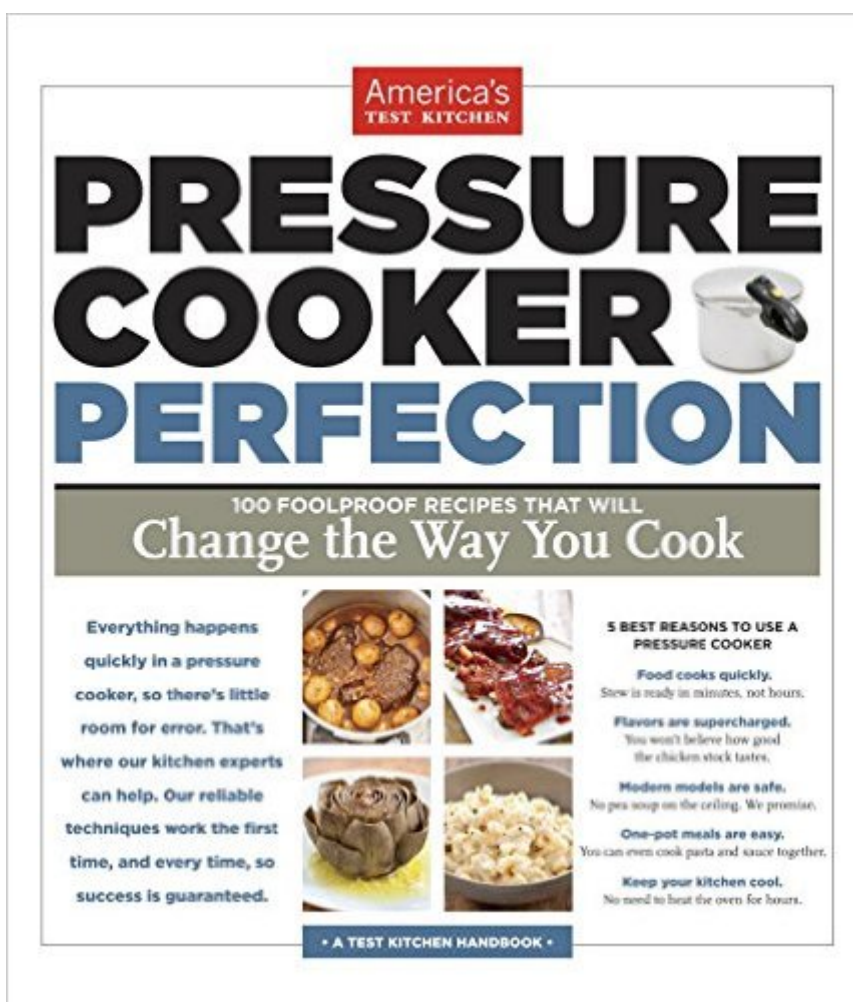


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# Pressure Cooker Perfection



## Synopsis

100 foolproof pressure-cooker recipes that will change the way you cook. In *Pressure Cooker Perfection*, the first volume in our new test kitchen handbook series, the editors at America's Test Kitchen demystify an appliance that to many home cooks remains intimidating -- but shouldn't. Modern pressure cookers are safer, quieter, more reliable, and more user-friendly than old-fashioned jiggle-top models. And they can prepare a wide range of foods -- everything from barbecue to risotto -- in record time. Cooking under pressure results in better-tasting dishes because every drop of flavor is trapped in the sealed pot. This fact, combined with the shorter cooking time, means that your dishes will be supercharged with flavor. And cooking under pressure is versatile. While they're ideal for roasts and stews, pressure cookers can also turn out perfectly tender beans, grains, and legumes in short order. If ever there was a cooking method that could benefit from the obsessive trial and error that our test kitchen is known for, this is it. When cooking time is compressed, every minute matters, and when flavors are amplified, even a small change becomes significant. We ran hundreds of tests in fifteen pressure cookers to find out what works and what doesn't, and we deliver the foolproof, guaranteed-successful recipes in *Pressure Cooker Perfection*. With this foolproof guide to cooking under pressure, every home cook will be guaranteed success.

