

If It Has Words

"Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts. Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me, because you do have a job to do, and no good can ever come of it."

-Shel Silverstein

"In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer."

- Albert Camus

"Those who don't believe in magic will never find it." - Roald Dahl

"Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese."

-G.K. Chesterton

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The Muffin Tin Cookbook by Brette Sember and Melinda Boyd

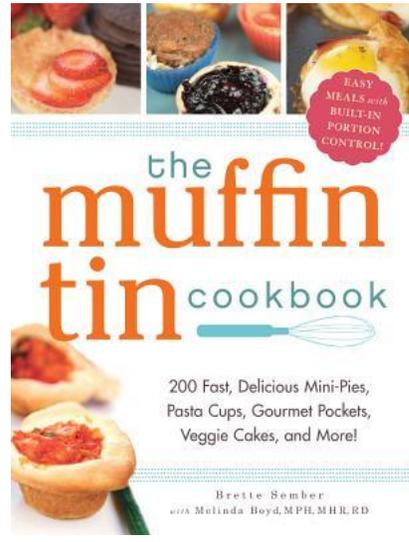
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I take forever to review cookbooks, mainly because I like to try as many recipes as I can possibly stand before reviewing. To date (1/22/2013) I have made 42 of the 200 recipes in this cookbook. And I would say that I would give this cookbook a 3.5 to 4 star rating.

The main concept of this book is that everything is cooked/prepared in a muffin tin.

This requires three different sizes of muffin tins; mini, regular & jumbo. It should be noted that you could probably get away with just one size of muffin tin but in doing so would sacrifice the calorie counts the cookbook author has provided. Even so, three muffin tins for 200 recipes isn't a bad figure for equipment needed for a cookbook. There's also a short introduction in the book that explains the muffin tin sizes and a little section on liners as well. This section also includes using pie crusts and crescent rolls in the muffin pans (how to prepare them). It also explains the Nutritional Analysis charts and the little leaf icon that notes a healthy recipe.

The first chapter of the book is the appetizer section. The scallop bites were easy to make and had a distinctive Asian flavor. I felt a little foolish making individual scallops in a tin as they are pretty easy to separate out for a calorie count though. The spiral snacks too were hard to wrap my brain around muffin tinning, but they had a good taste, despite the gigantic mess they made in



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preparation. Mushroom Stuffed Brien in Croute was great right out of the oven, but didn't reheat well. And the Crab Dip Cups had a strong hint of horseradish but everything else had a moderate flavor. A real standout in this section was the Hot Nuts. They were a favorite appetizer at the family Thanksgiving and only had three ingredients.

Breakfast was the next section and even though I'm not a big breakfast fan, I ended up making several of the recipes in this chapter. The Egg Crescent Pockets were a good concept, but following the directions exactly (and yes the oven was the appropriate temp) yielded eggs that had a plasticky texture to the top of them. Luckily, the Ham and Egg Cups turned out ok and were tasty, yet simple to make. Coffee Cakes were light, simple, but not overly abundant on flavor. The Denver Omelets tasted like a mini quiche and were a quick recipe. The first recipe I ever made out of this book was the Apple-Granola Yogurt cups which were tasty, but definitely required a fork to eat. I did try the book's method for baking hardboiled eggs and it turned out successful. No harder to peel than a boiled hardboiled egg either.

Chapter three was Beef and Pork and while I'm not a big beef eater, I did try a few of the recipes in here. Meatballs in Spaghetti Nests were time consuming but they tasted good and had a unique concept of making a noodle dish. Bur-Ogies involved meat and pierogies but the amount called for wasn't enough to encase the pierogie in the meat. And the taste was only so-so. Finally, the Cheeseburger Pies were easy to make, but tasted like a cheap fast food cheeseburger despite using premium mustard, ketchup, etc.

Chicken and Turkey was next. The Moroccan Chicken Pot Pie was one of the recipes I tried here and it had an interesting mix of flavors, but I found it a little too sweet. The Chicken Parmesan also had that noodle bowl technique, but was bland and very messy. There was also the Chicken with Caper and Dill Sauce that I thought was too lemony and the chicken too dry. It seemed an odd thing to make in a muffin cup and I think that because it was cooked in the muffin cup with few other ingredients, that's what made the chicken so dry. A waste of liners on that particular recipe. Mango Tandoori chicken, by contrast, was delicious. It was time consuming to make, but worth the extra effort. Likewise, the Chicken Coron Bleu had a very good flavor. The Chicken Fettucine returned to the noodle cups but this time did it justice with a great mix of flavors and creaminess.

