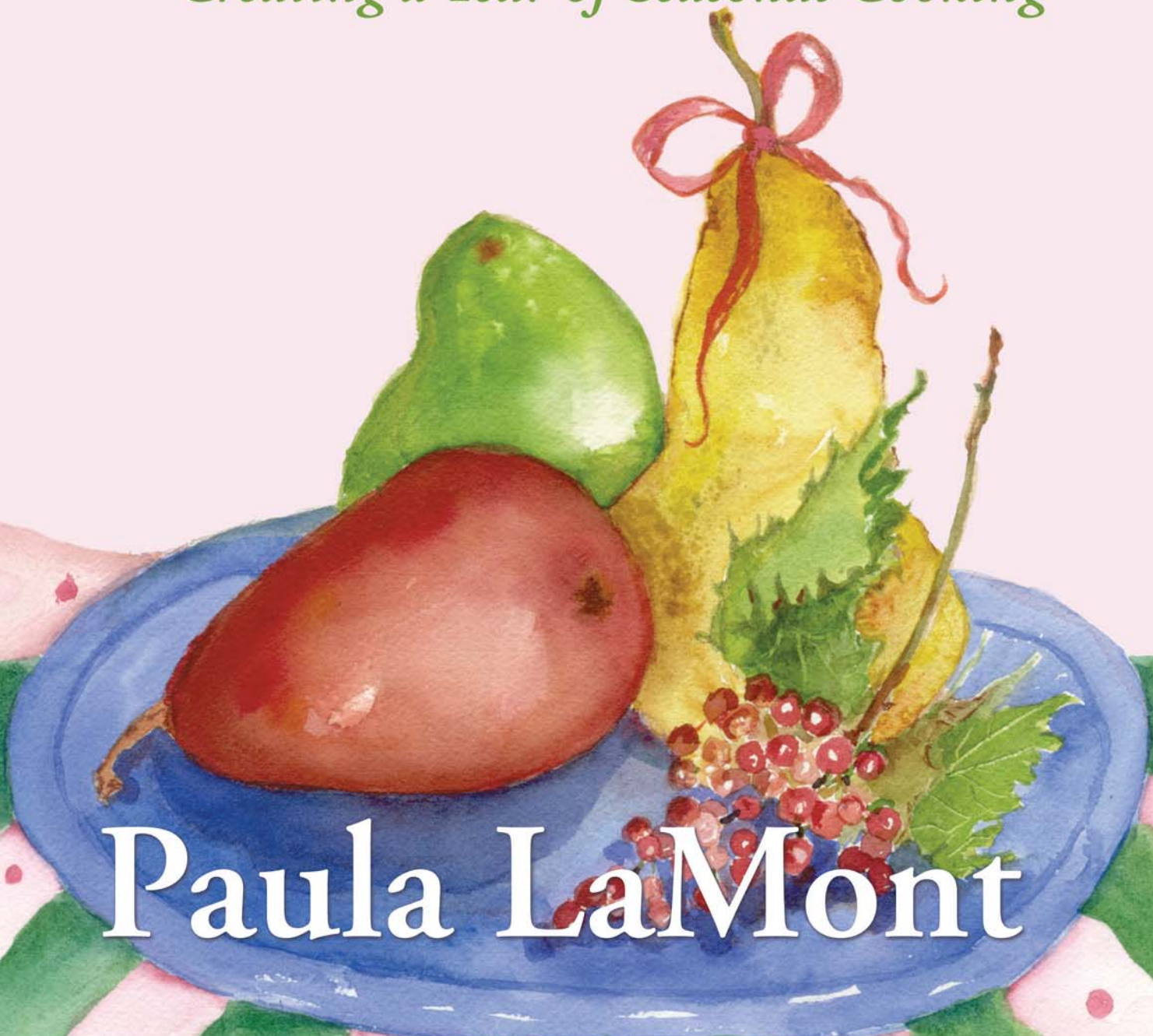


Joyful Seasons Cookbook

Creating a Year of Seasonal Cooking



Paula LaMont

CHAPTER ONE

Spring

One of the first signs of Spring in Oregon's Willamette Valley, is the small flecks of white that emerge against the sap green grass in the fields below my home. A closer inspection reveals the specks are actually newborn lambs, making their first appearance in the pristine-rain washed world. I

live near Oregon State University; an agricultural school. In March the lambing barns are filled with urban visitors catching a glimpse of the new life heralding the coming of Spring. Children touring the barns are getting an idea of how a farm works and its relationship to daily life.

Each Spring, Farmer's Markets and kitchen gardens (including my own) begin sprouting with spring onions, rhubarb and asparagus. By the time berries come along, I am overjoyed that at last we have 'real' local fruit, bursting with the freshness we've missed all winter. I do a private "happy dance" when I spy my ever-bearing strawberries slowly starting to show crimson among the leaves. I have plans for those red beauties!

