

It's a Biscuit! It's a Power Bar!

No, it's *Super Natural Cooking* BY MOLLY TEMPLETON

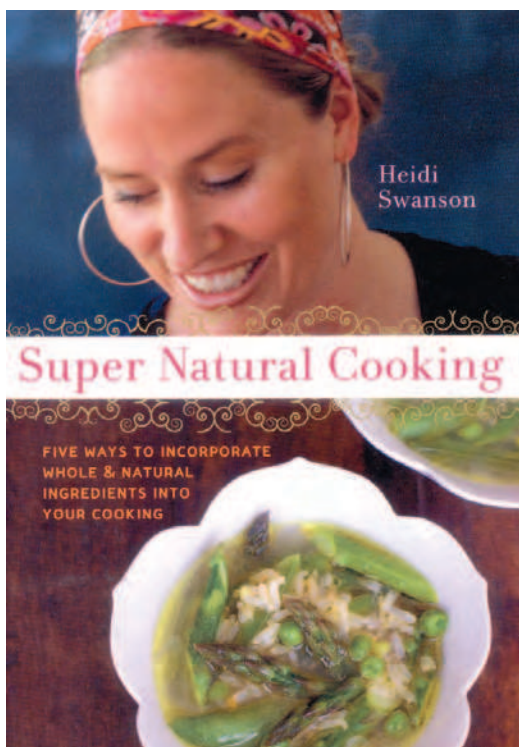
SUPER NATURAL COOKING by Heidi Swanson. Celestial Arts, 2007. Paperback, \$20.

Food porn. It's a goofy term, but it's one highly applicable to the new cookbook from writer, photographer and blogger Heidi Swanson, who runs www.101cookbooks.com, a recipe and food blog that gets 500,000-plus hits per month. Her new book, *Super Natural Cooking*, is a gorgeous treatise/recipe collection designed to help readers expand their use of natural and whole ingredients. The jacketed paperback's thick, textured pages give extra life to Swanson's bright, enticing photographs, which show beautiful food that's not so perfect that it looks uncookable. I'd want to lick the pages, but the matte images stop me just short of the paper, suggesting that perhaps I cook the dishes instead.

Swanson's recipes are easy to follow and many involve a simple ingredient list and basic kitchen tools — though since her focus is on minimally processed foods, she's going to tell you to get natural, organic cane sugar, brown rice, amaranth flour and other slightly off-the-beaten-path items. Some ingredients may be more difficult to find (and Swanson does offer sources at the book's end), but with Eugene's wide array of natural stores, many of her suggested ingredients await, especially in the bulk foods aisles.

Each chapter begins with an introduction to the central ingredients and ideas highlighted in the section's recipes: basic whole foods pantry items, "superfoods," cooking by color, using a variety of flours and grains and trying natural sweeteners. Swanson doesn't just want you to use whole and natural ingredients but to know what their benefits are, where to find them, how to select them. Her tone is enthusiastic and knowledgeable but not evangelistic or bossy. She's not telling you *what* to do; she's telling you *how* you can eat better, and pretty easily at that. With flours, she suggests blending less common flours (barley, mesquite) with ordinary flour until you get the hang of the various grain and non-grain flour options. A delicious sushi bowl recipe includes a technique for cooking tofu to perfection; the

secret is simply to use a dry nonstick or well-seasoned pan. Dessert recipes include trans-fat-free thin mint cookies, coconut panna cotta and raspberry curd swirl cake — but I'm getting ahead of the meal here. Try the creamy wild rice soup with sweet potato croutons, a different sort of curry that's thick with chewy, filling grains of wild rice. The spring minestrone (see recipe, page 17) is a bowl of soup so green it nearly



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glows; giant crusty and creamy white beans with greens is next on my to-make list. At the book's end, Swanson includes a simply presented list of basic recipes, from clarified butter to bright red tomato sauce, that act as building blocks for her more complicated taste treats.

It's not often that a cookbook is so beautifully designed and engrossingly written that you can pick it up and read it cover to cover. But *Super Natural Cooking* hits a perfect balance of recipe and information, introduction and instruction, design and function — meaning that, apart from the ingredient lists for a few recipes, that's pretty much what I did with this one.

MUCH LIKE THE UNICORN,



IT IS ALSO DELICIOUS.

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