

## BretteSember



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## Location

Clarence, New York, US

## Bio

Brette Sember is the author of over 35 books. Her web site is [www.BretteSember.com](http://www.BretteSember.com)

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SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 2:10PM

EDITOR'S PICK

## Martha and Me: Living the Martha Life

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Whether you love Martha Stewart, resent her, or laugh at her, she's an important figure in our collective cultural consciousness. What would happen, I wondered, if I took a year and tried to live a Martha life? Nine months ago, I undertook that challenge.

### The Beginning

It all started because of a birthday. My fortieth. It was a biggie and it was staring me down as a reminder that I was supposed to do something significant or take control of my life and steer it in a meaningful direction. Midlife crisis? Possibly. I loved my life, but I just felt as if somehow it could all be better – more joyful, more purposeful, and more beautiful.

Martha and I were already acquainted casually, but I decided to become a disciple. I subscribed to the magazines, bought the books, and DVR'd her show. My goal was to do one Martha project each day and see if it changed my life. I started a blog, [MarthaAndMe](#) where I chronicled my journey and gained some loyal supporters.

### The Food

One challenge was to open myself up to Martha's recipes. In the past nine months I've learned to like capers, lemongrass, fish sauce, and kale. One of my earliest and most terrifying challenges was cutting up a [whole chicken](#). I conquered my salmonella fears and did it quite nicely. [Baked Alaska](#) for eight? No problem. In fact, I made it for my eleven-year-old's birthday party. Martha has taught me to make [challah](#), steam a whole fish, dry brine a turkey, and [corn my own beef](#). I also laughed a lot. The night the [shrimp bisque](#) gushed out of the bottom of the Cuisinart and then exploded out of the top of the blender was perhaps the most comic moment of my life. While it wasn't funny at the time when I had an allergic reaction to Martha's sole or got sick from her quiche, in retrospect it is comedy of the absurd.

### The Organizing

If you know Martha, you know she's an organizing nut. This is a woman who labels the shelves in her linen closet. I've never been a complete slob, but I had my hidden messes before Martha. Now my linens and towels are folded uniformly (well, almost), my medicine cabinet is pristine and I installed [slide-out drawers](#) in my baking cabinet. I've come to appreciate order. I now make my bed every day and sometimes I complete my monthly household to-do list.

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### The Crafts

I always got high marks for effort in art class, but my skill level is in the basement. The crafts were what I dreaded the most. And rightfully so. I tried to sew a [stuffed pig](#) ("Cute! Simple!" the magazine exclaimed) but it ended up looking like a rabbit that exploded. Whitewashing wood was the "new trend" I tried and was left with a cabinet that looked as if it had been in a paint accident. I did make a [fabric oak leaf bowl](#) that was passable and an [ink print of a fish](#) that was so good I framed it and hung it. A true crafter I will never be, but I did learn that some things are so easy, even I can do them.

### The Decorating

Martha's homes are gorgeous. There's no way to even aspire to her level of decorating, but she has inspired me to work with what I have. We redecorated a bathroom and chose an ocean color scheme and hung some art that evoked that. I've created groupings to emphasize and accentuate collections that I've put together over the years (my cranberry glass looked nice scattered around, but even better when I grouped it on the center of mantel). I might not have Martha's cash, but I can still find beauty at my budget.

### The Products

Martha has an overwhelming product line, however you don't see her products in the photos of her own home. When Martha began personally recommending products she herself uses, I had to try them. I've tried her [shampoo](#), facial wash, moisturizer, and lotion and have concluded that while Martha might have \$35 to spend on a bottle of shampoo, I don't and there is almost no discernible difference between her high end favorites and my drugstore finds. It was fun to wash my hair knowing she was washing hers with the same product, though.

### The Garden

Gardening is one of Martha's favorite hobbies. And let me stress it is a hobby since she employs a huge staff of gardeners to do the real work. I don't have a gardener, but Martha inspired me to plant a vegetable garden, which I started from seed. This was a double failure – the [seedlings were killed](#) in a frost and an animal broke through the fence and ate all my tomatoes. Next year I'm going to focus on container gardening on my deck.

### The Lessons

Clearly, Martha has taught me some hard and fast skills. But I've learned some more important things, and this experiment has truly changed my life. First and foremost, I've lost 20 pounds. I'm cooking Martha food every night AND making Martha desserts, but I've listened to what Martha says when she talks about what and how she eats. I taste everything, but pig out on nothing. I focus on fresh, tasty, and healthy ingredients and I find I am fully satisfied. In a year in which I turned forty, lost my ninety-nine year old grandmother (my second mother), watched my youngest graduate from elementary school and my oldest enter the workforce, and traveled to Europe for the first time, I took every event and experience and asked myself "What would Martha do?"

