

IT'S BETTER WITH BUTTER

BY NAOMI HENRY

What if ingredients we deem “toxic”—like butter, cream and eggs—could, in fact, restore our health and that of future generations? Molly Chester, a Moorpark-based traditional food chef and farmer, and her mother, “real foods advocate” Sandy Schrecengost, believe they can.

In *Back to Butter: A Traditional Foods Cookbook* (Fair Winds Press, 2014), the duo walk readers through the benefits and techniques of a traditional foods diet, and use the recipes as delicious and nourishing examples. (A traditional foods diet emphasizes natural, organic and unrefined ingredients and avoiding processed foods.)

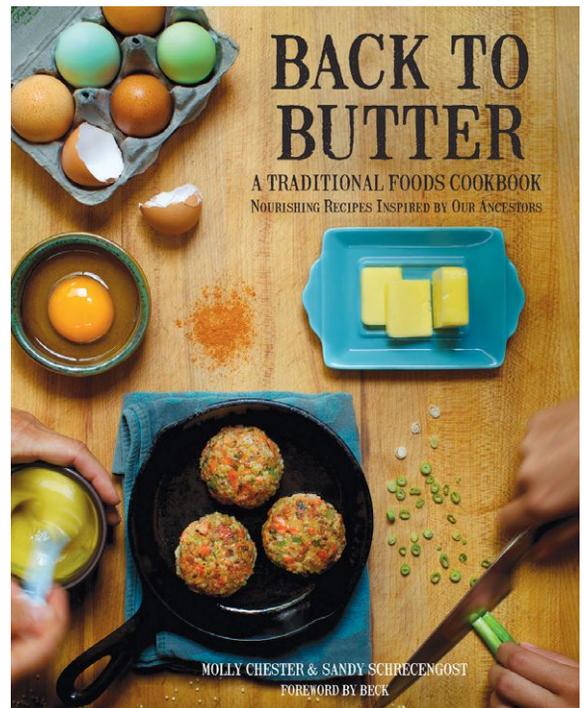
Chester, who adopted a traditional foods diet in response to severe health issues, credits her healing to incorporating the diet's principles.

Recognizing the lack of farmers raising grass-fed animals and wanting to be more connected to their food, Chester and her husband, John, abandoned their careers and purchased Apricot Lane Farms, a 160-acre property in Moorpark where they farm organically and biodynamically.

Drawing from experiences on the farm and their journey with a traditional foods diet, Chester and Schrecengost's cookbook provides intriguing recipes and homemade takes on basic pantry items, all while illuminating the benefits of foods our great-grandparents likely ate.

Particularly helpful for people struggling with the overload of information, part one gives recommendations of meat, dairy, grains and legumes, fats and oils and natural sweeteners and includes the rationale behind their choices. The authors demystify terms such as grass-fed, pastured, organic, local and free range, which can leave shoppers paralyzed in front of the cartons of eggs.

Part two departs from the basics and guides readers through recipes ranging from “First Bites” all the way to desserts and even includes recipes for homemade drinks, making this cookbook a perfect resource for a dinner party.



“You will get no apology that many of these recipes take time,” the authors warn at the beginning of the book. While the Homemade Beef Stock and Hearty Beef Soup with Brussels Sprouts fully support this declaration, the first bite validated the time spent chopping veggies. These were some of the most flavorful and wholesome recipes I have tasted.

Sprinkled throughout the book are gorgeous photographs of Apricot Lane Farms and friendly anecdotes for each recipe, delighting readers as they explore traditional foods. 🌱

Turn the page for some recipes from Back to Butter.

Book cover photo by John Chester

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HEARTY BEEF SOUP WITH BRUSSELS SPOUTS



Photo by John Chester

Recipes excerpted from Back to Butter: A Traditional Foods Cookbook (Fair Winds Press, 2014) by Molly Chester and Sandy Schrecengost.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

This recipe is a perfect one-pot meal. It is also quite simple to prepare—and did I mention gluten-free? In fact, the only grain in this soup is corn, whose omission would not compromise the recipe one bit.

