

Recipe for a Queer Cookbook
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So you want to cook up a queer cookbook? Here's a recipe that you can customize to your tastes. Begin by assembling your ingredients.

Required ingredients:

- (1) An author or authors who self-identify as LGBTQ+, ideally in the cookbook itself.
- (2) A discussion of LGBTQ+ community, culture, or issues in the front matter, introduction, surrounding recipes, and/or in section headers.
- (3) Instructions for preparing food or drink (it is possible to have metaphorical recipes, yet most of the cookbook should centre on creating food or drink).

Additional ingredients that you can mix and match. Choose your *toppings* based on your aesthetics:

- (1) **Photographs of the dishes, authors, or other content related to the cookbook.**

You might want to go high gloss like *Drag Queen Brunch* (2020), *Antoni in the Kitchen* (2019), *Big Gay Ice Cream* (2015), Lagusta Yearwood's *Sweet and Salty* (2020), and *Tasty Pride: 75 Recipes and Stories from the Queer Food Community* (2020). You can keep production costs down by printing the photographs on uncoated book paper stock such as *Cookin' with Honey: What Literary Lesbians Eat* (1996) and Jenice R. Armstead's *Lesbians Have to Eat, Too!* (2011). You can combine both techniques and print only some of your

photos on glossy paper such as the Bloodroot Collective's *The Perennial Political Palate* (1993).

(2) Illustrations to accompany the dishes – expressive and campy cartoons are highly encouraged!

Whimsical illustrations such as the joyful fairies in *The Gay of Cooking* (1982), the “campy cartoon” line drawings of Lou Rand Hogan’s chef swimming in fruit salad by David Costain (1965, p. 30), David Shenton’s stylized cartoons of people cooking in *The Queer Cookbook* (1997), and the loose-lined portraits in *The Art of Gay Cooking: A Culinary Memoir* (2019) adorn many of the cookbooks.

(3) Erotic content and/or nudity.

The Lesbian Erotic Cookbook by Ffiona Morgan Genre (1998) has erotic and nude photographs, but many queer cookbooks that do not have naked photos still utilize sexual innuendo and word play.

(4) Purple ink.

The use of purple ink and a purple colour scheme is common in many queer cookbooks such as *Cooking with Pride* (1989), the Kitchen Fairy’s *The Gay of Cooking* (1982), and *The Lesbian Erotic Cookbook* (1998).

There are vegetarian, vegan, and meat versions of this recipe. Cookbooks written by and for lesbian and queer women are more likely to be vegan or vegetarian. There are queer cookbooks that address a wide variety of dietary needs, including gluten free, kosher, and more! There are cookbooks, such as *Out of Our Kitchen Closets: San*

Francisco Gay Jewish Cooking (1987) that address religious dietary needs. You can customize your cookbook to meet these requirements.

Instructions:

- (1) **Place the recipe in a story** like the authors of *Cookin' with Honey: What Literary Lesbians Eat* (1996) and *Lesbians Have to Eat, Too!* (2011). Or better yet – **write the whole recipe in a memoir format** like *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook* (1954) and *The Art of Gay Cooking: A Culinary Memoir* (2019).
- (2) **Reference other queer cookbooks within your own.** Make clear that you see your cookbook in relation with other queer cookbooks. In *The Butch Cook Book* (2008), the authors Lee Lynch, Nel Ward, and Sue Hardesty write explicitly about how they see their cookbook as a part of the butch lesbian community and part of a longer lineage. Isengardt models *The Art of Gay Cooking* (2019) on Toklas's cookbook. Skyler Blue's *The Gay Man's Cookbook* (2011) references Lou Rand Hogan's *The Gay Cookbook* (1965).
- (3) **Salt with camp and humour to taste.** Consider puns and sexual innuendos in recipe titles. The titles can be explicit such as the ones in *The Gay Man's Cookbook* (2011) or playful puns. In the Kitchen Fairy's *The Gay of Cooking* (1982), the word play begins in the table of contents. Each section has a whimsical title, and a translation "straight talk" is below it. For example, "A little starch will keep it stiff" is for "Pasta, Rice, and Potatoes." Titles should reflect your personal preferences. There are so many ways to be LGBTQIA+ and your cookbook should reflect your or your community's wide variety of experiences.

(4) Optional Step: make your cookbook a fundraiser for a LGBTQ+ organization or cause.

For example, *Cooking with Pride* (1989) is a queer community cookbook that fundraised for Pride and PFLAG committees.

Want to add the special sauce? Add more recipes from friends (Figure 18.1).

