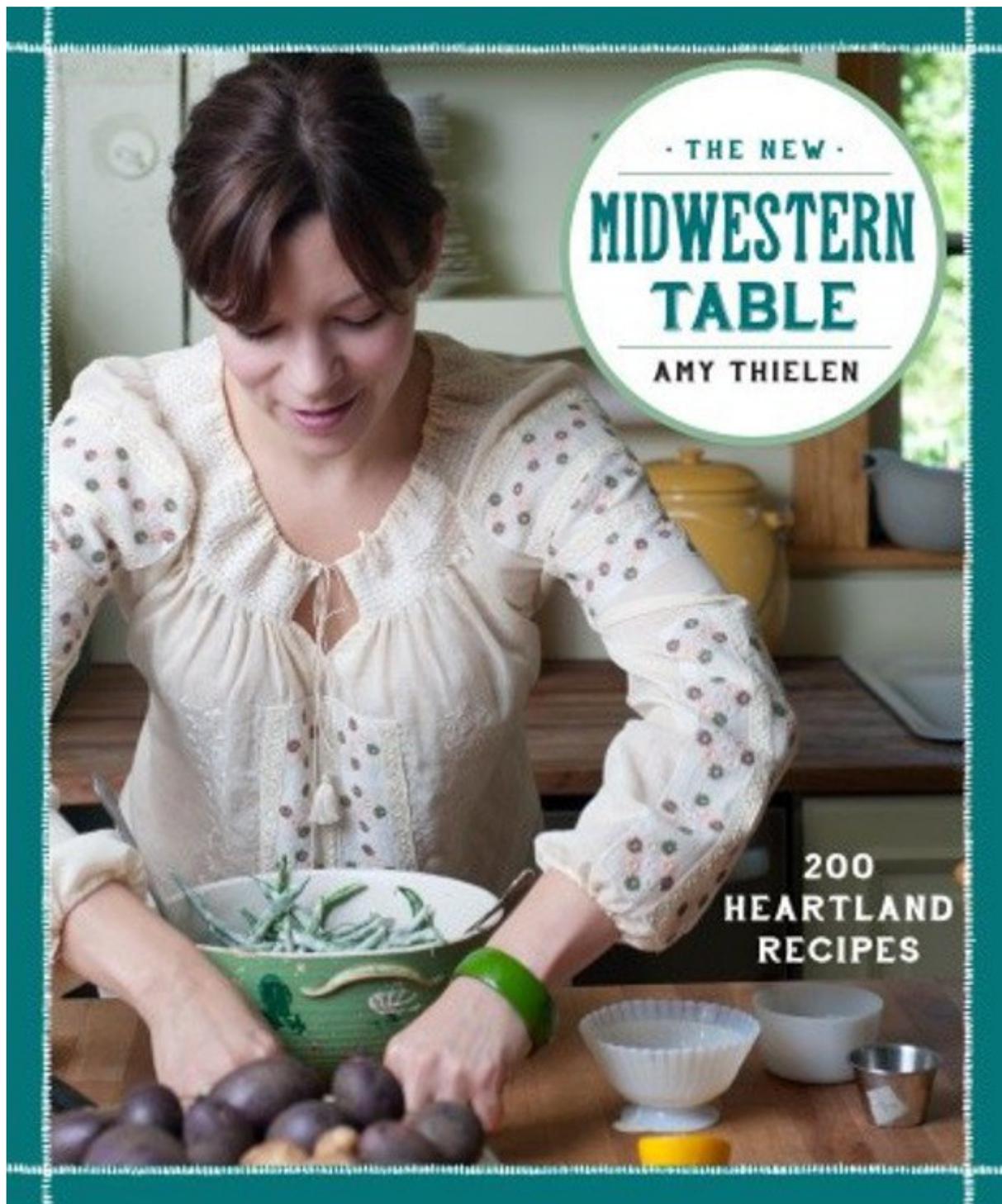


Cook the Book: 'The New Midwestern Table'

KATE WILLIAMS



If your family is anything like mine, there's a good chance you're about to be bombarded with a seemingly endless stream of holiday visitors. They'll stop in for at least a bite to eat or a cup of tea. Perhaps they'll stay for a night or two, allowing for plenty of drinking, eating, and...repeating. For weeks such as these, it's a blessing to have a cadre of warm, comforting meals ready to unleash at any time. Food writer [Amy Thielen](#)'s recently released cookbook, [The New Midwestern Table](#), is full of them.

Midwestern cuisine is not exactly the hippest food on the block these days, but there's no good reason why it shouldn't be the next regional American style to get the kind of attention the Southeast is currently receiving. Much like **Edna Lewis**'s *The Taste of Country Cooking*, Thielen's book introduces a broad, diverse culinary culture that encompasses far more than the expected casseroles and cheese. The Midwest is, after all, a huge swath of land, home to a panoply of cultures and cuisines; many of the descendants of the earlier Scandinavian and German settlers are now living next door to folks from Mexico, East Africa, and Central America. In short, cooking Midwestern food is as much of an American experience as is preparing the food of any major US city.

Thielen does a beautiful job embracing the stark seasonality and limitations of her home in Minnesota. While there is certainly not a wide variety of ingredients in the book, each is prepared with whip-smart attention and care. *The New Midwestern Table* embraces the homesteader; many of the recipes ascribe to the practical DIY-ethos of farmers and hip foodies alike. Thielen believes that this fact is what makes Midwestern food especially American. She writes, "A lot of the best Midwestern food involves a very American intimacy with the wilderness, some hunting and gathering, a principle that counts even if some of the gathering occurs in your backyard." Between her charming introduction and thorough, detailed recipes, I have a hard time keeping myself from jumping in the kitchen and starting a batch of sauerkraut or frying a griddle full of lesfe flatbread.

So while Thielen's book may not include the most elegant roast or trendiest Brussels sprout preparation, it does offer the kinds of dishes that are most welcome around the holidays: hearty, warming food that pleases—the heartland at its best.

This week, we'll sample some of the best the Midwest has to offer. We'll serve **chicken and wild rice hotdish** (casserole) alongside crisp, **caramelized cabbage**. Then we'll try a **pounded cheddar cheese spread** drizzled with port syrup, braise a rich **pot roast crowned with pistachio salt**, and finish the week off with a true northern Midwest treat: **cream potato lefse**.

Win 'The New Midwestern Table'

Thanks to our friends at Clarkson Potter, we have five (5) copies of *The New Midwestern Table* to give away this week. All you need to do for a chance to win is to **tell us what you think of when you hear the words "Midwestern food."**