



# The Kitchen Diaries: A Year in the Kitchen with Nigel Slater

*Nigel Slater , Jonathan Lovekin (Photographer)*

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"Right food, right place, right time. It is my belief—and the point of this book—that this is the best recipe of all. A crab sandwich by the sea on a June afternoon; a slice of roast goose with apple sauce and roast potatoes on Christmas Day; hot sausages and a chunk of roast pumpkin on a frost-sparkling night in November. These are meals whose success relies not on the expertise of the cook but on the more basic premise that this is the food of the moment--something eaten at a time when it is most appropriate, when the ingredients are at their peak of perfection, when the food, the cook and the time of year are at one with each other."

—Nigel Slater, *The Kitchen Diaries*

Nigel Slater writes about food in a way that stimulates the imagination, the heart, and the palate all at once. *The Kitchen Diaries* brings an especially personal ingredient to the mix, letting us glimpse his pantry, tour local farmers' markets with him, and savor even the simplest meals at his table.

Recording twelve months in his culinary life, Slater shares seasonal dishes and the intriguing elements behind them. As someone who celebrates each visit to the cheese shop or butcher, he enthusiastically conveys the brilliant array of choices and encourages his view of food shopping as an adventure rather than a chore. A rainy day in February calls for a hearty stew; summertime finds him feasting on a lunch as simple as baked tomatoes with grated Parmesan. If an exotic mood strikes him, slow-roasted duck with star anise and ginger is in order. In *The Kitchen Diaries*, Nigel interweaves his meditations on how food should be enjoyed and prepared with his delicious recipes. No matter the season, *The Kitchen Diaries* offers a year-round invitation to cook and dine with the world's most irresistible lover of food.

## The Kitchen Diaries: A Year in the Kitchen with Nigel Slater Details

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### Valerie says

I've got a confession to make. I'm in love with Nigel Slater's cooking and his recipes and he could come to my home and be my kitchen slave forever. Needless to say, despite ogling his dishes on the television, I bought his books. Well, I bought two: *The Kitchen Diaries: A Year in the Kitchen* (2005) and *The Kitchen Diaries 2* (2012). Not only are they filled with great recipes but, importantly to me, the text in between the recipes is engagingly descriptive and effortlessly witty.

Nigel Slater is my kind of cook as his recipes are straight-forward, easy to understand, and generally use ingredients that are either already in our cupboards, fridges and freezers, or readily available to most of us. I suppose I fell in love with Nigel's cookery skills by watching his television programmes. He has such a relaxed way about him, such an ordinary way of speaking to the viewer, such a no-nonsense approach to cooking, that he convinced me absolutely that 'I can do that'. Which actually remains to be seen, of course. His *Kitchen Diaries* books are like that. They are far more than just recipe books. They are, as they state, diaries. The narrative from the author, Nigel Slater, is almost poetic with descriptions of his garden, the plants, the weather, the shops that he frequents, the produce that he so loves. You can sit and happily read these books as if they were simply delightful novels that paint vivid pictures with words. They are treasures to be cherished. Really.

Extract: "April 17 ... "Could there ever be the perfect day? Maybe not, but today is as close as it gets. Bright sunshine and cool breeze, the scent of wallflowers and narcissus on the air; a farmers' market with sorrel, young pigeons and good rhubarb, and an afternoon so hot and sunny you could fry eggs on the pavement. I gave in and bought my first tomatoes too, a vine or two of the early Campari..." (Slater, N. 2005, 'The Kitchen Diaries: A Year in the Kitchen', London, Fourth Estate, p.123

<http://movies-and-books-world.blogspot...>

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### Miriam says

The title does not lie: this really is a culinary diary and not a cookbook. There is an entry for every day of the year: always food-related but sometimes merely about shopping for food, or what's growing in his garden, or what he bought and ate. Only occasionally are actual recipes spelled out in a way that can be reproduced. More often, a dish is described sufficiently that a reasonably experienced cook could figure out how to make something similar -- if she could find the ingredients.

Fresh, seasonal, high-quality ingredients are key to Slater's culinary philosophy, and if you don't live in England and have plenty of disposable income many of the components probably won't be available, or if you do find them they'll be imported and not fresh. For instance, I've never come across partridge even in the swank import grocer here. However, he does eat mackerel a LOT, so if you're looking for new mackerel ideas I recommend this book.

