

Home Is WHERE THE Food Is

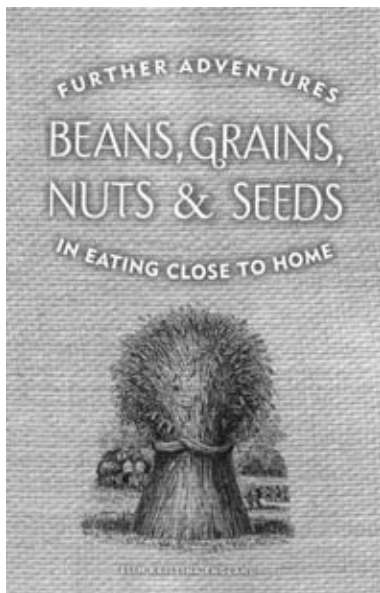
Local beans and grains feed you all year round BY VANESSA SALVIA

Eating locally year-round can be intimidating, even to people who are adventurous cooks. Though we have an abundance of farms and produce here in the Northwest, sometimes it can be hard to know what to eat in February when the potatoes have run out. Author Elin England is trying to make that easier. Her first book, *Eating Close to Home*, is a seasonal guide to what's available in the Pacific Northwest and what to do with it. Her newest book, *Further Adventures in Eating Close to Home*, covers beans, grains, nuts and seeds.

"The first book I started writing in 2004," England recalls. "It was back when people were just starting to become interested in local eating and they hadn't even coined the phrase 'locavore' yet." At that time, the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition was studying if it would be possible for our region to feed itself with only local food, and England's husband, Don Schneider, was helping with that research. "The answer was yes, we could feed ourselves year-round, but people would have to give up cooking zucchini 12 months of the year," she says. "I said somebody would have to write a cookbook and Don said, 'Yeah, somebody should!'"

England took on the cookbook project as a personal challenge, and she envisioned it as a gift to the community. Many local people contributed their personal recipes, and a portion of the proceeds of each book support the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition, which facilitates and supports the development of a secure and sustainable food system in Lane County.

A few years ago, WFFC received a rural business enterprise grant from the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The grant was to promote farms that were growing beans and grains. WFFC executive director Lynn Fessenden says that in 2010 she and her staff hosted a farmers market booth where they sold products from area farms that were experimenting with growing beans, grains, nuts and seeds.



"We were constantly being asked for recipes," Fessenden says. "The farmers were waking up the community that these products were here." Fessenden says there are four local farms that are growing large amounts of beans and grains and several smaller farms that are experimenting with heirloom beans and grains for flours.

England realized that farmers were growing these products that consumers could store all year round and wanted to help create a market for them. "Farmers are growing them but we need to have people buying them," England says. "I was interested in writing the second book because that was the gap. It wasn't part of the conversation yet, but in the interim since the last book a lot of the grass growers were finding that people didn't want to plant lawns quite so much so they experimented with growing different things."

Further Adventures provides 133 simple, family-friendly recipes. She also packs in contact information for farms and regional suppliers. Within each topic England includes appetizers, main dishes, salads and soups and, in the case of the grains chapter, breakfast dishes. Her son, Kory, and her husband

have been the prime taste testers for these dishes. "Kory has probably eaten more beans and grains this year than any teenager in America!" England jokes. "They've been good sports about it."

That's not hard to imagine. England began learning to speak Italian during the development of this book, so many traditional Italian recipes made their way in. Recipes such as "Ceci Fritta" (fried garbanzo bean fritters), or "Polenta Pasticciata Di Mama Elin" ("Baked Polenta in the Style of Mama Elin") are not only easy but also delicious. Because heirloom beans and grains are eaten the world over, many of her recipes have an international flavor. A crab and kale filling for crepes is delicious during crab season, while a lemony garbanzo bean soup can be enjoyed year-round.

The impetus behind England's book was to not only encourage people to experiment but also to support the farmers. Sometimes, the weather makes these ventures difficult. "There will be good years and bad years," England explains. "This past year was difficult for the dry beans but there was a lot of grains. In the book's introduction I tried to communicate that it's really important to cultivate our farmers so that they can cultivate our food. You have to take the long view."

If you can't find the dry beans you want this year, try something else, she says. Many of the heirloom beans are adaptable and interchangeable. "And the grains are the same way," England says. "If you don't happen to like barley then substitute wheat berries. If you like regular golden barley then try the black barley too."

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