What is a queer cookbook? Is there a set recipe for what makes a cookbook queer? Is it that the author is queer? Or is there something inherently queer about the cookbook itself? What do Lou Rand Hogan's *The Gay Cookbook* of 1965, the Bloodroot Collective's *Political Palate* of 1980, the Cincinnati Lesbian Activist Bureau's 1983 cookbook *Whoever Said Dykes Can't Cook? The Lesbian Erotic Cookbook* by Fiona Morgan Genre (1998), and *Lesbians Have to Eat, Too!* by Jenice R. Armstead (2011) have in common? Does a cookbook published by a global media company and marketed as "queer," such as BuzzFeed's *Tasty Pride: 75 Recipes and Stories from the Queer Food Community* (2020) count as a queer cookbook? In the summer of 2021, I curated an exhibit on American and Canadian queer cookbooks and zines which sought to answer these questions. The physical exhibit was at McGill University from August 18 until December 20 and showcased 17 queer cookbooks from my personal collection, three publications on loan from Les Archives Gaies du Quebec, and three zines from Les Archives lesbiennes du Quebec. The digital exhibit lives on The Historical Cooking Project website and includes more cookbooks. I drew on the scholarship of Stephen Vider "'Oh Hell, May, Why Don't You People Have a Cookbook?': Camp Humor and Gay Domesticity" (2013), sociologist Stacey Williams's "A Feminist Guide to Cooking" (2014), historian Katharina Vester's *Taste of Power: Food and American Identities*

(2015), and social anthropologist Rachael Scicluna's *Home and Sexuality: The "Other" Side of the Kitchen* (2017) who explore lesbian and gay cookbooks.

This chapter includes a literal recipe for creating a queer cookbook based on the commonalities of 42 Canadian and American LGBTQ+ cookbooks published between 1954 and 2021. As the recipe demonstrates, there are some key features of queer cookbooks. Authorship, connection to the queer community, and the use of aesthetic choices to emphasize the cookbook's relationship to queer cultures are necessary. The use of humour, puns, sexual innuendo, erotic content is prevalent, but not required. Recipes from friends or other community members appear in community cookbooks and single-authored texts.

The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook (1954) and *The Gay Cookbook* by Chef Lou Rand Hogan (1966) set important precedents for what makes a cookbook "queer." Toklas's genre blending of memoir and recipe work has inspired numerous queer cookbook authors. Hogan's use of illustrations and playful tone (including numerous innuendos and puns) is echoed in later cookbooks. In these two cookbooks, we already see that the author's identity, the formatting of the cookbook, the relationship to community, the use of images, and the recipes are all part of what makes a cookbook queer. The later-published queer cookbooks build on this legacy and continuously reference the queer cookbooks that came before.

Queer cookbooks have changed in some significant ways since the mid-20th century. The production value has generally increased. There tend to be more glossy images.

Recipes tend to be written by authors under their actual names as more LGBTQIA+ people are out. This shift is noteworthy because Hogan was a pen name for Louis Randall, and in *Cooking with Pride*, Leatherella O. Parsons writes in the introduction that we are gaining ground daily, but the number of recipes which came unsigned or signed with an obvious alias, let us know how many, for one reason or another, are still in the closet. Let's hope this book gives us all a bit of courage (Parsons, 1989, p. 1). However, the legacies of humour, community sourced recipes, and queer authors endure.

While the cookbooks may include metaphorical recipes, to be a queer cookbook the book must include actual recipes for food and drink. The formatting can vary, and recipes range from opening a pack of kraft dinner mac and cheese, as joked about by the authors of *The Butch Cook Book* (2008), to multi-course meals. There can be drink-centred cookbooks such as *Queer Cocktails: 50 Cocktail Recipes Celebrating Gay Icons and Queer Culture* (2021) and tips for party planning in *The Queer Cookbook: A Fully Guided Tour to the Secrets of Success in the Homosexual Kitchen!* (1997). However, all these books are part of the cookbook genre.

A cookbook's author or authors must also self-identify as LGBTQIA+ for the cookbook to be queer. In *Cookin' with Honey: What Literary Lesbians Eat* (1996) and *Lesbians Have to Eat, Too!* (2011), the recipes' authors make clear that they identify as lesbians. While quoting his husband Filip Noterdaeme, Daniel Isengart reflected his cookbook *The Art of Gay Cooking: A Culinary Memoir* (2019), "You are gay, your approach to

cooking is gay, why bother trying to write a conventional cookbook?" (p. ii). For a cookbook to be queer, the authors must utilize their experiences as LGBTQ+ individuals to shape the cookbook that they create. However, if a cookbook's authors are queer, is their cookbook necessarily queer?

