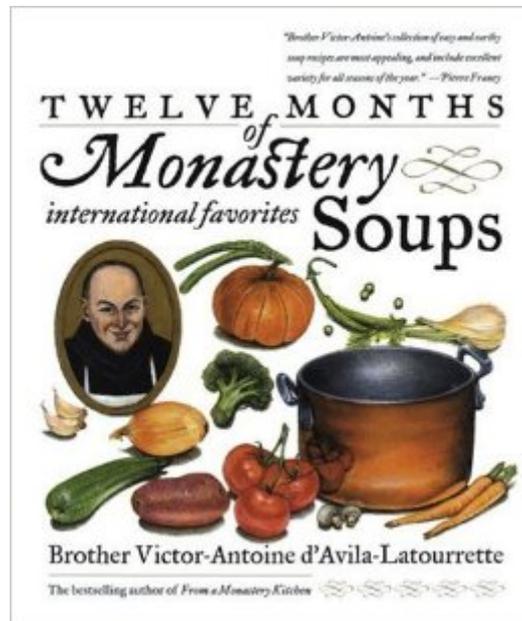


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Twelve Months Of Monastery Soups



Synopsis

"Of soup and love, the first is best." Brother Victor-Antoine makes a passionate case for this Spanish proverb in *Twelve Months of Monastery Soups*, bringing easy, delicious, soul-satisfying soup recipes from the monastery to your kitchen. From simple, clear broths to thick, hearty soups, there's a recipe to appeal to every taste. Arranged by month with an eye toward seasonal variety and at least one recipe for every vegetable native to North America, the 175 soups include classic favorites such as Cream of Corn and Tomato and more unique recipes such as Jerusalem Artichoke, Provençal Rainbow, and Danish Onion-Champagne. With inspirational quotes proclaiming the goodness of soup sprinkled throughout and beautiful period block prints, *Twelve Months of Monastery Soups* is a celebration of the art of soup-making.

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Customer Reviews

Twelve Months of Monastery Soups is an excellent, seasonally based cookbook for practical soup making. However, you must take its estimation of servings as dubious - his "two servings" is eight servings as a meal in my house. Three things separate this volume from other soup cookbooks: (1) the soups are arranged by month that the ingredients would be readily available in your garden or green grocer's. (2) the recipes are international but are the cooking "of the people" not of exotic chefs (3) delightful line drawings, quotations, odds bits of trivia etc. are sprinkled throughout the pages. To give you a flavor of the variety of recipes presented: for March we find a German Saint Lioba Beer and Mushroom Soup, a Spicy (East) Indian Soup, a Basic Onion Soup, a Tuscan Green

Vegetable Minestrone, an Everyday Potato Soup, a Garlic Soup, a Lima Bean Soup, a Beguine Cream Soup, a Saint Patrick Irish Cheddar Soup ... All the recipes are easily made; they have clear instructions and ingredient lists.

'Twelve Months of Monastery Soups' by Brother Victor-Antoine d'Avila-Latourrette set the model for this author's later book on twelve months of salads which I have already reviewed and which has become my constant 'go to' book whenever I want to make a salad. This book on soups is in a much more crowded field, as soups appear to be one of the most popular topics for single dish or single method cooking, probably just slightly behind grilling and baking cookies. It is certainly a more crowded field than books on salads. But, this book has two really important facts going for it in the face of this crowd of books. First, soups are a dish where seasonality is not only important for which ingredients are available. Seasonality is important to the recipe as well. Heavy hearty soups are great in January while clear soups and cold soups are just the thing for July. Even when a recipe such as borscht is better suited to cold weather, the recipe in this book is lightened up and served cold to suit the summer, when many of its ingredients come into season. Second, Brother d'Avila-Latourrette really makes these soups on a regular basis and is dedicated to his subject in a way that journeyman cookbook writers are not. The good brother's book may not be quite a match for books from heavyweights such as James Peterson, author of 'Splendid Soups' and Barbara Kafka's 'Soups, A Way of Life', as these people are professionals of the highest water whose professionalism provides the quality which otherwise comes from passion and familiarity. Their professionalism will also provide the kind of recipes and background on good stock making which the good brother does not cover in depth. His recipe for chicken broth is simple, but not as clear as it could be, since it gives instructions based on burner settings, not endpoints described in terms of what is happening in the stockpot. I have made several soups from this book and I find the recipes every bit as good and every bit as simple as Brother Victor-Antoine's recipes for salads. And, doing a simple soup recipe is a lot harder than doing a simple salad recipe. Unlike recipes by Peterson and Kafka, not all of these recipes fall into the 'gourmet' camp. Some actually use bouillon cubes. And yet, when I did such a recipe, I was totally pleased with the success with which the recipe brought out the taste of mushrooms, the headline ingredient. I was especially pleased with this as mushrooms are one of my favorite foods and the main attraction of mushrooms is to take on the taste of other ingredients with their native taste blending into the background. All of Brother Victor-Antoine d'Avila-Latourrette's books are decorated with Medieval and Renaissance woodcuts plus quotes from both religious and folk sources. Accouterments of this sort are a two-edged sword.

