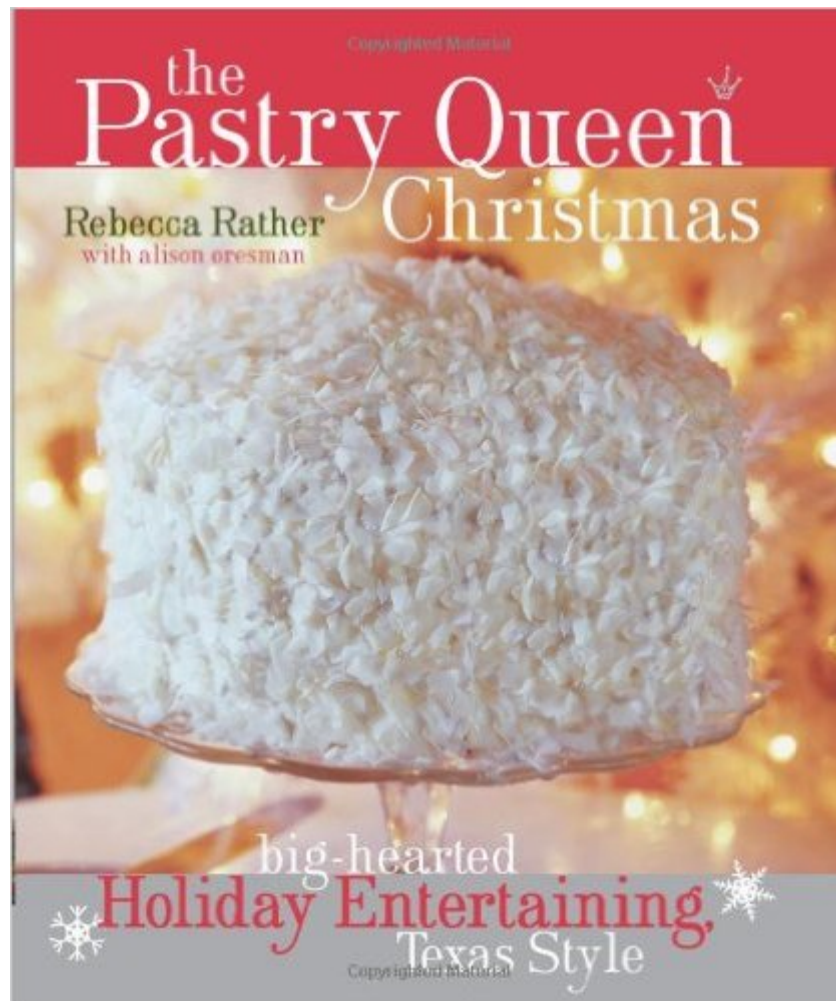


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The Pastry Queen Christmas: Big-hearted Holiday Entertaining, Texas Style



Synopsis

It's Christmastime at the Best Little Bakery in Texas. The annual Fredericksburg Christmas parade marks the beginning of the Texas Hill Country's holiday season, which means the Pastry Queen is kicking into high gear at her Rather Sweet Bakery and Café. As party invitations pile up in the mailbox, Rebecca Rather is up to her elbows in sticky meringue, creamy chocolate, and a sleigh full of savory treats to meet the entertaining needs of her neighbors. In *The Pastry Queen Christmas*, Rebecca shares nearly 100 traditional recipes reflecting her made-with-love-from-scratch philosophy and the tastes of small-town Texas. Show-off desserts such as Chocolate Cookie Crusted Eggnog Cheesecake, Sticky Toffee Pudding with Brandy Butterscotch Sauce, and Warm Pear Ginger Upside-Down Cake with Amaretto Whipped Cream are the perfect toppers to a family-style feast of Texas Spice-Rubbed Roast Pork, Baked Apple Pear Chutney, Brown Sugar Bacon, and No-Peeking Popovers. Still hungry the next morning? No problem—this country girl does an impressive breakfast, too: Bite-Sized Sticky Buns, Sweet Potato Scones, Cast-Iron Skillet Potatoes, and Mexican Ranch Chilaquiles ought to fill you up. And if you're still looking for excuses to entertain this season, you'll find ooey-gooey baked goods wrapped up as gifts, homemade craft and décor ideas to make your home sparkle, and holiday-worthy menus guaranteed to make your gathering a Texas-sized success. Tree-trimming, cookie decorating, and Santas running down Main Street . . . Christmastime is here.

