

FOOD | RECIPES

# Prairie cookbooks highlight regional specialties

BY AMY JO EHMAN  
FREELANCE WRITER

The potatoes are in cold storage, the sour cherries are frozen and the beef is at the butcher to be cut and wrapped. Another prairie harvest season is coming to a close.

It's the perfect time to sit down with a book that celebrates the local bounty and feeds a growing curiosity in prairie food from farm to fork.

"The interest is huge on the Prairies, even moreso, I find, than in Ontario," said C. J. Katz, Regina-based author of *Taste: Seasonal Dishes from a Prairie Table*.

"We're a whole lot more than wheat," said Katz, who admits she held that old stereotype before moving to Saskatchewan from Ontario 10 years ago with her husband and two sons.

Reluctant to relocate at first, she became captivated and shared her discoveries with readers of her online magazine *Savour Life*.

"I was seeing it through new eyes and I think that I helped some people who had been here a long time to see their province through different eyes as well," she said.

Katz relates a story about Saskatchewan senator Pamela Wallin, a former journalist and diplomat, who gave a ringing endorsement of her book. Yet, Wallin wanted to know why there was a picture of fiddleheads on the cover.

"She didn't realize we have fiddleheads here, but of course we do," said



Recipes using prairie fruit include cherry spareribs, plum pizza and apple soup. | AMY JO EHMAN PHOTO

Katz, who noted other surprises like wild culinary mushrooms, fresh water fisheries and prairie cherries.

"People are surprised to learn how many fruits are grown on the Prairies," said Getty Stewart of Winnipeg, author of *The Prairie Fruit Cookbook* released earlier this year.

The cookbook features 11 prairie fruits from apples to grapes, with information on picking, preserving and preparing creative recipes such

as plum pizza, Saskatoon berry salsa and apple soup.

"Our fruits are so versatile. They sometimes have more of that tart flavour (compared to B.C. fruit), but that's what makes our fruit so unique and so versatile," she said. "You can go savoury or you can go sweet. You're not stuck with just desserts."

Stewart grew up on a farm at Nesbitt, Man., where her family collected wild and orchard fruit. When she

started a family of her own in Winnipeg, she was struck by how much fruit grew in the city and how much of it went to waste.

Three years ago, she started a harvesting co-op called Fruit Share that allows volunteers to pick unharvested fruit and share it with homeowners and food charities.

This year, volunteers picked 9,000 pounds of fruit. Yet, she said many didn't know what to do with it.

"Unlike a lot of farm families who pass that tradition on, many of our volunteers didn't have that background. But they are really curious," said Stewart.

It joins a new crop of single-issue cookbooks, including the *Gravelbourg Mustard Cookbook*, which elevates mustard from its niche as only a condiment, and *Cooking with Cherries From the Prairies*, a collection of recipes and folklore compiled by the University of Saskatchewan's fruit program, where these hardy prairie cherries were developed through selective cross-breeding.

"Most people think cherry pie and that's it, but there's so much more you can do with these cherries," said Loretta Bors, one of the *Cherries* authors.

She said some of the keenest customers are producers who are marketing locally-grown fruit and hope to encourage customers to think outside the pie. It includes recipes such as cherry spareribs, cherry biryani and Hungarian sour cherry soup.

Even the Company's Coming cookbook empire joined the local food bandwagon this year by launching the *Canada Cooks Series*, including the *The Canadian Prairie Cookbook* featuring prairie ingredients for busy home cooks, a sign of the growing interest in tapping the local foodshed.

"The term foodshed refers to any specific geographic region and the food thereof, from the farmer who produced it though the distribution system to the consumer's plate," said Dee Hobsbawn-Smith, author of *Foodshed: An Edible Alberta Alphabet*.

"In my mind, the producers are the bedrock of it."

From asparagus to zizania (the genus of wild rice), *Foodshed* covers the ground of regional food and the farmers who produce it, focusing on being a small, independent farmer selling directly to customers.

A professional chef, Hobsbawn-Smith began sourcing local food and collecting stories when she had her own restaurant in Calgary and later as the food columnist in the *Calgary Herald*. Already the author of three cookbooks, she decided this book would have few recipes and focus on the farmers instead.

"These farmers do it not for the money, but because they believe in it. They do it for the rural lifestyle," she said. "A lot of them have second jobs to underwrite the fact that they are raising our food, which I think is a terrible reflection on the importance of food and lack thereof in our culture."



**ENGINEERED TO WORK TOGETHER.**

Book Roundup WeatherMAX® herbicide with your Genuity® Roundup Ready® canola this fall.

[www.roundup.ca](http://www.roundup.ca) [www.genuitycanola.ca](http://www.genuitycanola.ca)