## Book Information

Paperback: 168 pages

Publisher: America's Test Kitchen (March 15, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1936493411

ISBN-13: 978-1936493418

Product Dimensions: 8 x 0.6 x 8.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (616 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #4,309 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in [Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Kitchen Appliances > Pressure Cookers](#)

## Customer Reviews

I was very excited to receive this book, as I've had some wonderful results from recipes produced by America's Test Kitchen. I pay close attention to their equipment reviews. The descriptions of methods and cookers is worth reading. Today, I made two recipes from the cookbook and was

disappointed - to put it mildly - with the results of both. I made a warm potato salad, following the recipe as closely as I could. The potatoes were mushy and way overcooked. I attempted to make the lovely top sirloin roast on page 100, choosing the meat with the help of 3 butchers at a store that actually has butchers cutting the meat. I followed the instructions precisely. The sauce was very tasty, but the meat was overcooked and dry as cardboard! The recipe predicted that the internal temperature of the meat after cooking would be around 105 degrees; my ruined roast was almost 200 degrees. I have been using pressure cookers since I was married over 40 years ago, and own and use four pressure cookers several times a week. In addition, I used to demonstrate several different brands of pressure cookers in retail stores including Macy's and Williams-Sonoma. After choking down the cardboard for dinner tonight, I consulted some of the many other pressure cooker books I've collected over the years. To cook chicken parts, Roy DeGroot, Lorna Sass, and the booklet that came with my Kuhn-Rikon cooker all say to use high pressure for around 9 minutes. The "Perfection" book's time under high pressure for thighs is 20 minutes. I usually cook chicken breasts for 5 minutes under high pressure, but this book instructs cooking braised chicken breasts for 15 minutes! I am not going any farther with this book, because I can't afford to waste any more food.

I thought America's Test kitchen was churning out fail proof recipes. I thought they were trying out all the different options in appliances and ingredients to tell us which ones were the best. In the past I thought they were doing a bang up job! Then comes along Pressure Cooker Perfection. A cookbook that sound like it is going to be right up my alley since I grew up with marvellous food coming from pressure cookers and have a firm belief in the ability of Pressure cooking to save energy, save time and produce terrific food. The first hint that things might not be quite right was a quick flip through the book and all the many pictures of meat : chicken, roasts, stews, Turkey, etc. There is woefully little devoted to anything besides meat and potatoes - although there is a tempting looking recipe for beets and another for artichokes. There are absolutely no recipes for desserts - puddings, flans, etc perhaps because there is not a single recipe that mentions using a steamer basket or a trivet. The second oddity was the fact that the book ranked the Fagor cooker (I own one) as a top buy and a Kuhn rikon as a 'recommended with reservations'! Without going into a review of pressure cookers, I would recommend that you read the reviews for both brands on before taking the plunge and buying a cheaper but more frustrating appliance. I've learned how to handle my Fagor but, compared to the pressure cookers that I grew up with, it is a second class appliance. However, I took my hissing, spitting Fagor and a whole organic chicken and set out to try

the recipe for the whole chicken in rosemary and garlic. the cook time seemed a bit long but I figured I would trust the books - tested by America's test Kitchen after all. Twenty five minutes later I had an over cooked, falling off the bone chicken that was good for not much more than shredding. Oh well, there's always a bum recipe or two in every cook book. so i decided to try out the Classic Pot roast with potatoes. This recipe - for a 3 to 4 lb roast - called for 90 minutes under high pressure. Seriously?? You could reduce a beef bone to jelly in 90 minutes under high pressure!! I cut down the time to 50 minutes (based on my older recipes) and the roast was done perfectly. The flavor was boring. . . sorry America's Test Kitchen, and a waste of a perfectly good roast. So, this is not a pressure cooking book that I would recommend. The cooking times seem to be off. The variety of recipes is limited and I question the book's recommendations of the best cookers. Pressure cooking is a marvellous way to cook. If you are interested in it there are many other better books out there for you to explore.