2 tablespoons bacon fat
2 pounds grass-fed stew beef, cut into bite-size chunks and thoroughly patted dry
½ cup diced onion
½ cup sliced celery, with leaves
1 tablespoon minced garlic
8 cups homemade beef stock (recipes follows)

2 cups diced green cabbage
1 cup sliced carrot
½ cup frozen corn
2 cups halved Brussels sprouts
2 cups fresh or frozen cauliflower florets (about 1 small head)
1 cup diced zucchini (about 1 medium)
2 cups diced tomatoes
½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
2 teaspoons sea salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
2 dashes cayenne pepper, optional
5 ounces roughly chopped fresh spinach

In a large soup pot over medium-high heat, melt bacon fat until it glistens. Add half the meat in a single layer and let it cook undis-

turbed for 3 minutes, until browned. Use a spatula to flip meat over. Repeat, browning meat on all sides, then transfer to a plate and set aside. Add remaining half of meat and repeat browning process. Once all the meat is browned, return it all to the pot and lower heat to medium.

Add onion and celery to pot and sauté for 5 minutes, stirring frequently, until softened. Add garlic and sauté for 1 minute, stirring constantly, until fragrant.

Add 2 cups of stock and use a spatula to scrape browned bits from the bottom of the soup pot. Add remaining 6 cups stock and bring to a boil. Lower heat to a rolling simmer. Cover and simmer for 1 to 4 hours; additional time simply yields more tender meat.

After simmering, add cabbage and carrots to the pot. Bring to a boil. Cover, lower heat to a rolling simmer, and simmer for 10 minutes.

After 10 minutes, add all the remaining ingredients, except the spinach. Bring to a boil. Cover, lower heat to a rolling simmer, and simmer for 20 minutes.

Right before serving, stir fresh spinach into the simmering soup. Turn off the heat, wait 5 minutes, and serve.

NOURISHING BEEF STOCK

Yield: About 4 quarts

Both oxtails and short ribs are excellent choices for bone-in cuts of meat. Many grocery stores already have knuckle and marrowbones packaged in the freezer section for purchase. If not, ask a favorite butcher to save them for you. Better yet, seek out grass-fed beef from a local farmers' market; it will be a much less expensive option.

- 6 quarts cold water
- 2 pounds beef bone marrow and/or knuckle bones
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 pounds bone-in cuts of meat
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper
- 3 cups carrots cut into 2-inch (5 cm) pieces
- 3 cups celery cut into 2-inch (5 cm) pieces, leaves left on
- 2 fresh or dried bay leaves
- 10 whole black peppercorns

- 1 large onion, peeled and quartered
- 2 cloves garlic, whole and unpeeled
- 8 sprigs parsley

Preheat the oven to 400°. In a 12-quart stockpot, combine water, bone marrow and apple cider vinegar. Allow bones to soak in the solution for 1 hour, to draw out calcium from the bones.

Reserving soaking solution in stockpot, place meaty beef bones on a sheet pan. Sprinkle evenly with sea salt and pepper. Roast in oven for 40 to 60 minutes to produce a crispy, brown exterior, which will ultimately help flavor the stock. Note that some cuts, such as oxtails, require less cooking time.

Once bones brown, remove them from oven. Using tongs, add them back to the stockpot. Bring water to a boil over high heat, uncovered. A foamy scum may develop on surface of the stock once a rolling boil is reached. If you like, you can skim this and discard. The foam is natural coagulated lipoprotein. It's not harmful but it isn't pretty either and may cloud the stock.

Add remaining ingredients, except parsley, to the pot (this will be added at the very end of cooking), cover and reduce heat to low, maintaining a gentle simmer. It's important to keep the stockpot covered, as this allows the stock to bubble away for hours without fear of the liquid evaporating.

Simmer for anywhere from 12 to 24 hours, depending on how much time you have,

adjusting heat up or down as needed. A long cooking time allows more digestion-enhancing gelatin to be released from the bones into the stock and enhances its flavor. If you have time for the 24-hour stock, occasionally check to ensure the meat is covered with liquid, adding more water as needed. Ten minutes before removing stock from the heat, add parsley. Once done, remove from heat and cool uncovered for 10 minutes. Using tongs, remove large bones and discard.

Strain stock with a chinois or large strainer. The stock may be used immediately. However, when fully cooled in the refrigerator, any fat will rise to the surface and congeal. Use a slotted spoon to carefully scoop off fat and set aside for reuse (it's great for sautéing vegetables or frying eggs). This step allows the cook to control the amount of fat in the final dish.

Recipe Note

Store stock in a glass container in the fridge for up to a week, or stock may also be pressure canned to remain shelf-stable for up to a year. Stocks may be stored in the freezer for several months.

To freeze, add stock to a 1-quart glass Mason jar, making sure to allow 3 inches of room in the jar for the liquid to expand in the freezer. Resist boiling the jar in a pot of water to thaw; the glass jar can break. Instead, defrost on the counter, in the fridge or, in a pinch, in a bowl of warm water.



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