



Chicken and Pig Stories; Local Flavors

Keep Chickens!, Local Flavors and The Pig Who Sang to the Moon

Keep Chickens!

Raising chickens in the city or the suburbs is not my preference—for me or the chickens. I subscribe to the notion that chickens are best left in the country with room to scrabble and strut.

Barbara Kilarski, on the other hand, thinks fowl can do quite well—in fact, thrive—off the farm as evidenced in her book, *Keep Chickens! Tending Small Flocks in Cities, Suburbs, and Other Small Spaces*. From the heart Kilarski expounds on the advantages of keeping chickens: eggs, weeding, eliminating garden pests, turning soil and fertilization ... and companionship. “These ubiquitous yet taken-for-granted chickens have changed my life, and I love them for it,” the author says.

Love, passion, whatever it is, Kilarski makes a compelling and highly entertaining argument for keeping urban fowl. Admittedly, I was smitten.

The first chapter of *Keep Chickens!* delves into why Kilarski opted to keep city fowl in the first place. Her father was the son of a butcher, and her mother was raised on a farm in France. But despite her ag background she’s a self-defined “Total City Chick,” born and raised in Los Angeles. After moving to the suburbs of Portland, Ore., and tending to her very small garden there, chickens became a natural step in her progression toward self-reliance for sustenance. Plus, as she says, “fresh and organic = good.” The “good” being eggs, not meat. “... I don’t think I could eat a chicken that I’ve named and that has been following me around for years ...,” Kilarski says.

In subsequent chapters, Kilarski jumps into the how’s and why’s of keeping chickens—always mindful that her audience is not the rural farmer, but rather those with limited space. City codes, building a coop, breeds, climatic considerations, fowl history, et cetera, are all covered. There are also many fabulous illustrations, some fun—and campy—reprinted advertisements, along with a color photo gallery of good breeds for a backyard chicken flock. *Keep Chickens!* nicely mixes instruction with personal anecdotes.

Kilarski doesn’t change my opinion on keeping urban fowl, but I definitely had reason to pause and ponder the possibility... .

Local Flavors

Read the book, marked my favorite recipes, then stopped and reflected on the implausibility of it all: “How can I pick dishes from *Local Flavors*, *Cooking and Eating From America’s Farmers’ Markets*, and expect to find all the ingredients at my local produce stands? The quest to find only locally grown fare for specific recipes is too daunting.”

But then I read back on the selections found in *Local Flavors* by Deborah Madison and realized it’s not that difficult at all. Madison has done an excellent job at keeping the recipes very simple—only but a handful of her dishes call for abundant produce variations. And since *Local Flavors* is organized by seasonal availability, you’re not going to find a dish that mixes asparagus with winter squash, or one that combines peaches and oranges. “Rather than letting the parts of the meal dictate the order of recipes, botanical families and regional seasons themselves have been given that guiding role,” the author writes.

Some of my favorite dishes from *Local Flavors* include “Cinderella Pumpkin Soup Baked in the Pumpkin,” “Winter Squash Braised in Pear Cider,” and “Rhubarb with Berries and Candied Ginger”—come summer, I’m anticipating “A Big Tomato Sandwich” and “Cherry-Almond Loaf Cake.”

Local Flavors brings readers a fantastic selection of delicious recipes, and it strives to promote awareness of local ag. By purchasing food at a local farmer’s market, consumers are connecting with growers in their own community.

While some people might balk at the prices found at farmers’ markets, Madison responds, “When food is cheap, we tend to treat it carelessly and wastefully. But when it’s dear, when it costs what it’s actually worth, we tend to pay closer attention to it. In this sense, good food can sharply focus our world.” She recalls in her book an overheard quip from an Ohioan, “People will drive across town to shop at Saks, but they won’t go to the farmer’s market and pay a little more to eat well.”



The Pig Who Sang to the Moon

If a farm animal has a good life and that life ends in a painless death and the animal is used to feed people, is that wrong? Yes, says Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson in his book *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon, The Emotional World of Farm Animals*. His viewpoint is that farm animals have feelings and a consciousness, and he backs his perspective with scientific studies, along with his own experiences.

The book leans clearly toward a vegetarian lifestyle—no disguises. The author's intent is to stir emotions and cause discomfort. But he knows he can't convert the majority of his meat-eating readers, so he makes passionate arguments against traditional farm animal husbandry. The heart of the book is the author's conviction that animals thrive best if left to live according to their own nature, without the confines of cages or pens, and without human intervention on such matters as removing young from their mothers and unnatural diets. *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon* is less about persuading one to change his or her lifestyle, and more about changing the collective attitude: Rather than thinking of farm animals as creatures of instinct, respect them as sentient beings.

Regardless of your own personal views, there's enough substance in *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon* to make it worthwhile.