After a winter of soups, stews and heavier foods, we long for a change – a bite of spring onions, cabbage or the woodsy flavor of asparagus. Greens of all kinds are available at this time of year and their antioxidant boost can ward off spring-time sniffles. A plate of warm *Soft Polenta with Fresh Asparagus* is the perfect meal on those warm days and cool evenings.

I look forward to my first trip to the Farmer's Market each year. I make note of the bounty spilling from baskets on display, and take time to chat with the local farmers about their crops and what we can be expecting in the coming weeks. Even if you are blessed to have your own kitchen garden, The Farmer's Market is a wonderful way to introduce yourself to local produce and start planning menus for upcoming meals.

The local farmers can be a great tool in your cooking arsenal; they will teach you how to tell the difference between "ripe" and "almost" ripe, and how to choose the right produce for your meals. Talk to them – and you'll find that most love to discuss food and how you can use the produce they bring to the market for your meals. Many farmers will include copies of their favorite recipes along with your purchase. You'll develop a rapport with some that may last a



life time and those relationships can be invaluable to help you learn about incorporating fresh ingredients into your meals.

The recipes in this chapter all use commonly available Spring vegetables. Of course, local crops vary, and you may find that you want to substitute some items for others as you gain more confidence in the kitchen. (If you are ready now, go for it!) If you can't find an item, ask at your local fresh grocer or Farmer's Market. You will likely be able to find an easy substitute – or find that your local market has a slightly different name for the item. The most important thing is to get out and get those fresh items into your kitchen. The bounty of the land is waiting for you – and incorporating it into your cooking will change the way you think about food forever!

The Pantry Check List are items to keep on hand to make your meal preparation easier. If you don't have a pantry in your home, create your own using several shelves in your kitchen cupboard. I have used a hall closet, a metal shelf in the garage and space under my stairs for a pantry. Look around your home and see where you might organize a pantry for your family.

Having these pantry items on hand will allow you to easily make your own healthy “fast food” for your “on the go” family.



Pantry Check List

Before stocking up your pantry, throw out any food or canned products older than three months. All of us purchase items that our family didn't care for, or we seem unable to use in our regular meal preparation. Clutter-clearing your pantry will enable you to have on hand the items your family enjoys and will eat! Take Saturday or Sunday morning and enlist the help of your family; that way the job can be done quickly. Print out this list and attach to the door of your pantry, if you use up an item, make a note and check the list before going to the grocery. If you have room available, buy two of your family's favorite item; for instance if you love catsup, keep two in the pantry.

These items are meant to get you started, but continue to make your own list of favorites

Dry Goods:

Oil - *olive oil and vegetable oil*
Vinegar - *cider and balsamic*
Dry Mustard
Pasta - *spaghetti, rigatoni and orzo*
Bread Crumbs
Rice - *white and wild rice mix*
Flour - *unbleached all purpose and wheat*
Yellow Cornmeal
Pancake/Waffle Mix
Taco Shells
Sugar - *white, light and dark brown*
Honey
Vanilla
Baking Powder
Baking Soda
Peanut Butter

Canned items:

Beans - *black, pinto, red and white*
Tomatoes - *crushed, whole and tomato sauce*
Chicken Broth
Beef Broth
Olives
Cream of Mushroom Soup
Evaporated Milk

Dried Herbs:

Basil
Curry Powder
Garlic Powder
Ginger
Italian Seasoning
Lemon Pepper
Parsley
Tarragon
Thyme

Vegetables:

Onions
Garlic (fresh)
Potatoes (a baking potato can
be used for most recipes)
Sweet Potatoes

Now that you have your pantry together, make a journey to your local Farmer's Market or cruise the fresh produce aisle for mealtime inspiration. Remember the recipes given are meant only as a guideline for your cooking. Try substituting green beans for the asparagus in *Spring Vegetable Pasta* or peaches in the *Ritzy Strawberry Pie*. The recipes in *Joyful Seasons* are a chance for you to succeed and build confidence in your cooking, but don't be afraid to experiment!



Fresh Strawberry Mint Spread

Serves 8 - 10

2 - 8 oz cream cheese

1/2 pint fresh strawberries, sliced

1 teaspoon honey

2 tablespoons rose or white wine

Garnish with fresh mint leaves

Allow the cream cheese to soften at room temperature. Place all the ingredients in food processor and blend until smooth. Chill before serving. Add the mint garnish before serving. The mint flavor blends with the cheese.



THE BEAUTIFUL ROSE COLOR OF THE *FRESH STRAWBERRY MINT SPREAD* SHOUTS SPRING! MINT IS A VERY VIGOROUS HERB AND CAN BE EASILY CULTIVATED ALL YEAR INDOORS IN A POT. USE THIS SPREAD ANY TIME OF THE YEAR AS A SANDWICH F I L L I N G OR DIP. IT GOES ESPECIALLY WELL WITH APPLE OR OTHER FRUIT SLICES. OMIT THE WINE FOR THE KIDS AND KEEP IT IN THE REFRIGERATOR FOR THEM TO SPREAD ON A TORTILLA, ROLL IT UP AND GO ON THEIR WAY WITH A NUTRITIONAL TREAT IN HAND.