It was hard not to feel a bit envious of Slater: he seems to have nothing to do but wander about the garden,

shop in fancy food stores, and cook. Once he mentions a meeting (at his home) and seems to find it quite tiring. I guess he made a lot writing those food columns! Or perhaps he's retired now; as an American I forget that in some other countries people can still retire without penury.

Or possibly there's all sorts of things going on, work and parties and whatnot, that Slater just doesn't mention. This diary is not intimate in the way the author's earlier *Toast*, unless you consider admitting lack of self-restraint in eating fresh fruit to be a highly personal confession.

Lastly, a note about the photography. It is again by Jonathan Lovekin, whose work I mentioned liking very much in my review of *Plenty*. I didn't love it quite as much here, but I don't think that's Lovekin's fault. One, the paper quality was softer and the images didn't come out as sharply. Two, Slater's food is not as colorful as Ottolenghi's. I was impressed at how Lovekin suited his style to the simpler and homier kitchen-garden feel of this book -- many excellent photographers (or writers or artists) and not so flexible.

(Pork belly with cannellini beans)

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### **Margaret says**

Very interesting read.

Didn't find any recipes that inspired me, but I very much enjoyed what was, essentially, Nigel's food diary.

Lusciously illustrated and a superb way to while away a few hours.

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### **Rebecca says**

This is such a lovely, atmospheric read- makes you want to run into the kitchen and start cooking ;)

Edit Aug '12- The wonderful news that a second *Kitchen Diaries* is coming out made me revisit this one, and how I love it. It is such a practical cookbook; there are recipes that you can plan for and impress with, but it is also very useful when you have something 'lying around' (like Nigel often does).... an on the spot decision to make plum crisp, p288, turned out beautifully just last week.

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### **Sheena Lambert says**

Another great book by Nigel Slater. This time he cooks his way through the calendar year. As with *APPETITE* (his other book I own) this book reads as well as any novel, and introduces its recipes like anecdotes. I love being able to refer to the date (or month anyway) I am myself cooking in to see what might be a suitable recipe/shopping list for the day's dinner.

My one gripe with the format of the book, is that Nigel comes across as a little annoying insofar as all he seems to spend his day doing is lazily shopping for his dinner at the local market (?! - it's well for some...) while the rest of us race around Tesco for ten minutes with a screaming toddler on our hip, at the end of a day's work in the office. Now, he being a professional cook and cookery writer, the chances are this IS all he does all day, but depending on the day, it can make for a jealous/angry/disgruntled reader (esp in Jan/Feb....).

Also, the book is really only suitable for Britain as the recipes are very focussed on seasonal produce. Still, it makes a nice bedtime read, if you can ignore the hunger pangs while you are reading it.

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### **Anula says**

Nigel proves (not for the first time) that he is as great a storyteller as he is a cook. I could hear his voice and accent in my head, when reading it, as it was probably designed - each day of the diary on it's corresponding day during the year, my year. It allowed me to experience this book in it's fullest potential, and provided some great recipes throughout the year!

I truly enjoyed this sneak peak into Nigel's everyday life. His (almost) everyday account and thoughts about changing seasons, nature's way of providing us with fresh food within them and his ideas of how to use those in the kitchen.

It is more of a diary than a cookbook, but there is an abundance of recipes - recipes that are easy to follow and ingredients that are easy to source and to be enjoyed at their best!

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### **Beth says**

Seriously one of the best books about food I have ever read. This was a birthday gift - and it was written by someone I'd never heard of. But he eats like I want to eat, and thinks about food the way I think about food.

There are recipes. Some that I will be trying. However, there is a lot of ideas in here. Attitudes towards food, eating, and cooking. A happy relationship.

There are some well planed meals in her but it is a food diary for a year so somedays there is nothing in the fridge, and somedays you order pizza, and somedays you have deal with the stuff you have almost forgotten in the back of the fridge...

