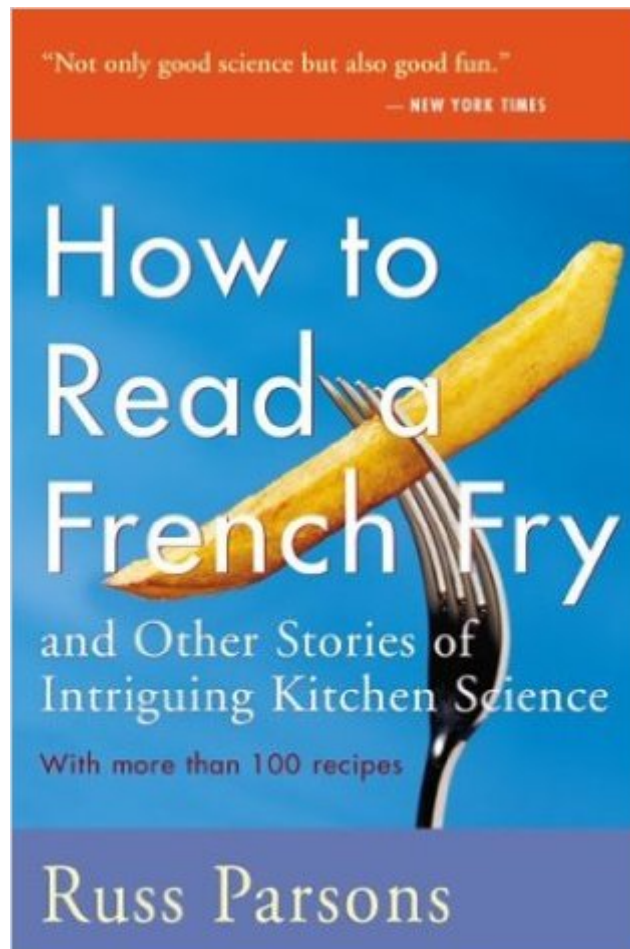


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How To Read A French Fry: And Other Stories Of Intriguing Kitchen Science



Synopsis

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 saut ing 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.

Book Information

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Age Range: 9 and up

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Customer Reviews

Clear and conversational, LA Times food editor Russ Parsons' first book demystifies the chemistry and physics of cooking. Knowing why makes knowing how easier, from picking the best vegetables to creating a stable hollandaise sauce to cooking a tender roast. From the first page, on which Parsons explains why onions make you cry - a compound called sulfonic acid, lacking in Vidalias, which accounts for their raw sweetness - his book is full of fascinating, illuminating facts. He begins with deep-frying, and explains how to cook efficiently and healthfully, with fat. It's all a matter of

getting oil temperature right so that the steam in the food repels the oil. And then there's the little details - why fresh oil fails to brown food, why batters should be firm. The vegetable chapter - how to pick the freshest and tastiest - and how to keep them that way - is especially useful, explaining why mature vegetables are tougher, how the absence of green in a nectarine is more important than a rosy blush, which fruits can safely be purchased under ripe, why potatoes change color when exposed to air, why to cook green vegetables uncovered, why lemon preserves color. Parsons explains emulsifying and the miracle properties of the invaluable egg; he explains how beans and grains go from toothbreaking hard in their raw state to tender soft in cooking and how this property can be used in a variety of ways from making perfect gravy to reheating rice; he deconstructs the mysteries of heat on meat and explains why treating piecrust tenderly produces tender piecrust. Each chapter includes a summary list of tips and a selection of recipes demonstrating the properties and techniques discussed. An understanding of the science of cookery, Parsons says, enables the cook, freeing her or him from recipes.

Russ Parsons is a 'Los Angeles Times' culinary columnist originally hired by Ruth Reichl who, with Shirley Corriher ('Cookwise'), Alton Brown (TV's 'Good Eats'), and Robert Volker ('What Einstein Told His Cook') work at explaining cooking to us all. I have not read Corriher's very highly regarded book, but I would give Parsons the highest regard when compared to Brown and Volker when looking at what they do in common. To anticipate any thoughts that I am overlooking Harold McGee, I believe McGee's book 'On Food and Cooking' is literally in a class of its own, from which all of these other authors have probably borrowed. While Brown and Volker give scientific explanations of culinary phenomena, with Brown's chapters in 'I'm Only Here for the Food' being somewhat deeper than Volker's question and answer format, Parsons is looking at culinary facts from a much broader point of view. It is as if all three understand food and all three have good scientific explanations for food facts, but only Parsons understands SCIENCE. Alton Brown gives an excellent metaphor for science in describing what he does as drawing a roadmap of a neighborhood (of custards, for example) rather than simply giving step by step instructions as one would when writing out the method for a recipe. Brown, however, seems constantly constrained by the limits of a 30-minute 'Good Eats' episode or of a book chapter on braising. Parsons addresses the whole field of food science from the other direction. He doesn't talk about what causes meat to brown (and why this tastes so good) or how simmering in water creates gelatin in stocks, or how the barbecue method is so good at producing tender meat from tough primals.

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