



DAIRY

CEREALS

SNACKS

SPREADS

SOUPS

THE HOMEMADE PANTRY



101 FOODS
YOU CAN STOP BUYING
& START MAKING

ALANA
CHERNILA

PASTA

FROZEN FOODS

CRACKERS

BREAD

CANDY

THE
**HOMEMADE
PANTRY**

101 FOODS YOU CAN
STOP BUYING & START MAKING

ALANA CHERNILA

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JENNIFER MAY



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**For Joey,
Sadie,
and Rosie**

“We cannot go back in time. Instead, we must
reinvent life for ourselves.”

—LAURIE COLWIN



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introduction

THIS IS MY KITCHEN. Come on in, but be prepared—it might not be quite what you expect.

There is flour on the counter, oats that overflowed onto the floor, chocolate-encrusted spoons in the sink. There is Joey, the husband, exhausted by the preschoolers who were hanging on him all day, and he is stuffing granola into his mouth to ease his five o'clock starvation. There are two little girls trying to show me cartwheels in that minuscule space between the refrigerator and the counter where I really need to be. Sadie's seven, and she is asking about the menu and ordering her sister to take over her job of setting the table. Rosie is five, and has already decided that she doesn't want what's for dinner. All I can do is throw up my hands in the midst of it all, and I can almost feel the anxiety of all families trying to get food on the table. Whatever time it is, it is the unfortunate hour that comes over many households right before dinner and links so many of us.

On this night, we're having lasagne, and there are large floppy noodles hanging on the laundry drying rack in the corner. For the filling, there is ricotta in the fridge from a morning cheese-making demonstration that I gave, and I still have milk left for the best part—quick mozzarella. Rosie changes into her tutu every day as soon as she drops her schoolbag, and I zip up her costume with one hand as I massage the hot cheese curds into stretchy mozzarella with the other. I can't help but curse as I realize that I have submerged my hand into nearly boiling whey. "Mommy said 'shit'!" Sadie announces with a triumphant little dance, and I say it again when I realize that the sauce that I have thrown together from my tomatoes that I roasted and then froze has boiled over.

I could have avoided this whole chaotic event. Any number of companies would have been happy to offer me a frozen lasagne, perfectly boxed into an aluminum pan with easy-to-read instructions. For extra nutrition and crunch, I could have picked up a salad in a bag and a bottle of dressing, and we would have been set. The kitchen would have been clean, dinner would have been ready at a decent hour without the rush, I would have finally had a chance to answer some e-mails, and this day would have been a bit simpler.

So why is there no perfectly boxed lasagne in my oven? At this moment, I must admit that I am asking myself the very same question.

Fortunately, the answer eventually comes to me. When the lasagne mess reaches its pinnacle, something shifts. The smell of the bubbling sauce takes over the kitchen, and Rosie realizes that mozzarella is in the works. She stops mid-cartwheel, puts an apron over her tutu, pulls her stool to the counter, and stands ready to roll the hot cheese into little balls. She'll eat her weight in homemade cheese before the lasagne even goes into the oven. Sadie sets napkins and forks on the table as Joey emerges from his hunger stupor; he is finally aware of the goings-on in the kitchen. "Lasagne?" he asks with hope. With a nod of my head, his whole mood changes, and he spoons my sauce

into the glass baking pan so that it can be ready for the first layer of noodles.

In 2003, Joey and I threw ourselves a wedding in the dead of winter. We were both twenty-three, just a few months away from the birth of our first child, and we had three hundred dollars to feed sixty-five hungry and excited people who had traveled the country through snow and ice to witness our nuptials. In a late burst of inspiration, we asked several friends to make what they thought was the perfect lasagne. So on that snowy day, although we didn't even have tables to eat it on, we had the most lovely assortment of pasta and cheese and sauce that I could have dreamed of. With that meal in our laps on folding chairs in my grand father's house, lasagne became the food of love, support, and warmth for our family.

I thought lasagne couldn't get any better than that, and in many ways, it never can. But then I learned how to make fresh noodles and I made sauce from my own oddly shaped tomatoes and herbs, and I thought it couldn't get any better than that. And then I learned how to turn milk into the silkiest ricotta with a squeeze of lemon and a bit of patience at the stove. Then there was the homemade mozzarella.

AS THE LIST OF THE STAPLES that I make at home has grown, my excitement has moved me to draw friends into my kitchen to create them with me. Of course, we talk about food as we make it, and so often the conversation moves from enthusiasm into another realm, a place filled with guilt and the idea of what we "should" be making in our kitchens. Then there is some version of the same sentiment, punctuated by a heavy sigh.

"I wish I were the kind of person who makes butter."

Tell me, who really is the kind of person who makes butter?

One hundred years ago, many people made their butter every week, patiently churning the yellow gold distilled from the cream of their cow in the backyard. I am a mother of two young children, piecing together work and family the best I can. I have very little time to patiently churn anything. I do, however, make some pretty good butter.

