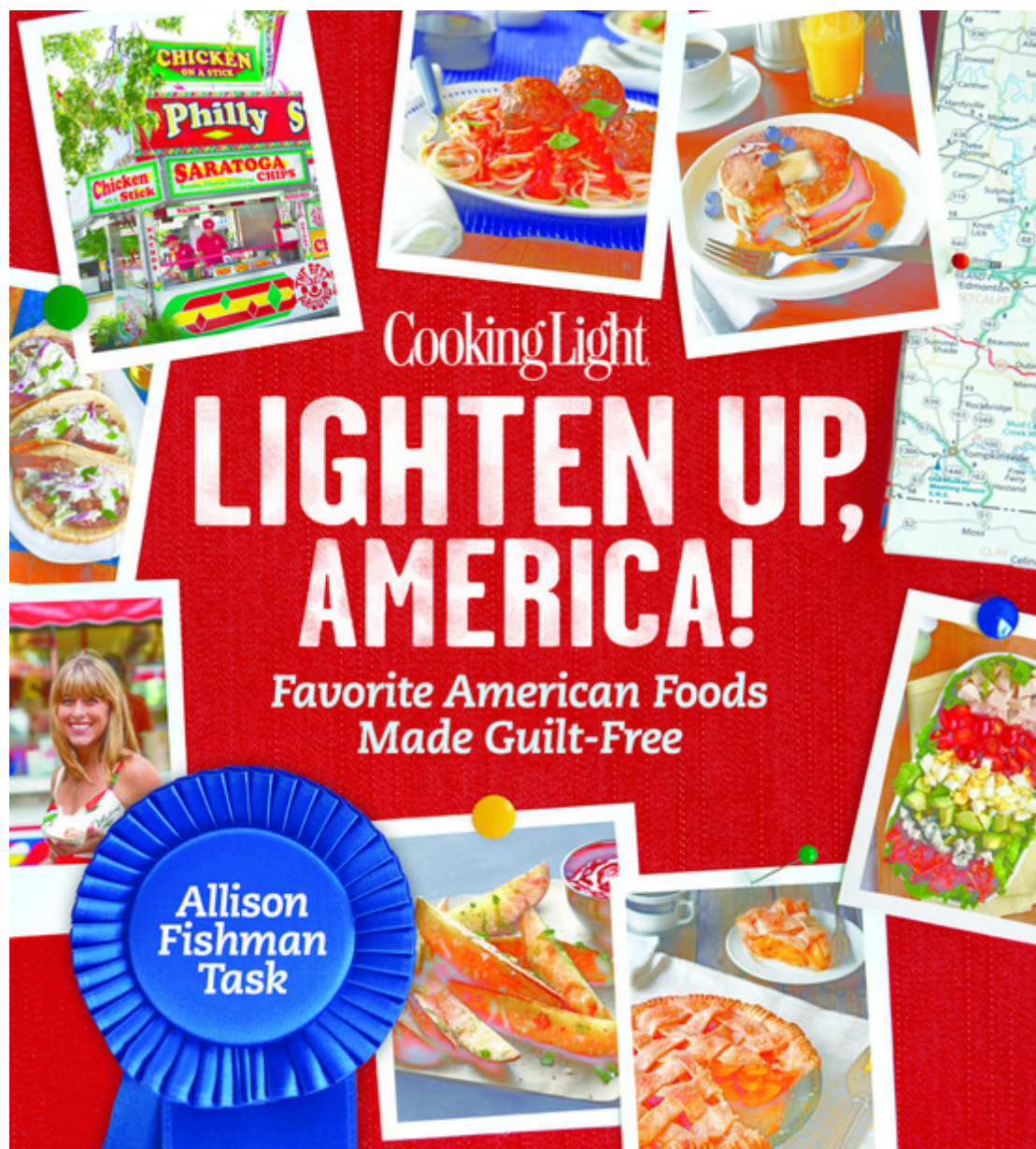


Cook the Book: 'Lighten Up, America!'

KATE WILLIAMS



For many eaters around the country, the new year comes filled with expectations for change. More often than not, this change revolves around diet. I am certainly not one to adopt a brand new diet come January, but I do find myself looking toward lighter, healthier meals in the new year.

One part travelogue, one part cookbook, *Lighten Up, America!*, a new cookbook from *Cooking Light* written by editor **Allison Fishman Task**, is a fun approach to healthier eating. Task travels around the country, collecting homespun recipes for American classics, and then gives each a *Cooking Light* makeover. Interspersed between recipes for things like lightened pigs in blankets, tuna noodle casserole, and New Orleans-style gumbo are reflections on regional traditions. Task witnesses a milk drinking contest, attends a roadkill cooking festival, and jumps onto a Carolina shrimping boat. Her stories make her cookbook less about dieting and more about embracing every piece of American food culture.

To those unfamiliar with the magazine, *Cooking Light* usually takes a low-calorie, low-fat approach to healthy eating; many of the dishes in Task's book follow this pattern and use lower fat substitutes for items like milk and cheese. However, there are still plenty of dishes that take a more natural approach: meals like meatloaf and meatballs are bulked out with spinach or mushrooms to lighten the heavy meatiness. Small amounts of bacon appear frequently in the book, adding smoky, salty pork flavor without too much excess.

Needless to say, portion control is king in *Lighten Up, America!* . If you're interested in the nutrition facts listed for each recipe, you will want to pay close attention to the serving size. If you're a little less concerned with the final fat and sodium counts, it is easy to tweak the recipes to suit your taste; seasoning to taste is always a fine idea. Either way, the recipes are consistently reliable.

We'll sample a wide variety of American classics this week. Starting with a hot bowl of split pea soup with ham, we'll then tackle a spinach-laced meatloaf, sample maple-y Vermont baked beans, return to our childhoods with revamped fish sticks, and finish out the week with a comforting bowl of chicken and dumplings.

Win 'Lighten Up, America!'

Thanks to our friends at *Cooking Light*, we have five (5) copies of *Lighten Up, America!* to give away this week. All you need to do for a chance to win is to tell us about your new year's food resolution in the comments section below.