I stumbled across a series of cookbooks done in rural Americana with exceedingly cute colored pencil or watercolor drawings and homey sayings which simply detracted from the book as a collection of recipes, since the relevance and the quality of the sayings was weak at best. The decorations and commentary in this book have exactly the opposite effect. They enhance the experience of reading the book and supply useful grace notes to the recipes. The mix of recipes is a very nice combination of the familiar and the unusual. With borscht, minestrone, and bouillabaisse, we get Brussels sprout soup, Shaker style soup, cold salmon soup, and a hermit's soup. Added to the seasonality of recipe and ingredient, there is a seasonality of tradition, as many of the recipes are specific to a particular holiday, although many saint's days may be familiar only to card carrying Catholics. I heartily recommend this over many more detailed but less inspired books on soup. And, unlike another reviewer, I assure you the recipes I tried were anything but bland.

This cook book has a very good collection of simple soups (mostly vegetarian) that can be made quite easily. They are grouped by month and take advantage of the fresh produce that are in season. One of the great benefits of these recipes is that most of the ingredients are relatively inexpensive and healthy (e.g., carrots, onions, celery, beans). The recipes vary a great deal in taste, although many have similar ingredient lists. A great testament to the diversity of soup. I have, however, noticed that many of the recipes call for a rather large portion of oil and turn out somewhat greasy. I recommend cutting the oil if it seems excessive.

'Twelve Months of Monastery Soups' is my second-favorite cookbook, by virtue of the copies I've given to other cooks. (Bernard Clayton's 'Complete Book of Soups and Stews' is #1) Complete Book of Soups and Stews In my many years of cooking, I've enjoyed soupmaking because: 1. It doesn't take a lot of work to make a soup, 2. It is pretty hard to ruin the dish if you follow the recipe; and 3. You can make a good recipe even greater with a little ingredient experimentation and fine-tuning. 4. The more you do it, the more confident you get with your skill. In 'Twelve Months...', Brother Victor raises the soup cooking consciousness by providing a fine variety of seasonal selections presented in a very readable recipe format. Here are my reasons for recommending this fine soup cookbook: Recipe Simplicity: I loathe the 'Joy of Cooking' because of the cryptic recipe language it is written in. Brother Victor lays it out plain and simple here, making the construction easy for the new or challenged cook. Anyone can make one of these fine soups. Seasonalness: The soups are arranged by month when the vegetable ingredients are most readily available and fresh. For not-too-adventuresome cooks, the combination of ingredient seasonality and recipe simplicity

tempts you to try new things you'd probably never try before. Recipe Selection: The mix of recipes is very good. Even though the selection leans heavily toward the Vegan side, there is something here for everyone. Try Clayton's book if you seek more meaty varieties. One last thing. Several reviewers were critical of the 'blandness' of the recipes. Pshaw, I say! If there isn't enough garlic, salt, pepper or spice in the recipe, I add more (and make a note of it in my cookbook.) Soup recipes should not be blindly followed, but spiced by the cook's good taste!

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