**SUMMARY** - This book:- omits whole categories of food that highlight the benefits of pressure cooking;- gets operating instructions wrong, resulting in many overlong timings & overcooked food [ETA];- shows lack of breadth in range of cooking technique; and- incompletely surveys available models in the buying guide. Fortunately, a much better beginner thru advanced book is *Hip Pressure Cooking: Fast, Fresh, and Flavorful* -- with much more accurate and informative information, and a wider variety of recipes (over 240) and techniques, *Hip Pressure Cooking* is the one to get. Pressure cooking is a great technique for maximizing flavor & simplifying cooking, and the visibility of ATK will make this book be many people's first introduction to pressure cooking. However in spite of their hand-holding instructions, I cannot recommend this book as a first pressure cooker book (see the *HipPressureCooking* website "Beginner Basics" instead). The individual recipes are well-presented (except for bad timings, below) though available elsewhere, but in terms of covering pressure cooking techniques and ideas, the book gets some things wrong, and the collection is fairly narrow and incomplete. As a fan of the ATK approach, I was not expecting this range of problems. **DETAILS:FOOD CATEGORIES:** I expected a comprehensive treatment of all things pressure cooking, given the title. Instead this is mostly a collection of braised & moist-cooked meat recipes. Out of the 64 recipes (& variations), only 17 are vegetarian (mostly starch), rather than the variety found in any of several more comprehensive pressure cooker recipe books (e.g. by Laura Pazzaglia, Victoria Wise, Lorna Sass, or Jill Nussinow, and others). The vegetable coverage is especially weak, with most vegetables out there simply missing. The timing chart on p. 20 only lists 15 vegetables, 4 of which are potatoes. (Astonishing that a food editor would not see the problem

with this.) There are actually a lot of great things you can do with vegetables in the pressure cooker (for example, Modernist Caramelized Carrot Soup, on the web), but you won't find out about them here. There are other categories of foods that benefit from pressure cooking. In this book there are no desserts, no breads. No fruits or nuts. No eggs. No condiments, jams, or preserves. What about baby foods, or the easiest & safest ever dulce de leche? Not here. And they are missing out on clever techniques & accessories, such as utilizing different cooking zones, pressure steaming, pot-in-pot cooking, or helper handles to lift out pots, etc. (Look at the HipPressureCooking site for examples).

**OVERLONG TIMINGS:** A major problem is that many of the cook times they give are way too long. What I at first chalked up to individual variation in ingredients, seems instead to be a systematic problem, due to misunderstanding basic operating instructions. See the DadCooksDinner review of this book (April 9, 2013) for an explanation of how they misread the pressure indicator on a manual pressure cooker, thus producing longer time recommendations than necessary. [It seems like they have the same problem with electric pressure cookers, see "A Technical Oddity" below.] For their recipes, it is better to get the timing estimates from any of the other great pressure cooker books out there, or the very comprehensive HipPressureCooking timing charts on the web. [ETA 4/23/2013]

**RECIPE TECHNIQUES:** Also, they don't seem to get pressure cooking "style". For example, a few recipes, like chicken curry, use **\*\*canned\*\*** chickpeas (!). A few minutes in the PC is all it takes to convert dried chickpeas to cooked, and they taste much better than canned. That would have been a better and more instructive recipe (and they could have added a note about substituting canned beans if desired). Some bean recipes are written for dried, but why not all of them? Or [ETA 4/23/13], for some recipes (e.g. short ribs), they say if they are not cooked enough, to simmer longer until done. Real PC cooks will just put the top back on and bring it back up to pressure for a bit longer.

**ATK** writes as though they are the first people to ever think of things. For example, for artichokes they say "... the nearly 45-minute cooking time plus prep can make them a real turn off .... We suspected the pressure cooker could make a big difference here." Duh, quick artichoke cooking has been known for ages and is one of the no-brainer reasons for getting a pressure cooker (more flavorful broths & no-stir risotto are a few of many other reasons). It is so much more interesting when the provenance of an idea is given instead.