Reading books about food can make you hungry. This one makes you hungry for peaches , fresh bread, really good cheese, and a glass of wine

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### **Hallie says**

Warning: this book will fill you with longing for Nigel or his boyfriend's life. Every single day is documented. After a day spent making homemade flatbread and taramasalata, he writes "In my smug haze of good house-keeping from yesterday's baking session, not to mention my arch disdain for factory produced foods, I fail to notice there is bugger all to eat in the house. At seven-thirty I dash to the corner shop, returning with a can of baked beans, a bag of frozen fries, and some beers." See, nothing to make you feel like Martha does. There are also dinners of braised oxtail with mustard and mashed potatoes followed by treacle tart and cream. Personally, I would settle for being their dog, content to bask in and beg from their kitchen.

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## Kelly Deriemaeker says

Zeer fijn boek dat me zin gaf om te koken en boerenmarkten te bezoeken zoals Nigel doet. En de seizoenen wat beter te volgen zodat ik eet wat ik op dit moment hoor te eten. Ik ga zeker wat van zijn recepten proberen de komende weken. Inspirerend!

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## Garry says

A lively read. Nigel Simpson writes "recipes" in the style of Elizabeth David. He does not number every little step and he is not always super precise in his measurements - "a good handful," "a glass of," and the like appearing more often than, say, "one and a half teaspoons" -- and employing lively, evocative descriptors like "enthusiastic boil" over traditional cookbookspeak. What is most interesting are the days when he confronts leftovers or seeks inspiration from what is on hand in his house, in the organic box of veggies he gets every day, or what caught his eye at the fish store, the veggie store, the butcher, etc. And this last point is the REAL theme of his book: cook, and eat (and enjoy), what is in season, what is fresh, what is good, what is reasonably priced, and doing so is not going to break the bank, consume every waking hour, or force you to lead a life of foodie preciousness. It will, however, ensure you eat and live well.

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## Philippa says

So many of my foodie friends talked about this book and now I know why. It is quite possibly the best cookbook I've ever read. Inviting, sumptuous, but never pretentious, Nigel Slater talks us through a year of meals he cooks and eats, tantalising with delicious details. He eats seasonally, so each month reflects the best of what is naturally available at that time of year, which is the ideal way to cook and enjoy food. As well as recipes, there are just loads of great ideas - things to pull together if you want something quickly. I made one of the salads he described - spinach, fresh apple, toasted walnuts, walnut oil and goat cheese - and it was incredible! Nice to know that he likes unwinding with cold, cold beer as much as I do too :) And if you live in London, he describes some wonderful markets and shops to try (which I certainly will be doing). I can see myself cooking a lot from this, but it's also a book I would happily curl up with and read purely for pleasure. Highly, highly recommended.

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## Shimelle says

I read this slowly and surely over 2007 and it has been such a life-altering experience. We live without television, so I couldn't tell you the first thing about Slater being a TV chef. We received Appetite as a gift a few years ago and fell in love with the simplicity of his recipes. Our favourite dish is from that book and it requires three ingredients, yet I guarantee it wouldn't be out of place with a high price tag at a good restaurant. So last year I picked up The Kitchen Diaries as a Christmas gift to my other half, but it was me who fell in love with the idea of a narrative that takes one through a full year of honest, good food.

We are split over this one in our house: I like it because of the diary format, which gives me more information about what the experts look for...but without it feeling like I am being lectured. The boy of the household prefers Slater's recipe-only books because he can flip right to something and make it, no-nonsense. But then, that exemplifies the differences in our personalities. I had to resist the urge to read the

whole thing like a novel over a few days, and instead read a little each month to see if he would be right about what beauties I would find at the farmer's market and so forth. Of course he was. Plus the diary format makes it feel like you're getting to know a chef's secrets. And we all like to have a few of our secrets in the kitchen to make our guests ask how on earth we could have made something so lovely.

While I am honestly a bit sad to get to the end of the book...and as a vegetarian, I knew the big finish of a Christmas dinner would not be my favourite part of the book...but I am inspired. This month I started keeping my own notes, and for 2008 I am planning to keep my own kitchen diary as a personal journey. I have to salute the writer here for never boring me with talk of vegetables, but also for letting us all know that even famous chefs have days where they grab bread from the local bakery and make a sandwich with the leftovers. Hurrah for humanity.