A recurring article is the yearly LGBTQ+ cookbook list of the year. Examples include BuzzFeed's *16 LGBTQ-Authored Cookbooks To Feast From During Pride Month* (Szewczyk, 2018), Tasty's: *18 LGBTQ-Penned Cookbooks To Cook From During Pride Month* (Szewczyk, 2019), Chowhound's *14 Must-Have Cookbooks by LGBTQ+ Cooks* (Paget, 2020), Food and Wine's *13 Cookbooks by LGBTQ+ Authors of Color to Buy Right Now* (Chapple, 2020), and Autostraddle's *7 Super Queer Cookbooks For Your Super Queer Kitchen!* (Charles, 2018). These lists share cookbooks by LGBTQ+ authors, yet the cookbooks are not always explicitly queer in their content; they do not make connections to other queer cookbooks; and the authors do not always connect their recipes or content with the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, while representation and authorship are important components for making a cookbook queer, they are not the only factor.

The third necessary requirement for being a queer cookbook is that the cookbook makes connections to LGBTQ+ community. Authors can make these connections by utilizing memoir and story to link their recipes to their experiences as LGBTQ+ individuals. Photographs, illustrations, and graphic design can emphasize the authors' queer aesthetics. Some authors discuss their cookbook's connection to LGBTQ+

organizations and may donate a percentage of the profits to queer causes. Other authors include recipes from the larger LGBTQIA+ community/communities. While that inclusion is beneficial in representing more queer perspectives in a single cookbook, this is not the same as a queer community cookbook.

As cookbook historian and antiquarian bookseller Don Lindgren writes in *UNXLD: American Cookbooks of Community and Place* (2018), community cookbooks tell stories of community and place. The recipes that they contain are “mementos of shared experience, of friendship” and they are “preserved records of collective effort in service to a cause” (2018, p. 5). While Lindgren primarily collects women’s community cookbooks, queer community cookbooks share the similar features of publication on a shoestring budget, recipes coming from local sources, created to generate revenue for a charitable cause, often spiral-bound (2018, p. 7). While the cookbooks by Toklas (1954), Scholder (1996), Isengart (2019), and Armstead (2011) bring recipes from friends, lovers, and community members, queer community cookbooks, such as *Cooking with Pride* (1989), compiled by Leatherella O. Parsons, show these roots more explicitly.

Cooking with Pride (1989) is a queer community cookbook that fundraised for the International Association of Lesbian and Gay Pride Coordinators (IAL/GPC), as well as the various Pride Committees and PFLAGs (founded in 197, the first and largest organization in the United States uniting parents, families, and allies with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) who submitted recipes. The

cookbook is a compilation of nearly 300 recipes representing entries from 30 cities in 20 states or provinces, in three countries on two continents. It is spiral-bound and printed in black, white, and purple. The formatting of the cookbook emphasizes the importance of every member of the community by reminding readers about shared pride conference experiences. The appetizer section includes a story about the first Pride Coordinators Conference in Boston in 1982. The beverage section begins with a story about the pride conference in St Louis. As a community cookbook, *Cooking with Pride* declares that this cookbook exists to build and serve the queer community.

The three features of queer cookbooks: authorship, connection to the queer community, and being an actual cookbook with recipes, are required. Within these parameters, the cookbooks range widely in production value, costs, aesthetics, and publishing. As LGBTQ+ people have gained more acceptance; larger publishers and digital media companies such as Clarkson Potter of Penguin Random House and Tasty of BuzzFeed have partnered to publish cookbooks targeted towards queer audiences. The publication of *Tasty Pride* (2020) raises questions for the future of queer cookbooks. Does *Tasty Pride* still count as a queer cookbook? The editor Jesse Szewczyk identifies as queer. The collectively sourced recipes come from 75 queer cooks and celebrities. A story accompanies each recipe and authors make the connections between their identities and the dish they have prepared. The introduction explains that the publisher donated US\$50,000 to GLAAD, an organization that works towards LGBTQ acceptance. Does BuzzFeed's involvement in the cookbook's publication undermine the community aspect of the cookbook? Did BuzzFeed work to publish the cookbook

because the company actually cares about queer representation? Was the decision to publish this text just to capitalize on the LGBTQIA+ market? Or does a major media company wanting to publish a pride cookbook indicate mainstream acceptance and evolving cultural views of the LGBTQ+ community?

Queer cookbooks continue to have value. Inside the cover of *Tasty Pride*, large font declares: To all the queer cooks who have longed to see themselves represented in mainstream food media. We are in every restaurant, test kitchen, hotel, catering company, studio, and publication. This book and the stories within it prove that there is a seat at the table for all of us. Later in the introduction, Szewczyk discusses wishing that he had seen himself represented in kitchens and cookbooks. He writes that the impetus of editing this cookbook was “to pass on the gift of finding joy in each other’s successes” (2020, p. 12). Queer cookbooks offer more than representation. They serve to preserve and share LGBTQ+ cultures and socializing. That sounds like a recipe for success!

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