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Customer Reviews

The Pastry Queen Christmas unabashedly offers plenty of delicious, fattening holiday fare, both traditional and unusual, and every single recipe we tried was fabulous. My only reservation, in fact, was with respect to the green bean bundles--green beans marinated in butter and spices, then wrapped in bacon and baked. The seasonings were perfect, but it seemed like the recipe would have been even better with maybe half the butter. But then I've been trying to eat more healthily lately, so perhaps I've just lost my taste for the more fatty dishes! And at any rate, now that I know it's too buttery for me, it would be easy to adjust the recipe. The Mexican camp bread had us eating it for breakfast, lunch and dinner, in just about every way we could think of. The cranberry-walnut scones had a ton of flavor, and perfectly balanced the tartness of the cranberries with a bit of sweetness. An apple pear chutney was the perfect foil to fattier, richer Thanksgiving fare, and a pear salad with pomegranate and chevre was positively to-die-for! Whether you're looking for homey fare such as savory rice balls in tomato sauce or fancy holiday specials like red velvet cupcakes with mascarpone cream cheese icing, you'll find recipes in here certain to impress friends and family alike. More importantly, they taste wonderful! The book is a large hardcover that lies flat easily, and it includes plenty of lovely photographs. The recipes are laid out very clearly, and often include personal notes from the author. This book would make a lovely source of recipes for your own holiday feast, or the perfect holiday gift for your favorite cook.

An attractive book, but as I have experienced with other Rebecca Rather books, the instructions are incomplete. The Caramel Meringue Pie looked beautiful and intriguing and was the impetus for my purchase of the book. I am an experienced pie baker, unafraid to tackle any recipe. So I dug in with much anticipation. A dozen eggs and 6 cups of sugar later, I am throwing away a runny mess. The instructions simply said to heat the milk and egg yolk mixture (without letting it boil) and pour it into the caramelized sugar. The obvious question is, to what temperature should the milk mixture be heated? It doesn't say. So when the sugar was caramelized and the milk was hot (without boiling!!), I poured them together as instructed. At this point, the instruction didn't say whether to keep the mixture on the heat while adding butter and marshmallows or to turn it off. I kept turning it on and off to get the marshmallows to melt. Of course, what should have been stated is that for the custard to set, the egg yolks have to reach at least 160 degrees (something I later learned by researching Rose Levy's information). If the eggs don't reach that temperature, the filling won't set. I can now vouch for that! Also, the timing in many of Ms. Rather's recipes are off. In this same recipe, it said it would take about 20-25 minutes to caramelize the sugar. If you heat it that long, you will have black sugar. It takes about half that time. Also, the recipe says bake the crust 10 minutes. This has to be a

typo. No pie crust could possibly bake (particularly one lined with parchment and filled with pie weights) in 10 minutes. I baked it 30, then removed the weights and baked another 12 until it was golden. Also, the recipe says use half the pie crust dough (so why not give a recipe for half the amount so you aren't stuck with pie crust you may not use). Anyway, if you use a true 10" deep dish, you'll need about 2/3 of the dough. Finally, it simply says cool the filling and pour into the crust. Do you cool it completely until it's nearly set (which I would still be waiting for) or does it just have to cool down reasonably? Perhaps if my filling were going to set, it may have been obvious. A clearer description in the recipe would have been very helpful. Another reviewer had said this recipe is too sweet. I agree. Even if it had set, a person would not be able to finish a piece of it. The meringue is too much (3 cups of sugar and piled too high), the filling is very sweet and the crust is even sweet. I am wondering if this really is Aunt Mary's recipe. Perhaps Aunt Mary kept secrets of her own. I did make the bacon-wrapped green beans. They were very good. My family really enjoyed them. I also made the apple-pear chutney. Again, some details would be helpful. For example, I would use bosc pears. They are a bit firmer and probably wouldn't get as mushy as the chutney did with the pears I used. Also, it was pretty sweet, so the next time I will cut down on the sugars. The recipe said if you put the chutney in apples, bake them for 30-45 minutes. I did put it in apples, but you don't want to leave them that long in the oven. About 25 minutes tops. I intend to try more of the recipes. If you do as well, be prepared to try them a couple of times until you can figure out the missing information.

I'd read about *The Pastry Queen: Royally Good Recipes from the Texas Hill Country's Rather Sweet Bakery & Cafe* in *MORE Magazine*, and had to have the cookbook. It arrived shortly before my daughter's wedding, and once I went through it, the reception menu was scrapped and substituted with Rather's recipes. That cookbook has become a favorite; I reviewed it here on , describing it as the first thing I'd grab, after my children, in the event of a house fire. When I found out that it would be followed on with a volume devoted to the Christmas holidays, I pre-ordered it here on , although standing in line in front of a bricks-and-mortar bookstore would have been worth it. I received notification a few days ago that it had shipped, so it was constantly on my mind. I could not wait for it to show up. Monday was Columbus Day -- a legal holiday with no mail, darn it -- which delayed my receiving this cookbook by another day. But arrived it has, and oh boy, is it ever worth the wait. Rather shares her signature recipes and food styling in easy-to-understand ways for us mere mortals. With careful direction, we too can prepare delicious and stunning dishes. Among the first I'll be trying: Texas Spice Rubbed Roast Pork, Sour Cream and Chicken Enchiladas, Apple-Spice Layer Cake with Caramel Swirl Icing, Red Velvet Cupcakes with Mascarpone Cream

Cheese Icing, and Caramel Pie with Meringue Topping. There's no reason to put off trying holiday recipes now. I can already tell these will be a big hit at potluck dinners, family birthday fetes and tailgate parties. Thank you, Rebecca Rather and Alison Oresman, and I'll be on the lookout for your next volume.

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