**BUYING GUIDE:** Their product reviews have very poor coverage of models which are actually out there, and exclude some of the best examples. They really don't "get" electric pressure cookers. The recipes ignore the fact that different models cook at different PSI and hence different temperatures, which will affect cooking time. For example, some start at 15psi and then cook at 11psi (e.g. Nesco PC6-25P), others cook at only 9psi (e.g. Cuisinart) -- different settings for "High" will result in different cooking

times, but none of the recipes address that. They ignore the convenience factor of electric PCs, that you just set it and walk away, no monitoring and fiddling with temperature once pressure is reached, and automatic timing. And, they didn't look at the different features that can make a model worth choosing. Some have a browning setting and some don't. For example, Instant Pot supposedly automatically calculates timing based on food type and quantity (if I understand it right, that will be my next purchase) and has a stainless steel insert (rather than "non-stick"). The Emson also works as an indoor smoker. Etc. And they completely ignore the fact that most of them also work as slow cookers, rice cookers, or vege steamers, etc., so can save space (and money) by replacing many appliances with one.[By the way, if you don't like the "non-stick" insert that came with your 6qt electric PC, you can replace it with an aftermarket stainless steel one which fits many models (including my Nesco PC6-25P),<sup>^</sup> 6-quart Pressure Cooker 18/10 Stainless Steel Cooking Pot. ETA 4/25/13]

**THE BINDING** doesn't want to stay open, it is even hard to open the book past 90 degrees, rendering the book hard to use.

**THE GOOD:** Some of the intro material is useful, including the reasons for owning a pressure cooker on page 4, though I would put improved flavor as reason #1. (See for example Dave Arnold's Cooking Issues tests of broths cooked at different pressures, and the role of the Maillard reaction in flavor development at higher pressure; or [ETA 4/24/13] DadCooksDinner's Irish Mashed Potato test, to see how a pressure cooker wins.) People new to pressure cooking will appreciate this intro section (though this info is nothing new and available elsewhere). The recipes themselves aren't that original and similar ones can be found elsewhere, but newbies will like the hand-holding that comes with most of the recipe descriptions, though they could be quite disappointed with some of the timing guidelines. For the recipes I have tried, I find the flavor not quite complex enough, which is my usual experience with ATK, ymmv; e.g. the pomegranate braised short ribs could have used some added spice and less sugar. There are some clever recipes here (e.g. one-pot pastas, no-stir risotto), but I've already got similar recipes in my other pressure cooker books. Except for the narrow meat-based coverage, and glitches like using canned beans (above), the recipes themselves look fine, as long as you consult other sources about timing, such as the HipPressureCooking site. As far as meat recipes go, there is a nice variety of flavors and suggested variations, and steps are quite well-explained (otherwise my rating would have been lower). It would be helpful if there were a master recipe list on a single page somewhere in the book. But if you have to consult a different book to get more recipes and accurate timings, why buy this one?

**A TECHNICAL ODDITY:** They have convoluted instructions for electric pressure cookers, which shows yet more misunderstandings. They claim that electric pressure cookers will overcook unless you ignore the built-in timer and manually shorten the cook time; and most recipes

have space devoted to how to fuss with the steps if you are using an electric pressure cooker. There are two problems with this. First of all, if the times are too long, why not just use the built-in timer but set it for a shorter length of time, wouldn't that be much simpler? But the second problem is this: as with manual pressure cookers, they seem to misunderstand when cooking under pressure begins. After the steam stops coming out of the regulator, the pressure climb is just beginning, and reaching full pressure takes additional time; but they seem to think that timing should begin when the steaming stops. They say "There is a lag between the time the electric pots come up to pressure and when the timer starts..." (p.10, and in many individual recipes). Actually, that is exactly what the timer is \*supposed to do\*, start counting down only after FULL pressure is reached (which is a few minutes after the valve seals). Since the times in this book are too long, of course they need to be shortened for an electric pressure cooker (as they do for manual pressure cookers). Additionally, they assume that all electric pressure cookers are exactly the same, but actually not all electric pressure cookers have the same design (even though they look like they are all made in the same factory.) One model I tried, Emson, started the countdown the moment you turned on the heat (not good). The one I kept, Nesco, does seem to start counting down once full pressure is reached. And if Instant Pot automatically calculates cooking time based on type & quantity of food, why would you want to defeat that and do it manually? So ATKs command about ignoring the timer on an electric pressure cooker and doing it manually simply does not apply uniformly. [Rephrased this section 4/23/13][Updated 4/23/2013 to include corrections & improvements for clarity, plus tagged additions.]

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