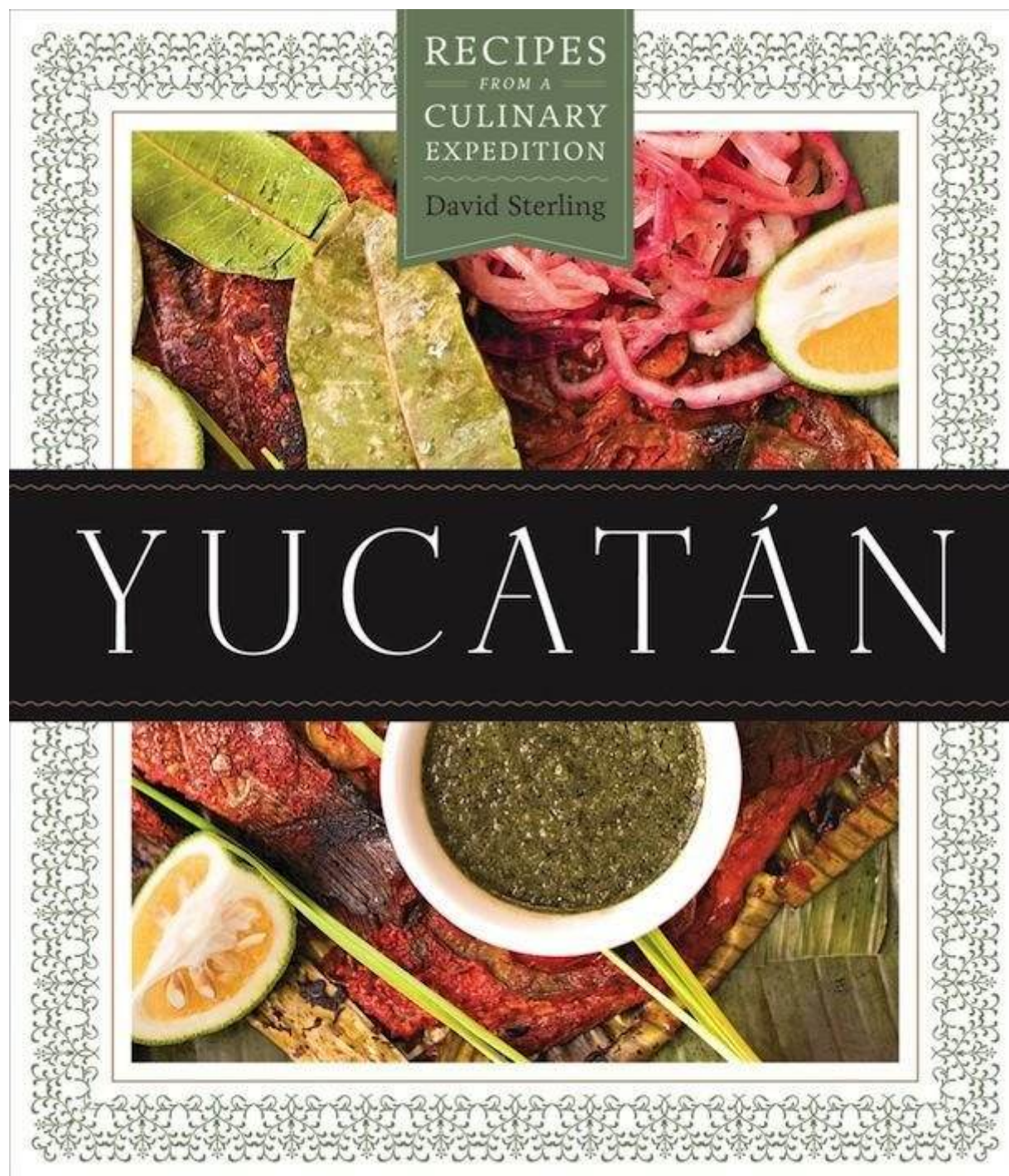


Cook the Book: 'Yucatán' by David Sterling

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I've never traveled to Mexico—it's sad, but true. For years now, I have dreamed of hopping on a plane to Oaxaca to feast on moles or heading straight south from my California home to have Baja tacos in, well, Baja. But then I received a copy of [David Sterling](#)'s encyclopedic new cookbook, [Yucatán](#).

Sterling is the founder of [Los Dos Cooking School](#) in Mérida, the first culinary school in Mexico devoted entirely to Yucatecan cooking. He's a friend of [Diana Kennedy](#), and she encouraged him to publish his impressive cookbook. Kennedy's seal of approval says plenty about the integrity of Sterling's approach to Yucatecan cuisine.

Yucatán is subtitled "a culinary expedition;" indeed, he delves deep into the history of the peninsula, filled with recipes from as far back as the pre-Columbian period, as well as dishes that are made and eaten today. (There is plenty of overlap, as I learned.) The abundant photographs and short essays on nearly every page, giving the book vibrancy and clear sense of place. Most of the recipes are barely adapted for modern American kitchens—yes, you're allowed to use a blender and a food processor, but you're also asked to make copious spice blends, smoke meats (maybe even in a pit), and cook with lots (and lots) of lard.

This is not to say that Yucatán isn't approachable. Many of Sterling's recipes are simple one pot meals that will easily fit into most of our cooking routines. The more complex dishes aren't terribly challenging either, but they do require a time commitment. Save those for the weekend; you won't be sorry. Yucatecan cuisine is smoky, tangy, and bright. It's filled with just as many pickles and spicy enriched sauces as it is with hearty, rich meat dishes. There is an earthy, grounded nature to the food—nuts, seeds, and corn are as common as rice and beans. Sterling's adaptations of this food are all deeply, deeply satisfying.

We'll explore some of the Yucatán's best cuisine this week. First, we'll take a stab at steaming large tamales called *brazo de reina* and mix up a pumpkin seed-filled dip called *sikil p'aak*. Next, we'll simmer a pot of approachable *pollo en bistec* and then tackle the classic turkey dish, *pavo en escabeche oriental*. Finally, we'll end the week with rich *papadzules*—tortillas and eggs smothered in a magnificently green pumpkin seed and epazote sauce.

Win 'Yucatán'

Thanks to the nice folks over at University of Texas Press, we have five (5) copies of Yucatán to give away this week. All you need to do for a chance to win is to tell us about your dream culinary expedition in the comments section below.