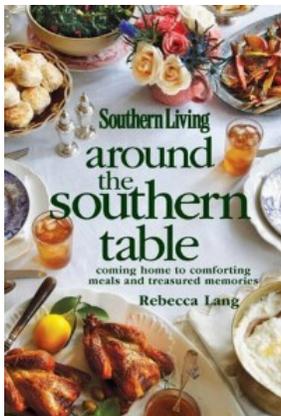




'Around the Southern Table' delicious

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Southern hostesses and those who wish they were will love Georgia native Rebecca Lang's "Around the Southern Table" from Southern Living. The hardback cookbook/Southern hostess how-to manual is filled with recipes for delicious food and graceful traditions unique to the culture. Onions, all served on heirloom china with monogrammed linens atop Grandma's treasured dining room table.

And the advice Lang puts forth, while common sense for the best Southern hostesses, is well worth a reminder. In fact, this cookbook, along with a cast iron skillet or stack of linen napkins, would make a wonderful gift for someone setting up house for the first time or even for a practiced hostess who'd enjoy the recipes.

"The tea is always sweet, the screen door is never latched and the warm greeting comes with a Southern drawl," Lang writes of life in the South.

Warm buttered biscuits are a fact of life as are cast-iron skillets filled with cobbler. But it's not all just about the food, she notes. "It's writing a sweet thank-you on real paper to taking supper to a neighbor in need. It's waving at every car that passes, even when we don't recognize the driver. Men hold the door open for women, and preachers know who's sitting in the pews. A friend is always ready to lend a hand, and the wine is chilled and ready."

Although Lang was obviously raised to be a Southern hostess, as evident by her book dedication to her mother and the loving memories she shares of her grandmother, hosting skills can be learned and heirlooms created.

Those who don't have their grandma's china or aunt's favorite cast iron skillet can enjoy collecting their own while establishing family traditions that will certainly pass down to later generations, she said in a recent telephone interview with The Daily News Journal.

"I think that gives people an opportunity to create their own special traditions for them and for the generations after them," she said. "I love to go to an estate sale, a yard sale or antique sale and pick up something older than I am and add it to my dining room table."

Then, use the china and the monogrammed napkins, she said. "They're not doing anyone any good sitting in the cabinet. Use them and talk about them and share them."

For those in need of stocking their Southern kitchen, Lang recommends starting with the basics.

"You can't cook anything in a Southern kitchen without a cast iron skillet," she said. "If you don't have one of those, stop what you're doing and head out and buy one. I have seven but I can always buy more."

Cast iron skillets can go from stove or oven to table.

"A peach and berry cobbler in that skillet is just as pretty as you can imagine," she said.

Once the skillets are in place, the next necessity to get in place is linens, Lang said.

"A napkin can take you a really long way. I've bought napkins strangely enough that have someone else's monogram."

In addition to recipes, suggestions and stories she shares in "Around the Southern Table," Lang also offers sets of menus based on her recipes to suit most any occasion, from supper on a school night to an elegant family meal.

And although she hesitated over choosing a favorite recipe in the cookbook during her telephone interview, she finally did settle on pimento cheese.

I made up a batch at home and must agree her version of the Southern classic is aptly named.

Divine Pimento Cheese

1 (16 ounce) block sharp cheddar cheese

¾ cup mayonnaise

1 (4 ounce) jar diced pimento, drained

2 tablespoons grated Vidalia onion

Garnish: freshly ground pepper

Grate cheese using holes of a box grater

Combine cheese and next 3 ingredients, stirring until blended. Store in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 4 days. Garnish if desired.

Makes about 3 cups.

Meet the author

Rebecca Lang will be in Nashville next month at the Southern Festival of Books. Meet her from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14, at Legislative Plaza, Room 16.

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