I saw the world through her eyes, and it is a beautiful world. Martha appreciates and finds 'good things' everywhere she looks and I learned to do so too.

Living the Martha life has been like going to cooking school, opening a store on Etsy, hiring a decorator, living on a subsistence farm, joining a new religion, and undergoing an apprenticeship in an unfamiliar trade, all at once. I've become a more well-rounded person (and not just from all the cupcakes Martha had me make in February) and have learned to appreciate and understand so much more about the world that is wrapped up inside our homes. My kids have experienced a wide variety of new tastes. The family has a home environment that I think is more pleasing and organized. And the projects and recipes have brought my husband and me closer together, as he often stepped in to help me when I was drowning. I've learned I can incorporate Martha Stewart elegance into every facet of my life by taking small steps each day.


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Very impressed that you kept at this so long and feel it changed your life. My linen closet could do with a bit of Martha's influence!



*Chezsvan*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 02:27 PM

A better appointed life that is tidier and where you try interesting new foods and projects? I could sign on for that!



*Frugal Kiwi*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 02:30 PM

Wow. I'm impressed that you undertook so many projects. I think it's great that you learned so many new things and made new discoveries! And could you, would you, come and organize my linen closet for me? Please?



*sheryl kraft*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 02:33 PM

This is great!

If my mother had had confidence, she would be "Martha Stewart" now—but, believe me, the apple fell a long way from the tree.



*Sourie de Campagne*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 02:55 PM

Oh, my closets would love a martha makeover. Maybe someday soon.



*Barb Freda*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 03:37 PM

You did a lot of interesting crafts, organizing and cooking with this project — and it sounds like it was fun. I visit your blog all the time and appreciate the time you spend to explain each project. The photos are a big help too! Thank you for sharing your Martha journey.



*Writers In Business*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 03:45 PM

I would love to live a Martha lifestyle - I just don't know if I'd have the stamina or the patience for it. Kudos for losing the 20 pounds and coming to see your home life differently. It sounds wonderful.



*Belle Wong*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 03:52 PM

What is interesting are the things you've learned from this experience. Who knew that all that food would actually help you lose weight! I might have to try it.



*Kerri Fivecoat-Campbell*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 03:52 PM

What a wonderful project. I love it!



*Stephanie S*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 06:09 PM

You are braver than me... I would have pulled my hair out after the first craft project... that is after I unstuck my fingers that I glued together with a hot glue gun...



*iamsurly*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 06:22 PM

Admire your character—not only did you stick with it, but you were able to laugh at your disasters. I actually don't WANT to be like Martha, and my house is heaving a sigh of relief.



*Vera Marie Badertscher*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2009 06:34 PM

'apprentice an unfamiliar trade' I like that. has me thinking about other people whose thoughts and approaches I might like to try out this idea with. thanks for the insights inot the lessons you've learned. sounds like a fascinating journey



*kkdexter*

SEPTEMBER 15, 2009 09:05 AM

Bravo! I'm almost loathe to admit it, but she's one of my all-time heroes. I think she is an incredibly intelligent and creative woman and I love her lessons. I could listen to her speak for hours. She became your mentor and she's a worthy mentor at that. She's one of the few people I would be genuinely intimidated to meet. I'm sure I'd be speechless!

**Beth Mann**

SEPTEMBER 15, 2009 11:05 AM

While I always dreamed of being this perfect mom, I've never been able to do it or pull it off. Martha Stewart's definitely an amazing woman and I give her props for it, you too for trying it all out. I laughed at your moments as I could totally see myself doing those things with the same if not worse outcome. I recently caught my stove top on fire when I doused a small flame (which I thought was bread from the night before when I let kids cook) it ended up being grease. Doubt Martha would've ever done something like that. Way to go to you though for taking on each task. I hope one day I can do these things, but it probably won't be until AFTER the kids are all grown.

**homemom3**

SEPTEMBER 18, 2009 11:00 AM

I love your Martha experience! It has made me take stock of my home and culinary life! Boy, do I need a makeover. It's amazing how a blog can change others' lives for the better! Kudos, Brette! BTW, love the recipes. Love, love, love them!

**Cheryl "Cie" Hosmer**

SEPTEMBER 27, 2009 11:57 AM

I know that Martha does an occasional segment with recipes for special diets. Do you know if she (or if you have) tried a recipe for a low-purine diet? I am in desperate need for my hubby!

**Cheryl "Cie" Hosmer**

SEPTEMBER 27, 2009 01:26 PM

Cheryl - Not that I know of, but you could check her web site.

**BretteSember**

SEPTEMBER 27, 2009 02:00 PM

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