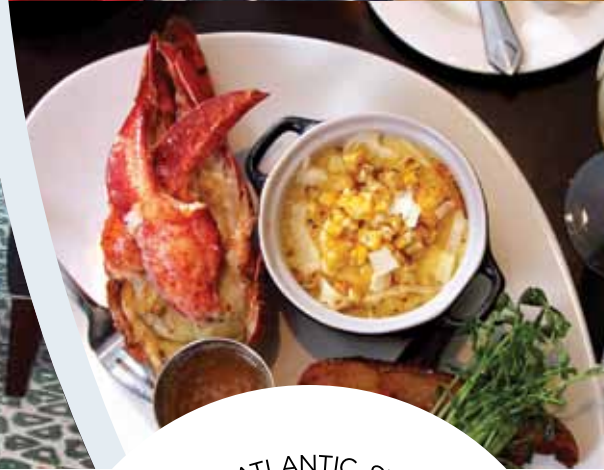


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Cooks' Books

These beautiful **Maine cookbooks** reflect the rhythms of the seasons.

BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

THERE'S NOTHING like fall weather and autumn's harvest of apples, squashes, greens, onions, and shallots to make cooking fun again. We look for inspiration from four Maine women—Annemarie Ahearn, Erin French, Nancy Harmon Jenkins, and her daughter Sara Jenkins. All four make their livings cooking, and as cookbook authors.

The books—Ahearn's *Full Moon Suppers at Salt Water Farm*, French's *The Lost Kitchen*, and the Jenkins' *The Four Seasons of Pasta*—are good reads and gorgeous to look at. All three are written to correspond with the seasons and seasonal produce, vivid with terrific, original recipes using the fall crops available locally.

HUNGRY EYE



An Erin French Trick: Serve dinner on pretty, mismatched old china from antique shops or grandma's cupboard. Spend a little time with the *Lost Kitchen* cookbook and you'll never covet a matched set of dishes again.



TRANSFORMED TRANSPLANT

Wisconsin native Annemarie Ahearn never planned to be a Mainer. She puts it right out there on the introduction page of *Full Moon Suppers*: “When I was eighteen years old, my parents decided to buy their own land on the Maine coast. My father was fulfilling a lifelong dream. I was, in a word, disappointed.”

But after college “did not feed my soul in the way that I was hoping,” she moved to the family farm in Lincolnville. “My plan was to open a cooking school for home cooks and teach people how to grow a kitchen garden.” In 2009, she did, naming her school Salt Water Farm after an essay in E. B. White’s *One Man’s Meat*. She now offers classes and workshops from May to October.

“Shaking cream into butter, pulling a carrot from the earth, making a loaf of bread, cutting apart a whole chicken—it’s the most basic skills that students find to be transformative,” Ahearn says.

“I find people trust recipes and the food media more than they trust their own natural ability in the kitchen. The only way to improve as a cook is to make mistakes and learn from them. The mark of a good cook is the ability to make a meal without a recipe and with limited resources.” True enough, but I want to learn some new tricks from her.

And I do. Each chapter in *Full Moon Suppers* creates a complete menu appropriate to the calendar month, noting the Native American name for that month’s full moon.

We start in the September (Harvest Moon) chapter at a recipe for “Queen of Smyrna Squash Soup,” because local farmers are still offering many winter squash varieties, and because it’s such a beautiful recipe title.

No Queens of Smyrna to be found in Portland’s farmers’ market, though, so I choose a small green hubbard and a honey-nut squash. This is a vegetarian soup—you make your own vegetable stock with onions, carrots, celery, fresh herbs, and fresh fennel. Lucky for us, fennel is now an easily found local crop. The squash is split (or peeled and cubed), rubbed with olive oil, and roasted with sprigs of thyme and whole garlic cloves. You whirl the tender flesh in a blender with the stock, adding dabs of honey and a pinch of red pepper flakes to taste, which gives this soup its spicy, haunting flavor.

From November’s menu (Beaver Moon) we tackle “Oven Tart with Sweet Onions, Pecorino, Anchovies, Caper, and Lemon,” since local onions are so fresh just now.

