

Cook the Book Thanksgiving Special: 'Choosing Sides' and 'The Wild Chef'

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Our [Cook the Book](#) celebration of [Thanksgivukkah](#) continues this week with a pair of cookbooks loaded with dishes that would be at home on any Thanksgiving (or any iteration thereof) table.

First up is former Serious Eats columnist [Tara Mataraza Desmond](#)'s new cookbook, [Choosing Sides](#). As the name implies, the book is focused entirely on those dishes that usually play second fiddle to the main course. But this isn't just any collection of salads and stir-fries. Desmond smartly corrals her creative recipes into useful categories, like potluck food and quick weeknight ideas, and then provides ample suggestions for fitting these dishes into practical meal plans. Each recipe comes with a list of at least five main course pairings, and is indexed into a list of more general pairings (i.e. lists of all the recipes that go well with chicken, beef, pork, etc). Desmond also includes tutorials on skills like making proper vinaigrettes, getting imaginative with mashed potatoes, and finding creative ways to upgrade basic fruits and vegetables that build a foundation for better, more resourceful cooking. In other words, this book is a seriously useful tools for anyone cooking dinner, anywhere.

Of course, all of this organization would be for naught if the recipes weren't up to snuff. You needn't worry. Desmond manages to tread the fine line between creative and realistic recipes with ease. Dishes like grilled halloumi and eggplant with almond mint pesto stand alongside more familiar staples like creamed peas amped up with a flurry of

fresh lemon zest. For big holiday dinners, Desmond offers a mix of treasured family recipes and subtle twists on fall favorites, making [*Choosing Sides*](#) a wonderful resource for Thanksgiving.

But what would Thanksgiving be without an oversized roast animal to anchor the table? Butterball turkeys are, of course, the most traditional choice, but we here at Serious Eats are nothing if not liberal in our view of holiday-appropriate mains. [*The Wild Chef*](#) cookbook from [*Field and Stream*](#) food columnist **Jonathan Miles** is a goldmine of ideas for unique centerpiece dishes. Based on Miles's column for the magazine, [*The Wild Chef*](#) takes an elevated approach to preparing wild game and fish. For active hunters, there are diagrams and instructions for dressing freshly caught animals (everything from squirrel to bear to walleye) and tips on setting up a hunting camp. For the rest of us, there are plenty of recipes for meat and seafood that can be (fairly) easily found at well-stocked grocery stores and butcher shops.

There is a welcome range in difficulty throughout the seasonally organized book; plenty of hearty stews and roasts mingle with elegant platters of boned game birds and duck prosciutto. And for a book written for a male-skewing audience, many of the dishes inside are surprisingly delicate and thoughtful.

This week, we'll build a Thanksgiving meal from both [*Choosing Sides*](#) and [*The Wild Chef*](#). First up, we'll try Desmond's persimmon and pomegranate salad, her Brussels sprouts with maple and browned butter, and her family's recipe for cornbread and sausage stuffing. Next, we'll turn to the meat, roasting a bacon-laced wild turkey and then braising a more diminutive pot of rabbit for those serving a smaller audience.

Win 'Choosing Sides' or 'The Wild Chef'

Thanks to our friends at Andrews McMeel and Weldon Owen, we have 5 (five) copies each of [*Choosing Sides*](#) and [*The Wild Chef*](#) to give away this week. All you need to do for a chance to win is tell us about **your favorite Thanksgiving dish** in the comments section below.