After the birth of our second daughter, driven by a lack of grocery money and some fervent curiosity, I went about trying to learn how to make food from scratch. Joey bought me a yogurt maker for Christmas, and I was so eager to see those cultures in action that I was already heating the milk as the kids opened the rest of their gifts. And like that, I became someone who makes yogurt.

IF WE ARE TO BECOME PEOPLE who do make butter, we might have to shift the way we see ourselves a bit. We might have to get into the adventurous spirit and unearth our own curiosity about where our food comes from. We might have to make a colossal mess of the kitchen. And we might have to slow down, at least long enough to knead a loaf of bread before the day begins. Here are a few reasons I have found myself to be the kind of person who makes butter:

1. Food made at home is better for you.

You know exactly what is going into it, and it will be fresher. There are no preservatives, no chemicals leaching from packaging, and no hidden ingredients.

2. Food made at home tastes better.

Yes, I know that we all have our favorite packaged foods and guilty pleasures, and while you might not be able to re-create all of them, you can make a delicious homemade chocolate sandwich cookie. It will have a deeper chocolate flavor than the one in the blue bag, and it might lack that strange chemical aftertaste you found so addictive as a child. That's probably because that other one has ingredients in it that you wouldn't bring into your home unless you were trying to clean your shower. But I think you'll get addicted to the homemade ones, too—I know I have. Home-blended hot sauce shames the stuff from the store, fresh-baked crackers have a crunch and complexity that far surpasses the alternative, and that's just the beginning.

3. Food made at home usually costs less.

Often, when you buy prepared foods, you are paying for packaging and brand names, shipping, oil, advertising, and who knows what else. If you make the food yourself, you pay only for the raw ingredients.

4. Food made at home eliminates unnecessary packaging.

Have you ever looked at the contents of your garbage or recycling bin? I think you would be shocked at how many wrappers and boxes you get rid of each week.

5. Food made at home will change the way you think about food.

You won't make all of these recipes every week. You might make pickles just once, and then decide that the experience is not for you. But I promise you this—after making *your* pickles, you will think very differently about *all* pickles. After submerging cucumbers in brine you have crafted, you will have closed the distance between yourself and the source of your food. And the closing of this distance can impact your life in ways that I can only begin to predict.



useful tools for the homemade pantry

MONEY, TASTE, AND TIME: IS IT REALLY WORTH IT?

Let's get this out of the way right now. I do not make all of these recipes every week—not even close. I do my best to keep my family eating the best foods possible. Some weeks are filled with all sorts of experimental and lovely treats. My girls might come home to handmade marshmallows in hot chocolate one day and then we might press tortillas together the next day. But some weeks are different, and I'm sure you know the kinds of weeks I'm talking about. Then I have to prioritize, and only the easiest and most important recipes warrant my time: yogurt, granola, and snack bars for the ride home from school. For me, the contemplation of each recipe begins with one simple question.

Is this worth it?

The criteria for answering that question shift depending on who will be serving the food, who will be eating it, and what day it is. Whether you are led by cost, taste, time, or just the thrill of the recipe, do what works for you.

COST • When money is scarce, if I can make the food at home less expensively, then it is absolutely worth it. This is especially true when it comes to foods that my family eats every day, basic staples that I need no matter how tight the grocery budget.

TASTE • Of course, as I bite into my first homemade potato chip or fruit rollup, I can't help but compare its taste to the store-bought equivalent. Does it taste better? Almost always, yes. Some won't just be better, they will be so phenomenal that it will be hard to go back to the packaged versions.

TIME • When life is really busy and I can barely find the couple minutes to make a sandwich, the efficiency factor takes over and only the fast and easy recipes are realistic. Even if a recipe far exceeds its store-bought equivalent in cost and taste, it will take a lot for me to commit to a three-hour hands-on prep time. If my kitchen is clean and ready and you want to take my kids for the afternoon, then we'll talk about it.

THRILL • Although this might be the hardest one to put your finger on, it's really the thing that keeps me going. Whether it's your inner pioneer expressing deep satisfaction when you look at your rows of bright-red jam-filled mason jars or your inner five-year-old (or real five-year-old) celebrating when the butter breaks from the buttermilk, the thrill is what keeps me cooking and sharing.

about my recipes

Sometimes there will be a moment in a recipe when the texture of the batter or syrup

or dough might seem different from how it should be, or maybe something went wrong and you can't quite figure out where that happened or if you can fix it. I've tried to identify those moments in these recipes—I call them the **tense moments**. You might experience them or you might not, but if you do, I'm hoping my stories and notes will ease a bit of the tension. I often get phone calls from friends who are having tense moments in their own cooking, and together we try to figure out what happened, how to fix it, or if there really is anything wrong. Think of the “tense moments” in these recipes as our phone call when you need them.