Ahearn’s tart is made with a simple yeast bread crust rather than pastry. It’s a variation of the traditional French *pissaladiere* tart made with caramelized onions, grated hard cheese, and anchovies. She spins it by adding thyme, a few red pepper flakes, capers, and paper-thin slices of lemon. The onions are sauteed in butter rather than olive oil.

This combination sings in unanticipated, complex ways. I’ve already made it three times and committed it to memory, the better to whip it up in a pinch, Ahearn-style, without a recipe.

Get Cooking!



The Four Seasons of Pasta, Avery, Penguin/Random House, New York, \$35

The Lost Kitchen, Clarkson Potter, Penguin/Random House, New York, \$32.50



Full Moon Suppers, Roost Books, Boulder, \$35





From left to right: Roasted Buttercup Squash Cups from *The Lost Kitchen*; Queen of Smyrna Squash Soup from *Full Moon Suppers*; *Lost Kitchen's* Waldorf Salad; and fixings for pasta with crumbled sausage, sage, and winter squash from *Four Seasons of Pasta*.

"I think Maine and Tuscany share an austere and frugal approach to cooking."

—Sara Jenkins

LOST AND FOUND

Chef Erin French's restaurant in Freedom is the stuff of legend since it's all but impossible to get a reservation. No matter now, thanks to the book. Her motto is to "learn to trust your instincts...and if all else fails, remember that there are few ailments that butter and salt can't cure."

French's ability to find magic in the simplest ingredients shines in these recipes. Take Waldorf Salad. You think of the retro-cafeteria sugary mess of apples and mayo. Forget that.

French starts you off making your own candied, oven-toasted walnuts, which you sprinkle with flaky Maldon sea salt as they

come hot out of the oven.

While they cool, you toss cubed apples—pick something crisp and local—with sliced fresh fennel, sliced celery stalks, lemon juice, and zest. Stir in a modest dab of mayo, parsley leaves, and the cooled nuts. Garnish with fennel fronds, celery leaves, perhaps a few torn pink radicchio leaves, *et voilà*, a sophisticated autumn salad.

I also try my hand at "Roasted Buttercup Squash Cups," which are made decadent with a spoonful of butter in each quartered squash cup during roasting. Her garnish of Maine autumn slaw is created by cutting crisp apples into matchsticks and dressing them in a rice-wine vinegar and shallot vinaigrette that's laced with thyme leaves and maple syrup. Sounds simple, tastes exotic. Put little heaps of this slaw on a few arugula leaves in each warm squash quarter and arrange on a platter.

I found myself imagining these creations as alternative side dishes at a Thanksgiving dinner.

THE DYNASTY

Camden native Nancy Harmon Jenkins is a food and cookbook writer with few peers. Her cookbooks include *The Essential Mediterranean*, *The Flavors of Tuscany*, and *The Flavors of Puglia*. She splits each year between homes in Camden and Tuscany. Nancy's daughter, Sara Jenkins, has also lived, written, and cooked in Italy. She is

the chef/owner of the Porsena and Porchetta restaurants in New York City; in Rockport, her baby is Nina June. "Bastions of all that is good: simplicity, freshness, and harmony," is how Chef Mario Batali describes the Jenkinse.

Although *The Four Seasons of Pasta* is overwhelmingly Italian in tone, dedicated to Mita Antolini, Sara's "adopted grandmother" in Italy, you'll nevertheless find pasta recipes that call for sturdy Maine autumn produce, including brussels sprouts, chard, cauliflower, and winter squash. "I think Maine and Tuscany share an austere and frugal approach to cooking," Sara says.

I opt for "Pasta with Crumbled Sausage, Sage, and Winter Squash." This is supreme comfort food. Using freshly made Italian sausage from Portland's Otherside Deli; sage from the garden; and local onions, garlic, and coarsely chopped pieces of peeled squash—any "hard winter squash" will do—I saute as directed until the squash is tender and pieces start to fall apart. Just as the pasta finishes boiling, I add a scoop of pasta cooking water to the sauce before draining the pasta and putting it in a serving bowl, topping it with the sauce, and showering it with a blizzard of grated parmigiana-reggiano.

Talk about Sunday night supper—this is what you want when the nights draw in. ■