

Sample Pages from

# One's Cook's Kitchen

by Edith Forbes

## THE PLACE TO BE

I did not learn to cook at my mother's knee. When I was a year old, my father died, leaving my mother with seven children, several hundred cows, an ambition to revolutionize the cattle industry, and fortunately, enough money to hire a cook. I learned many other things in my mother's company --how to pay bills and keep the financial records for a business, how to play games like Hearts and Five Hundred and Kick the Can, how to ride horseback and work cattle. But she did not teach me how to cook.

Cooking I learned from Anna. Anna spent only a couple of years in our household, but in that time she became my surrogate grandmother. Her husband Joe was a Basque, who had been a sheepherder and ranch foreman until he was disabled by a stroke. With Joe permanently incapacitated, Anna came to work as a cook for our family. She was a forceful woman, affectionate, outspoken, firm in her convictions and well supplied with opinions. Her values were clear, and at the age of ten, I was wax waiting to receive their imprint. She despised dishonesty and laziness. She respected anyone who did good work, regardless of social status. And, she was endlessly kind to people in need, which included her husband, walking with a cane and laboring to make his tongue form intelligible speech, and which also included me, brilliant at books, but paralytically shy and silent, and devoid of social graces.

With Anna in it, the kitchen was a magnet, and I became talkative there as I was nowhere else. I spent hours watching her work and carrying on what I considered to be thoroughly adult conversation. I don't know if Anna was interested in anything I said, but I know she sensed my crying need to talk and instinctively responded by encouraging me to do so, as she would have encouraged a starving creature to eat.

Anna did not teach me how to cook so much as she taught me to love cooking, by making the kitchen the place I loved to be and by loving to cook herself.

I realize it was probably easier for Anna to love cooking than it is for many parents, especially now, in our hurry-up era. For one thing, she was paid to do it. For another, she had plenty of time. Granted, she was often cooking for eight or ten or even more people, but that was her only job responsibility. She was not frantically squeezing her meal preparations into the scant hours before and after a working day somewhere else. Also, unlike many parents, she was regularly thanked for her efforts and complimented on her accomplishments.

For Anna, cooking was a source of pride and self-respect. Her sons were grown and on their own, and she was devoted to her work. As her shadow, I became devoted to it too. Now I look back and think what a luxury it was, for someone to have the whole day just to prepare meals. Although in fact, she did not have quite the whole day. Caring for her husband took much of her time, too. But somehow she wove the two things together, helping Joe to his place on a kitchen stool every morning and tending to his needs at intervals during the day.

Anna taught me to think cooking was a fine thing to do, and why not? To practice a creative art. To have plenty of time in which to do it. To produce tangible pleasure for other people. To receive acknowledgment, both verbal and financial. Those are fine things indeed. It is no wonder she loved cooking, and no wonder I learned to love it watching her.

## THE ONE TRUE CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE

About 35 or 40 medium cookies

My idea of a chocolate chip cookie is a luscious caramel flavor punctuated by dark chocolate accents. The texture is a delicate balance between crisp and tender. For a perfect chocolate chip cookie, you **MUST** use butter. Its flavor is the essence of the caramel quality. Margarine will give you a sickly imitation. Also, don't buy budget chocolate chips. Use good ones, such as Nestle's.

2 1/4 cups white flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup (2 sticks) soft butter

3/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar

1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon white sugar

2 eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 1/4 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Put the flour, baking soda and salt into a small bowl and mix together thoroughly with a fork. Set aside.
2. In a larger mixing bowl, cream the butter with a wooden spoon until it is soft and smooth. Add the brown sugar, crumbling it with your fingers to break up any lumps. Add the white sugar, also. Cream the butter and sugar together until smooth.
3. Add the eggs. Stir them up a bit with the spoon to blend the yolks and whites, then beat them into the butter-sugar mixture. Add the vanilla and beat well, until the mixture is very smooth and creamy. Add the reserved flour mixture and mix thoroughly. Stir in the chocolate chips until they are evenly distributed through the dough.
4. Drop the dough in spoonfuls onto an ungreased cookie sheet. Place the sheet on the second-from-bottom rack of the oven. Bake at 375 degrees about 8 to 10 minutes. The edges of the cookies should be lightly browned, the centers a pale golden. (If you want this perfect pattern of browned and golden, don't try to bake on more than one rack of the oven at the same time.) When the cookies are done, immediately transfer them onto a rack to cool.

Note: This recipe makes a tender, moderately crispy cookie. If you like your cookies very crispy and sweet, you can add another tablespoon or two of white sugar. Do not, under any circumstances, use more than 3/4 cup total.

## THE ALMOND COMPROMISE CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE

About 35 or 40 medium cookies

This is not a “true” chocolate chip cookie, but it is a remarkably tasty alternative, made with no butter. The saturated fat content is considerably lower. If you make it with milk-free chocolate chips (I found some in bulk at my local food co-op), it is a milkless dessert. The dough has a somewhat strange texture, but the strangeness vanishes when the cookies are baked.

2 cups white flour less 2 tablespoons  
1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon baking soda

1/4 cup soft lard or shortening  
1 cup firmly packed brown sugar

2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
2 tablespoons shortening

1 cup almond butter

6 tablespoons white sugar (3/8 cup)

2 eggs

1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla

1 1/4 cups semi-sweet non-dairy chocolate chips

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Put the flour, baking soda and salt into a small bowl and mix together thoroughly with a fork. Set aside.
2. In a larger mixing bowl, cream the lard, shortening and oil together with a wooden spoon until they are soft and smooth. Add the brown sugar, crumbling it with your fingers to break up any lumps. Cream the lard and sugar together. Add the almond butter and mix, then add the white sugar and mix until smooth.
3. Add the eggs. Stir them up a bit with the spoon to blend the yolks and whites, then beat them into the almond-sugar mixture. Add the vanilla and beat well, until the mixture is very smooth and creamy. Add the reserved flour mixture and mix thoroughly. Stir in the chocolate chips until they are evenly distributed through the dough. Note that this dough will be quite stiff and oily, and the chocolate chips may not mix evenly. Not to worry. It bakes up nicely. Just poke any loose chips back into the dough when you form the cookies.
4. Drop the dough in spoonfuls onto an ungreased cookie sheet. Place the sheet on the second-from-bottom rack of the oven. Bake at 375 degrees about 10 minutes. The edges of the cookies should be lightly browned, the centers a pale golden. (If you want this perfect pattern of browned and golden, don't try to bake on more than one rack of the oven at the same time.) When the cookies are done, immediately transfer them onto a rack to cool.