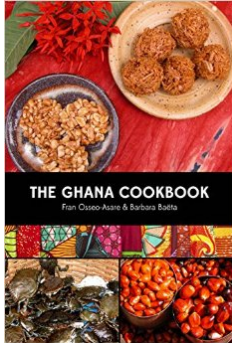

The Ghana Cookbook: A Review

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The Ghana Cookbook

by Osseo-Asare, Fran and Barbara Baeta. 2015. Hippocrene Books, New York, NY. 248 pp. Hardcover \$19.95 ISBN 978-0-781813-43-3.

*Correction issued December 19, 2016. Original published version omitted an author in the above citation and misspelled an author's surname in the body of the review.

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Several years ago, as a student in the United States, I discovered Fran Osseo-Asare's first Ghanaian cookbook, *A Good Soup Attracts Chairs*, a name derived from an Akan proverb. Though written for children, I gifted this book to several American friends who had tasted Ghanaian meals and asked me for recipes. As with many Ghanaians, my cooking is based on "feel" rather than carefully measured out ingredients so giving out recipes was always quite a challenge and I was grateful to have that little cookbook to give out to friends. I was thrilled to learn about *The Ghana Cookbook* and just as excited to be given the opportunity to review it.

Fran Osseo-Asare and Barbara Baeta set out to capture the heart of Ghanaian cuisine in *The Ghana Cookbook*. From the red hued glossy cover decorated with images of a few of typical ingredients, such as peanut toffee and palm nuts, to the glossary of Ghanaian names of ingredients and dishes used throughout the book, *The Ghana Cookbook* impressively accomplishes the author's purpose: take the user to the heartland of Ghanaian cuisine and as a bonus gives us some snippets of other West African gastronomy.

The book's introductions include mini biographies of the authors and a brief overview on the country and its culture. The biographies are an interesting read

and nicely capture the authors' mutual love for Ghana's cuisine as well as their spirit of collaboration, friendship and adventure that has culminated in this very gratifying cookbook.

The cookbook is divided into two parts. The first part of the cookbook provides information on equipment, textures, flavors; cooking methods and seasonal techniques that are foundational to Ghanaian and West African cooking and which are referred to in the recipes. The second part of the cookbook holds almost two hundred pages of recipes grouped under ten chapters that reflect the structure of Ghanaian meals. While most of the recipes are typical Ghanaian recipes, there are several recipes that are western or American adaptations. While vegetarianism is not common in Ghana, there is a brief vegetarian chapter but other vegetarian options can be found under the other recipe groupings, particularly under the Snacks, Appetizers and Street Foods chapter. The typical Ghanaian recipes are identified by English descriptions and their local name. As there are recipes from almost all the major ethnic groups of the country, the name of the cookbook, *The Ghana Cookbook*, is befitting.

The layout of the recipes is easy to follow with organized ingredients lists, step by step preparation directions and serving suggestions. Many of the recipes also have a troubleshooting feature where potential problems are anticipated and remedies provided. Alternatives are suggested for potentially hard to find ingredients. The pages of the recipes are also dotted with brief informative synopses on key ingredients such as palm nut fruit or gari and even egg. Although there are no pictures accompanying the recipes, the cookbook has an eight-page insert with colorful pictures depicting some of the recipes, ingredients, cultural attractions and the authors. All the recipes carry a caption that describes the recipe and some have anecdotes of how the final recipe was arrived at. Some of these anecdotes were amusing telling of differing opinions on how a certain dish should be prepared but demonstrate the adaptability of the recipes and should encourage users of the cookbook to have fun and be creative with the recipes. The authors accurately refer to onions, tomatoes and pepper as the "holy trinity" of Ghanaian cooking: this is very true.

All the recipes I tried turned out great without any modifications. I have always enjoyed Tiger Nut Pudding which I have had at parties and restaurants but had never tried to make myself. I was so happy to find the recipe in the cookbook and it was the first recipe I tried. It turned out really silky smooth and delicious, it

didn't stay too long in the fridge and so the next day I made up some more. My eight year old daughter was keen to try the fish cakes so I had her help measure out the ingredients and in less than one hour we were enjoying a delicious snack. I had one of my busy students try out one of the quickie recipes (Sardine Stew in a Flash) and this is what she had to say: "I loved how the instructions were clear and easy to follow. The ingredients were not complicated or difficult to find. The stew was ready quite literally in a flash! The amount of pepper stated in the instructions was too small in my opinion, so I just increased it to suit my taste. It is definitely a handy recipe and can be used on days where you just want to whip something up quickly."

I recommend *The Ghana Cookbook* for anyone interested in African cuisine in general and Ghanaian cuisine in particular. It is authentic, educational, and, more importantly, the recipes work. Both the novice and seasoned cook will enjoy this cookbook. At the start of her biography, Osseo-Asare says "This cookbook is the one I always wanted to buy and could never find." After reviewing this book, I would like to thank the authors for writing the cookbook that I have always wanted to buy for my foreign friends and could never find until now.



Esi Colecraft is a lecturer in nutrition at the University of Ghana. She obtained BS and MS degrees in nutrition from Cornell University and The Pennsylvania State University, respectively, and has a doctorate in international public health from the University of Alabama in Birmingham. In addition to teaching both undergraduate and graduate nutrition courses, she conducts community-based research in maternal and child nutrition with emphasis on the infant and young child feeding practices of mothers in low resource settings. More recently, she has been involved in research on diet, hypertension, and social influences on women's weight gain in Ghana. In her leisure time she enjoys cooking and baking for family and friends.