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## **Jessica says**

This month-by-month cookbook/memoir is the star British chef's diary of a year and what he really eats at home. If guests come over, it might be a roast with all the trimmings and a fabulous dessert. But if it's just him-and maybe his partner, whose presence is strongly felt but never named explicitly-it's a number of the kitchen meals we might do, described in an evocative way: a cold sausage from the fridge, perfect strawberries and cream. He writes about frustrations he finds in his weekly "organic box" (oranges in July: "I don't know why they bother") and triumphs at the local fishmonger's, or his surprise at finding a table of perfect lettuces in an overlooked farmer's market, the first sign of spring. What fills in, through his observations about the way we view and value everything from the slow food movement to haute cuisine, is not how to eat so much as how to read the meals that come along each day-opportunities, experiences, the mortar that binds the bricks together about being a human being.

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## **Tamara says**

Beware: this is possibly the longest review I've ever written of a book I have only skimmed.

Three things I disliked about this book:

1. I had a very hard time convincing myself to "read" a cookbook. I usually skim. But when I skimmed I missed things!
2. I hate it when authors live in much more advanced, metropolitan areas and think that it's easy to find 10 farmer's markets "on the way home." This just makes me jealous.
3. I find it suspect that someone would keep an ingredient such as rhubarb "on hand."

Despite all of that, each diary entry that began with a description of the sky made my mouth water. (See quotes below.) This man clearly loves food and nature, and can ruminate very eloquently about both. Bravo, Nigel. Bravo.

"A sky as clear and bright as iced water; plum and pear blossom breaking out in the garden; the hot scent of grated ginger coming from the kitchen. If only all days could prick the senses like this one."

"A still, quiet morning, as humid as a Turkish bath. I sit barefoot in the garden, sipping green tea and listening to the sound of church bells."

"Arms red and tingling from the sun and sea air. We have huge, kite-sized pieces of flounder in batter, with lemon and thick fried potatoes, eaten on the beach. Worth the wait, the drive there and the drive back home in the dark with the windows open and the music on too loud."

"Hazy morning, the air silent and heavy. The garden is turning from pink to orange, aflame from midday, when the sun comes over the top of the house and floods the garden with burning light. Montbretia, nasturtiums, Indian Prince marigolds, dahlias, zucchini flowers, hot-eye watering flowers in bright sunlight line the beds. The tomatoes are ripening, a single eggplant is hanging down from the purple-leaved plant in a deep pot on the back steps. The garden is suddenly a vibrant, vulgar, scorching place to eat."

One of the few paragraphs that make beets sound appealing: "Two of us ate the beets and their greens with slices of crumbly goat cheese, hacking off bits of cheese and pushing them on to the still-warm beets with ruby-stained fingers. After the fudgy, chalk-white cheese and sweet, claret roots, we filled up on slices of thick buttered soft white bread..."

Something I very much want to do when I am rich: "One of the reasons I bought this house was because the doors to the small, narrow kitchen opened out on to the garden and when I found them to be rotten, I rejoiced and replaced them with a much wider pair, hanging them on parliament hinges so each door could be pushed flat against the outside walls, giving the effect of kitchen and garden as one. I cook with the doors open on even the wettest day. The smell of spring rain as I chop and stir brings with it a gentle freshness and energy...every plant, tree and bush seems to have woken up this week."

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## **Elizabeth says**

I really can't recall the last time I enjoyed reading a book as much as I enjoyed The Kitchen Diaries. I spent most the weekend curled up with it on the couch under a warm blanket, drinking a hot mug of coffee. It's basically the perfect format for me - a combination of diary and cookbook, reflecting on seasonal eating, cooking experiments (both good and bad), and the pleasures (and sometimes shames) of food. After reading through half the year on Saturday, I woke up Sunday morning dreaming of perfect breakfasts.

I think one of the things I really enjoyed and appreciated was his perspective on meals and portions. From the way he talks about food, it seems like his diet centers around very good food, but not a whole lot of it - so small, hearty, flavorful portions rather than a plate full of mediocre food. As I told Shane, this is something I struggle with in planning meals - I worry that whatever I make isn't going to be enough, or that there should be more protein, etc - when perhaps if I focused on healthy, hearty, and flavorful, the rest wouldn't be as big of a deal.

On the whole, I found myself really inspired to cook more, make better meals, and read and write about food more. So consider yourself warned.

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