

I like cookbooks. On the bookshelves here are quite a few that I have bought over the years, but I also usually have one or two in my library book bag. And, I really do use them, as well.

On the shelves over our elevated oven, it is easy to see which cookbooks have been recently used—or, at least—read. They migrate, seemingly all by themselves, from the back shelf to the front.

Right now, if I look directly over the oven door, I see *Better Homes and Gardens New Cook Book*, an older edition; *The Best of Swedish Baking and Cooking*; *Gör din Egen Ost* (a Swedish title that translates to “Make Your Own Cheese”); a newer edition of the *Better Homes and Gardens* book; *Sju Sorters Kakor*, a Swedish baking book; *The Breakfast Book*; *Home Cheesemaking*; *The Fannie Farmer Baking Book*; *Great American Cookies*; and Paul Hollywood’s *100 Great Breads*.

When I bring a book from the back of the shelves to the front, I move one of the front group back. And, I do that quite regularly whenever I have a notion to bake or cook something from one of the other volumes.

It might seem strange to have two of the standard *Better Homes and Gardens* cookbooks next to each other. But, when the newer edition came out—and it is not new now, either—some of the recipes I used most had been eliminated. I suppose changes are made to reflect the cooking and baking habits of the present users. But, I couldn’t throw out the more recent edition either, as it had some new recipes that I use.

I suppose the proper action would be to copy down the old recipes I use and throw out the rest of the old book. But, that is too easy. Instead, I look here and there, in one edition or another, then think maybe that the recipe I want is in a completely different cook book.

When I don’t find it there, I look in the recipe file box, then the little book filled with handwritten recipes, and finally, I search through the loose recipes tucked here and there in that book. Not there? I bake something else.

There are, too, those “community cookbooks” that are fun to read, and occasionally, there is a good recipe to try. A lot of “old family heirloom” recipes, though, seem to use whipped topping instead of whipped cream, margarine instead of butter, and other purchased additives instead of plain ingredients. Still, a trip through one of these cookbooks will unearth some gems, too.

There is a “family cookbook” on our shelves, too. My cousin and her daughter compiled it before the one and only Erickson family reunion in 2006. They solicited recipes from descendants of all of the “aunts” in the family as well as directions for some dishes the present generations submitted. I use this collection often, sometimes for dishes my own mother made that I have no written recipe for. Because cooking and baking instructions were often passed around from one family member to another over the years, a treasured cake or cookie might be lost to one branch of the family and in the files of another.

Cooking and baking can be accomplished perfectly well without recipes, of course. Most of us prepare the same foods over and over again with once in a while a detour to some new taste or concept.

But, for those of us who like both to read and to cook, cookbooks can be

as fascinating as the latest best-selling thriller and as instructional as a textbook. And, handed down recipes, particularly ethnic ones, are also history that can provide insights into our families' past.