



## **The Insect Cookbook: Food for a Sustainable Planet**

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# Book Review

van Huis A, van Gorp H, and Dicke M [eds.]. 2014. *The Insect Cookbook: Food for a Sustainable Planet*. Columbia University Press, New York, New York, XVII + 191 p. ISBN 9780231166843. US \$27.95 (Hardcover).

The multi-authored *Insect Cookbook* delves into the benefits of adding insect protein to prepared dishes and how to do so in a tasty manner. The authors collaborated with chefs, a farmer, a researcher, a storyteller, and others who encourage readers to embrace entomophagy. Various recipes with accompanying illustrations tempt readers to try new, savory plates using insects that can easily be purchased from the Internet.

This book begins with an engaging foreword written by University of Amsterdam Professor Dr. Louise O. Fresco. She recognizes eating insects for nutritional and environmental benefits. Dr. Fresco also connects entomophagy to our past, with humans who readily consumed insects, and to awareness and acceptance of other cultures and their traditions.

The 1st section, "Insects: Essential and Delicious," briefly defines insects and illustrates their importance, and it explains insect diversity and abundance on the planet. In this section, Kofi Annan, the former secretary-general of the United Nations, says he believes entomophagy education will assist in people perceiving insects as a delicious food option. Of course, this book seeks to educate readers; thus, Annan promotes the editors' efforts. There are also tips for those first attempting insect preparation, such as storage and rehydrating advice. Communication and marketing is a common theme among the chefs, including Johan Verbon, chef de cuisine at Netherlands's Restaurant of the Future. Also aligning with Annan's beliefs is Pierre Wind, a chef and professor of food design in a Netherlands university, who wants to make the food appealing and educate consumers about entomophagy. According to researcher Harmke Klunder, her and her friends' perceptions of insects have changed, and this shows promise that others will be open to including insects in their diet. This section also lists several countries that take advantage of various insects, and presents recipes for using the insects. Storyteller Edoardo Ramos Anaya states he has seen the positive economic impact of insects where they are consumed, as well as the healthy long-term effects they have as meat alternatives. This section concludes with 5 easy-to-understand snack recipes.

Section 2, "Is It Healthy?," further enforces the idea of insect consumption as an ever-growing trend that began in the early 2000s and increased demand for insects. Marian Peters, an innovator in entomophagy, sees insects as the key to combating global hunger. Here, the editors discuss the safety precautions that must be taken when consuming insects. The book compares the nutritional value of insects to beef. This section includes recipes for appetizers: 3 salads, 1 carpaccio, and 1 soup.

The 3rd section, "Eating Insects: Naturally!," lays out recipes for 11 main dishes, 5 festive dishes, and 6 desserts. There are a few parts that

describe how societies currently use insects in food, indirectly (e.g., cochineal as red dye) and directly (e.g., eating palm beetle larvae in Latin America). There is also commentary from Daniella Martin, blogger of "Girl Meets Bug," describing her self-taught anthropology lessons concerning entomophagy. This is followed by pastry chef Robèrt van Beckhoven saying he has experimented with insects and his approach to getting people to try entomophagy is by gradually incorporating the insects into familiar dishes; and Danish top chef René Redzepi remarks he is mainly interested in the local insects' flavors, not sustainability or nutritional value.

In "On the Future and Sustainability," section 4, the editors list the usefulness of insects, from financial stability in southern Africa to artist Jan Fabre's sculptures using jewel beetle elytra. Similar to section 3's discussion about insects currently and frequently used, section 4 talks about shellac from the lac scale insect used as a coating for shining fruits and candy, as well as honeydew manna produced by psyllids and aphids used in South Africa and Australia. The editors mention insects as a meat alternative again and give an in-depth comparison of them with cattle, pork, and chicken, with information about greenhouse gas emissions, ammonia emissions, and production of the animals.

The photographs of the food look very enticing and would make even the most disgusted person interested in utilizing mealworms for a baklava, transforming it into "buglava." The bright colors and beautiful plating, combined with the continued emphasis of taste, work well to ease any fears of entomophagy. The editors ingeniously use images showcasing insects on the food and some where the insects are hidden within, which allows readers the option of serving up dishes to both accepting and fearful eaters of insects.

This book is geared toward anyone who can cook and wants to explore new recipes. Though informative and well-written, the book does not discuss limitations upon vegans and vegetarians who consider insects as meat. There is one paragraph titled "Vegetarians" in section 2, but it does not say much about vegetarians. (It only says that it would be nice "to see vegetarians eat insects as well.") Insects are also considered taboo in certain cultures, such as Hinduism and some sects of Judaism that still argue whether certain insects can be classified as kosher, but the editors neglect touching upon this fact. Limitations additionally exist for those with allergies, and as insects are related to crustaceans, the editors could have mentioned the allergies to shellfish and then incorporated this warning in the "Shrimp or Grasshopper?" subsection from the 1st section of the book. Furthermore, many recipes include other types of meat, although insects are meant to be the star ingredient, which is strange considering the continual emphasis placed on insects to

serve as a meat alternative. For instance, soy recipes, where soy is the main protein source, do not use chicken as an additional protein. This might be a good way to gradually introduce insects into a diet, but it is unnecessary because some recipes hide the insects, such as by grinding them in with other ingredients. Also, the editors and contributors stress the importance of reaching a younger generation more accepting of entomophagy, yet there are no recipes for children. There is neither a kids menu offered to parents nor

a simple recipe for children to follow. Regardless of the above, I would highly recommend this book to chefs and home-cooks.

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