

The Hippy Gourmet's Quick and Simple Cookbook ... - "Adventurous yet underwhelming"

I must confess, I had never heard of the Hippy Gourmet (apparently he has a PBS show), but his cookbook, (The Hippy Gourmet's Quick & Simple Cookbook for Healthy Eating) had some intrigue. Anything entitled quick & simple that sounds like it may contain some virtuous recipes is worth a trial in my opinion. Immediately upon receipt, I scanned the entire cookbook, dog-eared several pages, though not as many as I would have expected.

The first few recipes I selected to trial evidenced my cravings for the warm flavors of fall: Pasta with Vegan Butternut Squash Sauce

I became a bit frustrated right from the start with the butternut squash sauce. The recipe called for an ungodly amount of crushed red pepper. Luckily, I spotted the faux pas and used just half, but it was still too spicy and just barely within the edible range for my household. The recipe also called for "water or vegetable stock, as needed." You would think that when an entire cup or more is required just to distinguish the sauce from baby food, they might note it as an actual ingredient. As a genuine fan of squash, I ate mine up, but my husband barely ate half of his plate, still referring to it as baby food. (Prep note: I served it over wide rice noodles) Orange-Spiced Whole Wheat Couscous

Since even the best cookbooks have a marginal recipe or two, I didn't hesitate to move onto the next creation. But alas, this couscous was somewhat underwhelming in flavor with only the raisins taking a firm stance. I should have known that it wouldn't yield stellar results when they noted that it is excellent when served with a spicy vegetable stew. Why on earth would I go to the trouble of making a delicately fragrant couscous (rather than a nice neutral one) just to serve it up with a spicy and potentially overpowering stew? Overall it was okay, not bad, but not worth making again. (Prep Note: I added some garbanzos to make it a mini-meal) Curry Spiced Sweet Potatoes

The third time is a charm, right? My husband ate his entire sweet potato serving, so we were moving in the right direction. Let it be told that I am a big fan of sweet potatoes, especially when prepared simply or with contrasting flavors. I could pass on the candied yams, but roasted sweet potatoes with herbs and spices, yum! However, something just didn't quite "go" in this curry / sweet potato blend. This dish was pleasant, but both my husband and I agreed that the spices failed to meld with the wonderfully natural sweet potato taste. One flavor just seemed to follow the other. I did like the stovetop-cooking concept, it was one I had not yet tried with tubers, but I will probably use a different blend of seasonings next time. (Prep Note: I served the potatoes with some sliced bratwurst and freshly cooked brown rice)

Alas, while not tragic, the recipes trialed thus far have fallen flat on our taste buds. They were all okay, but neither my husband nor I were dazzled enough to consider any repeat performances. I haven't given up on the Hippy Gourmet just yet, as I do feel his creative collection is bound to hold a gem or two. I am determined to trial the Banana Fruit Mania Muffins (with no added sugars or oils), but I can't seem to find the 5 or 6 types of dried fruits it calls for. The Brazilian Style Black Beans, Sesame-Style Broccoli, and Tuscan Bean Soup are also calling my name. While his cookbook is still far from making my shelf of go-to cookbooks, I must give kudos to the Hippy Gourmet for his adventurous spirit and his promotion of healthy and sustainable eating.

A Few Extra Notes:

- For some reason the title led me to believe that this would be a vegetarian book. Since I am not a vegetarian, I wasn't hugely disappointed, but it should be noted that the Hippy Gourmet shows no discrimination in the ingredients he uses. Meat, fish, cheese, while all in moderation, he does not shy away from these ingredients.
- Some recipes are actually titled with the word vegan, such as the one above, but this really isn't a vegan cookbook. I do recommend it for someone who has vegan friends and needs some quick ideas of what to make if they are coming over.
- This is a whole foods cookbook, and the author focuses on buying local.