed for its entertaining prose and provocative research, the award-winning Los Angeles Times food journalist Russ Parsons examines the science behind ordinary cooking processes. Along the way he dispenses hundreds of tips and the reasons behind them, from why you should always begin cooking beans in cold water, to why you should salt meat before sautéing it, to why it's a waste of time to cook a Vidalia onion. Filled with sharp-witted observations ("Frying has become synonymous with minimum-wage labor, yet hardly anyone will try it at home"), intriguing food trivia (fruit deprived of water just before harvest has superior flavor to fruit that is irrigated up to the last moment), and recipes (from Oven-Steamed Salmon with Cucumber Salad to Ultimate Strawberry Shortcake), How to Read a French Fry contains all the ingredients you need to become a better cook.

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Jessica says

This was a bit more of a cookbook with scientific information thrown in than it was a science book with recipes thrown in. I was hoping it to be the latter. Lots of interesting information, and I am sure it will stay on my shelf to be referred to many many more times.

Katina says

This was an excellent Half Price Books find. It includes some very tasty-looking recipes that put the kitchen science principles discussed in the chapters to practice. I learned so much about onions and cell structure and I think I'll be able to put it to use in my cooking. I thought the chapters on "Meat and Heat" and "Fat, Flour and Fear" were especially interesting. This was a very practical book and I look forward to dropping its factoids in conversation.

Tamer Nossbi says

Really enjoyed this book as an intro to Kitchen Science. It really helped to understand where I have been issues in my cooking. Its a very easy read, probably about 100 pages of actual material with the rest are recipes. Will probably require a couple more reads to truly grab every valuable kernel of information.

Dominic Howarth says

I LUV food, which should be to no one's surprise. The only thing I may love more than food itself, is food science. This book is full of it. Awesome tips and interesting stories abound, plus delicious sounding recipes that range in a nice degree of difficulty. The prose is drier than say, Alton Brown, who's comical and grounded style usurps Parson's writing, but the book is still very good. Should be in many a kitchen.

Celina says

I finally managed to finish a book in the new year (sort of--I haven't tried any of the recipes). I've been too preoccupied with moving and settling in to a new city.

Not everything in this book was new to me; I learned a lot about food science from my mother, who once majored in the subject. But I learned a lot here: about frying, the way starches react at the microscopic level when cooked, and the Maillard reaction. I'm tempted to go into a food science textbook for more on gels and the emulsifying properties of eggs, as part of my quest for the perfect egg replacer. I'd like to keep this book

on hand to consult while I'm cooking but I should probably give it back to the friend who lent it to me.

Sarah Jane says

It was good for me to learn (or review, as the case may be) the information presented in this book to make myself a better cook. I think most everyone can benefit from a little course of the basics, and the hows and whys of cooking. For the most part, I skimmed through the meat chapter because it was grossing me out. As soon as he started talking about muscle fibers and melting collagen, I was done. I think I might be too squeamish to ever be a meat-eater. Oh well.

Andrea James says

It would have been great if the recipes were more infused with the stories and explanations. The book starts each section with decent explanations of the whys and hows of food and then follows that with a bunch of recipes.

I would have been happy just to read the stories and explanations without the recipes (which I found sadly rather uninspiring).

I got this book second-hand for not very much at all and it's really easy to read so it didn't take much time and therefore I actually think I got a good amount of value from it even without the recipes.

Gloria says

Really really like this book. Easy to understand, easy to read. And I really like the fact that he included recipes at the end of each section.... because there is NO WAY i am going to retain the scientific information without actually having to use the science.... so this book is actually one I am going to purchase, so I can dip in and out of it easily!

Kathleen says

The scientific why of cooking. This book is excellent. I really believe it will make me a better cook because it explained why I failed at grilling zucchini, why my strawberry sauce turned into jelly, and how I keep going wrong with emulsions. Understanding the underlying principles at work in kitchen chemistry is absolutely the best first step to becoming a better cook. I've already used it to make hard-boiled eggs with perfectly yellow yolks.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who ever cooks. A++, would buy in a spiral binding for ease of use in kitchen, will use to make delicious puddings.

Charles says

If you enjoy watching Alton Brown on the Food Channel, you will love this book. Cooking as a science - things we do for best results explained and broken down into comprehensible instructions. I guarantee this book will make you a better cook no matter your skill level.

Catherine Beebe says

This is fascinating - it's a nerd's cookbook. (That's a good thing). I needed answers behind the instructions in recipes as to why I needed to dry off food before pan-frying, or the wonderful magical egg. If you love to cook and you loved the lab portion of chemistry class, read this.

Rachel says

A really interesting look at why some foods do what they do. Half cookbook and half easy to read science book. It has a ton of recipes that I can't wait to try.

Linda Abhors the New GR Design says

I loved this!

I consider myself (as do others, from comments) a pretty decent cook, though I could work on presentation. I'm a decent baker, but pastry has always thwarted me-to the point where I've generally just thrown up my hands and bought frozen pie shells whenever I'm required.

I was intrigued by the title when I got it from Daedalus, and now that I've read it, wish I'd read it years ago, when I first got it.

There are the things that I thought I knew, but didn't-such as sweet Vidalia onions are only worth the money if you're going to eat them raw.

Then there are the things I didn't know-such as that step where you chill the pie crust *after* rolling it out, really isn't optional, but rather quite necessary.

The author says that the books isn't meant to be a text on "kitchen science", but he does indeed present you with the science behind almost everything-except for the braising of meats, the one that confounds everyone. But if you're not into the science behind gluten, proteins, etc. don't worry-the author will summarize the points in a checklist at the end of the chapter.

The best part is that each chapter is followed by some recipes which allow you to experiment with and utilize your new knowledge--and some of them are healthy, so I'll be able to try them! Of course, I'll need to refresh some of the points before I cook up the recipes, but the summary points will help with that. This book was a really good buy!

Katie says

I loved the information in this book so much that I started taking notes. In the book the author explains what is actually happening when you cook food. I started reading this book the day after I made fried green tomatoes for the first time, and it just so happened the the first section of the book was about the chemical process of deep frying. So then I totally understood the purpose of every layer of coating of the fried green tomatoes and why they were the consistency they were... it was just really interesting. Just all of these things with making pie crust and sauces and salad dressing that I have observed as I've learned to cook.. now I understand it a little better. Some of it was a bit scientific and I really just don't understand chemical structures of proteins and fats and sugars and all that. I really enjoyed the book, but I'd only recommend it to people who really like cooking

David Cooke says

My major disappointment with this book is that it is essentially a cookbook marketing itself as something else. The chapter text, which is why I picked up the book in the first place, is really quite good. It's a nice, readable version of some of what you would find in Harold McGee's quintessential book, *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen*. Unfortunately, the text is far too short, and instead there is recipe after recipe building upon what you learned in the chapter, which is fine except that there are far too many. The fruit and veggies chapter had something like 15 pages of text and about four times that in recipes. Granted, that's the extreme case, but out of the 300 pages of the book, only about 100 pages of that is actual content of interest.

And it's really too bad - the writing itself is very appealing and well done. But because of this, it touches only modestly on six topics in the kitchen without really even touching probably the single most important one - salt! I really would have liked to see more text, since the author has such a knack for making the science more readable - *On Food and Cooking* is an incredible resource, but it's not the sort of book you read cover to cover. Unfortunately, neither really is *How to Read a French Fry* unless you forego 2/3 of the book and its recipes.