Chapter Five is seafood and that just seems a very odd thing to cook in a muffin tin to me. I tried the Shrimp and Pesto in Phyllo and it was moderately successful though with few ingredients. The Crab Cakes were a good idea, but I noticed as I was mixing it up that the mixture was too soupy and had to add more bread crumbs than called for. The creamy shrimp in puff pastry was messy and light on taste and not a particular recipe that I'd recommend.

Chapter Six is where the carbs seemed to be located. Titled Potatoes, Rice, Pizza and Pasta it had the hearty fare. I tried making the Duchess Potatoes which were like fancy mashed potatoes but extremely messy when trying to eat. And the Hearty Deep Dish pizzas were good despite their very doughy texture. Maple Sweet Potato and Kale had a good flavor for the sweet potato, but the kale turned out more like dried out kale chips (and not the good kind) rather

than a nice side dish. The Yorkshire puddings tasted of grease and didn't have a whole lot of flavor otherwise. The last dish in the chapter, Shrimp Risotto, was a favored dish at New Years and while it was a tad bland, it cooked very nicely in the muffin tins.

Vegetables! The Cauliflower Gratin here had an excellent flavor. This is good because the very next recipe was a dud with the Cherry Tomato Cups just tasting like spaghetti sauce. The Roasted Swiss Chard didn't roast well in the cups and was light on flavor. But then the Zesty Corn Cups were full of flavor and easy to make. I've just started eating brussels sprouts this year and the Brussels Sprouts Cups weren't bad. I doubled the sauce though and they were still kind of dry. I might recommend tripling the sauce on those. I also liked the Smashed Pea Cups which were different but quick to make and nice and cheesy. The Green Beans and Mushrooms tasted good and almost seemed garlicky, despite not having garlic directly in them.

Muffins and Breads is chapter eight. I made the Pizza Muffins and was tired of them after eating one. They were dry and didn't hold a lot of flavor. The Irish Brown Bread Squares (well round for me, I didn't bother buying a square muffin tin) tasted like regular Irish brown bread. I was really excited for the Mango Coconut Muffins, but sadly they weren't very flavorful. They mostly tasted like flour with a hint of coconut and no mango flavor at all. The Buckwheat Pear Muffins though did ok on flavor, although a tiny bit more sweetener could have been used.

The last chapter, Desserts, is not one I used much. I'm just not much for sweet things. I did like the Poppy Seed Cupcakes. They were nice and light and airy with a delicious flavor. The poppy seed really came through. The Cookies and Cream Cupcakes with Oreo Frosting made good use of a cookie. The frosting was the best part and I'm not even a frosting person. And the Hot Chocolate Muffins were popular at work, but they were extremely messy to eat.

The reason I'm rating this book in the four star range rather than at a flat three star range is probably because of its convenience for dieters and calorie counters. Since every recipe tells how many calories there are per tin, it makes it extremely easy to know what you're eating. Likewise, these can be individually frozen for the busy person to take out and eat later and makes it even easier to make ahead and have a variety of meals later on. So even though there are a lot of so-so recipes here, for someone who's not as obsessed with food as I am, it would be a convenient book to cook out of. Especially considering none of the recipes take a particular amount of skill. Your average cook would be just fine with this book and a beginner might only have a little trouble.

Ingredient availability for the recipes in here is pretty good. In fact, you buy one thing for a recipe and you can almost guarantee that there is another recipe you can use the leftovers in. This happened for me several times with items like pie crust, pepperoni, and certain cheeses. The ingredients also aren't that premium (excepting seafood of course) and I'd say that while not a budget cookbook, it certainly isn't an expensive one either.

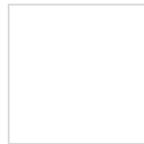
My biggest complaints about the book though would have to be its format. For

one, all the pictures are in a section in the middle which I detest. Either have them with the recipes or not at all. I don't enjoy flipping back and forth to try to look at things. Then there's the binding with the book. I haven't had this book for even a year yet and it's coming apart. Granted I've used it almost exclusively the past few months, but even so, most of the pages are loose and just shoved in where I could get to them later and at this point, only half the pages are still attached to the binding. I sent a three hole punch is in this books future. Which is a shame, because there really isn't an excuse for having that problem in a cookbook. Of course, even when the binding was intact you couldn't open this book to a recipe and lay it out flat. The tight binding would automatically close the book unless you lay something on each side to hold the pages down.

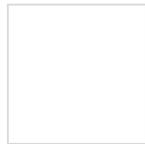
Great for dieters and it does have a lot of unique ideas, this is a decent book. I probably wouldn't refer back to it repeatedly, but there still are a few recipes left in there that I might give a try.



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