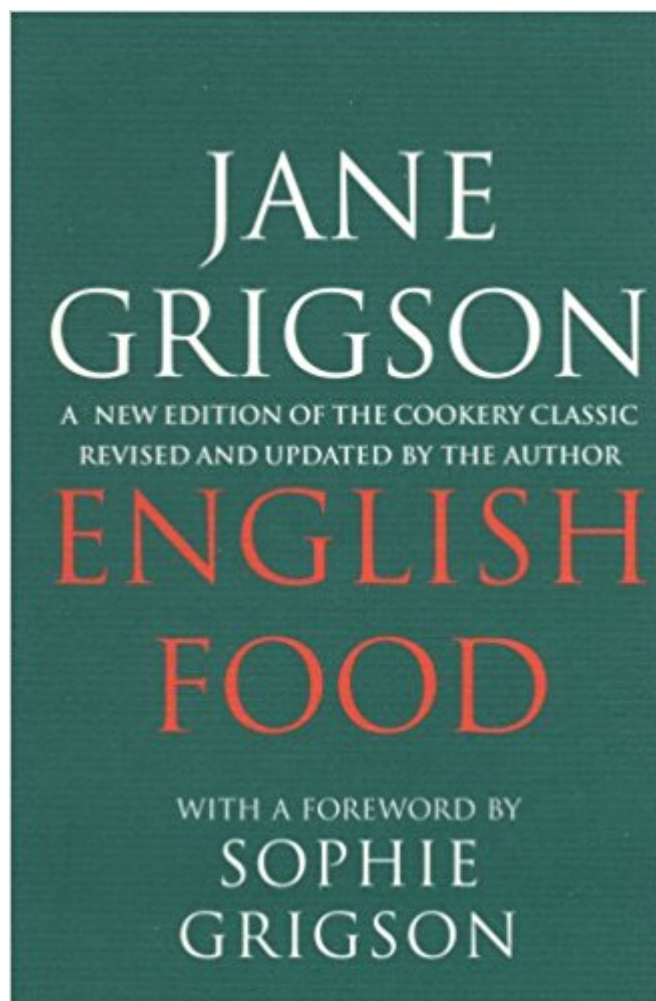


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English Food



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Customer Reviews

'English Food' is eminent culinary writer, Jane Grigson's last and probably finest book, revised, except for the last chapter, just before her death in 1979. Grigson is in the fine tradition of English female culinary writers, and a disciple of the foremost English woman culinarian, Elizabeth David. In fact, in this Penguin edition, the book bears a spooky similarity to David's finest book on English bread baking. The value of this book is no better stated than on pages 56 - 57 where Grigson says 'We (the English) are always after some new thing. Which is fine in many ways, but in matters of food often disastrous. We are so busy running after the latest dish, that the good things we have known for centuries are forgotten as quickly as the boring things.' Just as the author points out that the use of the vegetable, sorrel has been lost to her audience, books such as this one seem to slip into obscurity while newer books don't entirely replace them, and what was once common knowledge is lost to modern amateur culinarians. Before going any further, I must warn you that this book is not your typical collection of 'authentic old recipes' as you may find from famous culinary locales such as Williamsburg restaurants or Philadelphia's City Tavern. It is much more of a historical study like that of her mentor, David, cited above. That is not to say one cannot glean lots of good recipes from this book, especially for 'forgotten' dishes. In fact, in comparing her recipes with those in David's bread book, I find Grigson's much easier to follow, as she gives more highly structured lists of ingredients and more detailed descriptions of techniques. She is still just a bit thin compared to the lushly described recipes from Julia Child in her 'Mastering the Art of French Cooking', but then, that was first and foremost a COOKBOOK, which this is not. It is interesting to find Ms. Grigson giving more than a little credit to more than one American culinary tradition,

including both the inimitable Ms. Child and the founders of Boston's Legal Seafood company (now spread to Philadelphia and other eastern cities.). She also goes into some depth to explain the traditionally poor state, or at least the perceived poor state of English food. The two biggest factors I can see are the fact that so few vegetables are native to the British Isles and that the inhabitants of this beknighted island have a paradoxically poor taste for fish, so all the best stuff gets exported to the Continent. This is not as strange as it may seem, as exactly the same state exists with the Greek Islands in the Aegean, who prefer to export their catches to Athens for money rather than to eat them at home. Like her mentor, Elizabeth David and her inheritors, Nigella Lawson and Nigel Slater, Ms. Grigson is an excellent writer. You are carried along among some pretty dusty historical corridors and not realize how dry the material may seem if it were not presented by such an engaging guide. She may even be a bit easier to read than Ms. David herself, but maybe not quite as breezy as the good Mr. Slater. If you get nothing else from this book, you will certainly appreciate the fact that several culinary traditions which may seem either primarily Irish or French are actually English. The most famous, of course, is *crème brûlée*, which is based on the justly named *crème Anglaise* or custard. Another famous English dish is the pudding, which is a very general term for what we Yanks think of as the Christmas fruitcake, except that 'puddings', as seen in, for example, Dickens' 'Christmas Carol' is a rum soaked cake much more interesting than that famous sweet doorstopper. It is significant that unlike the typical Mediterranean cookbook, most of this book is dedicated to meats, puddings, and other baked goods rather than to fish and vegetables. In fact, the current interest in brining meats to improve moisture and flavor may go straight through Ms. Grigson's book, here, and in her book on French charcuterie. While this is an historical study, it is still the very best book I know of on typically English food. David spent most of her time writing about France, Italy, and the Mediterranean, Lawson and Slater deal with a very cosmopolitan cuisine, and major restaurateur / writers such as Gordon Ramsay and Jamie Oliver are firmly entrenched in French and Italian traditions respectively. A very important book for those who are interested in food writing.

I love this book! As a culinary instructor it is always interesting to read culinary books from years gone by. This lady certainly has great information and an opinion on the food industry that is before its time. I would have liked this lady!

Lovely book, well done.

Tiny bit of damage to the cover, but overall quite good.

Very, very interesting recipes and a great book to have if your are searching for recipes of long ago. I recommended this book to friends who are food writers and historians. Jane Grigson has a wonderful way of writing and explaining things. You have to remember, it was written a long time ago.....

A very nice collection of recipes.

Sorry but I had to return this book. It has no photos. Not one. Nothing to show how the dishes should look in the end. The book is over an inch thick and is written like a novel with lists of ingredients and paragraphs of instructions. I am not a good cook, I need photos to show me what it all means and how it should come together.

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