

Five Questions for Amelia Saltsman

To paraphrase the age-old question, how is this Jewish cookbook different from all others?

We tend to compartmentalize the different aspects of our lives. We have one box for the seasonal, lighter, healthier way we eat today, and another for Jewish food, which is often misunderstood as heavy, only Eastern European (Ashkenazic), or irrelevant to today's lifestyle. (This box also often holds wistful memories for beloved foods we think we're no longer supposed to eat.) In *The Seasonal Jewish Kitchen*, I want to open up all those boxes and show how intertwined tradition and modern life actually are. I've read the Bible for history and for literature, but now I've mined it for food, agriculture, and sustainable practices, and wow, what a trove of delicious connections I discovered!

What kind of surprises will readers discover?

First, the great diversity of Jewish cuisine. The Jewish Diaspora, or migration, is thousands of years old and global. Jewish food is a patchwork of regional cuisines that includes the deli foods of Eastern Europe *and* the bold flavors of North Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and more. My hope is that *The Seasonal Jewish Kitchen* will keep you saying, "That's Jewish food? Who knew?" Remember the line from Ecclesiastes about there being nothing new under the sun? The ancient Hebrews were among the world's early sustainable farmers, and many of today's innovative practices have their roots in the Bible. Also, the Bible contains quite a few "recipes" that are remarkably current (think freekeh, fire-roasted lamb, and red lentil stew). I love that today's food trends are links in a very long chain!

Why is the book divided into six seasons instead of four?

Over the years, I've found that dividing a year into two-month increments—September-October, November-December, and so on—is more useful for knowing which crops will be most plentiful and at their best. When I looked at my seasonal lifestyle through a Jewish lens, I discovered that the lunar Jewish calendar divides into similar time frames and that the foods of the holidays that occur during these "micro-seasons" reflect the natural cycles of the year. The spring herbs of Passover are a classic example. Less familiar is milk, which is more plentiful in May and June and plays a key role in Shavuot, the holiday that falls in those two months. Noticing such connections is one more way to bring meaning to our lives.

Is this a kosher cookbook?

It depends on the cook. The basic precepts of Jewish dietary law exclude pork, shellfish, and the mixing of meat and dairy in the same dish or menu, so you won't find those ingredients or combinations in this book. If you include those foods in your diet, I promise you won't miss them in this collection of recipes! If you follow the kashrut, each recipe is labeled with its category—meat, dairy, pareve (neutral), as well as pareve/vegan and fish. This is Jewish cooking for everyone; readers can mix, match, and adapt recipes according to their personal food philosophies.

What is your food philosophy?

Plain and simple: Use well-raised, whole, real, foods. I don't use artificial ingredients, so for readers who keep a kosher home, I'm especially excited to offer desserts that are naturally compatible with meat menus without having to resort to substitutions. And like many adventure some chefs today, I believe there's a delicious place for Old-World ingredients—pickled fish, organ meats, rendered fats, and cracklings (schmaltz and gribenes)—in fresh, modern meals. After all, good cooks make good food.