MANY RECIPES IN THIS BOOK involve the use of ingredients that you can also make from this book, for example, [Buttermilk Ranch Dressing](#) requires [Buttermilk](#), [Mayonnaise](#), and [Yogurt](#). In such recipes, I specify homemade *or* store-bought in the ingredient list. I am serious about this—don't feel that your dressing is any less homemade if you use store-bought buttermilk, mayonnaise, and yogurt. **Make what you like, and use what you have.**

IN MY KITCHEN

I am a gadget lover and I have no shame about it. I am not a minimalist in the kitchen. I do not make toast in my oven to avoid the need for a toaster, and the whirl of the stand mixer is music to me.

I know that counter space is precious, but if there is a machine or two that you use often, keep it on the counter and it will become infinitely more useful. So many times I'll talk to a friend about my deep love for my food processor, and she'll reply, "I have one of those, but I just don't use it." Inevitably that food processor is tucked behind all sorts of useless items, and as soon as I make the suggestion to let it see the light of day, it goes into regular use.

Certain gadgets will be more necessary for you than others, depending on the recipes that you make regularly and the skills that you feel a machine does better. Most of the recipes in this book can be made without a gadget if that is your preference. When I can, I will describe methods with gadgets and without, but just so you know what's in my kitchen, here is an overview of the tools that I use and suggest in this book.

electric gadgets

AIR POPPER • As surprising as it may be, I think this is the gadget that I have turned people on to the most. Air poppers are easy to find, usually under twenty bucks, and have not improved at all since the 1970s. I love this machine with such ferocity because it makes great popcorn (without oil!) in three minutes. Whenever there is whining and nothing to eat in the house, the popcorn popper comes off the shelf and saves the day.

BLENDER • I use my upright blender for smoothies, milkshakes, and the occasional salad dressing or sauce. I also have an infinitely useful immersion blender—a blender on a stick that I can put right into the pot. I use the immersion blender primarily for blended soups or large batches of tomato sauce or applesauce so that I don't have to transfer batches of soup or sauce from the pot to the blender.

DEHYDRATOR • This is necessary for making fruit rollups and jerkies and some creative snack bars, but it can also be used to dehydrate fruits, berries, herbs, and vegetables. Dehydrators take up a fair amount of space, but they are inexpensive and widen your options for preserving. Some ovens have a dehydrator setting and can go low enough to do the job, and for many foods the sun on a hot rock is a fitting backup.

FOOD PROCESSOR • Cuisinart makes the classic food processor, and I use mine almost every day. The food processor is useful for bread doughs and pie crusts, but where it

really shines is as a chopper and grater. The basic blade will chop your nuts and make your salsa, and if you ever have to make carrot cake for 100, the grating disc will take seconds instead of an hour on a box grater. The Cuisinart comes in several sizes, and I have found that the 11-cup is a good size for a family of four.

STAND MIXER • I have a red KitchenAid mixer and I love it like a third child. It's a workhorse that will do whatever I need it to, and I'd say that if you have to have one appliance and you bake, this should be it. There are three basic mixing attachments that come with the mixer: the paddle (looks like a triangle), the wire whip (looks like a whisk), and the dough hook (looks like a hook). I use all three of these attachments, and I will specify which one to use in each recipe.

YOGURT MAKER • I use a Euro Cuisine yogurt maker. It comes with seven little glass cups that fit perfectly into packed lunches. There are many other yogurt makers out there, and I cannot speak to those I have not used, but I can say that mine has been long lasting and cultures the yogurt in glass, which I find to be pleasing for both health and aesthetic reasons.

non-electric gadgets

FOOD MILL • This is useful for straining skins and seeds out of sauces. The same work can be done by pressing a seedy or skin-filled jam or apple or tomato sauce through a fine-meshed sieve, but the food mill will do it faster, with less effort, and just as quietly. It also does double duty as a baby-food maker, if that is where you are in your life.

MANDOLINE • This will slice your potatoes into perfectly sized chips if you are not so talented with a knife. The slicing blade of a food processor will do similar work, but a mandoline is inexpensive, folds up nicely, and will give you thin and even slices of most fruits and vegetables.

PASTA ROLLER • This fits on the counter with an attached vice to hold the machine steady while you crank the pasta. A pasta roller is such fun to use, and if you have one, you will probably find yourself making fresh pasta more than you ever thought you would. A pasta roller is possible to work with two hands, but much easier with four, so this is a task for which I recruit Joey or the girls.

TORTILLA PRESS • It is impossible for me to get corn tortillas to the thickness that I desire with a rolling pin. A tortilla press solves this problem and saves me tears. If you are lucky enough to live near a Latin grocer, you can usually find a tortilla press for about ten dollars. If you fancy yourself a tortilla maker, I suggest that you make the investment.