

Cookbook by Anna Wecker (1598)

Abstract

Anna Wecker wrote the first cookbook written by a woman to be published in German (1597). She lived in Nuremberg, Germany and Basel, Switzerland. The recipes and supporting text reveal a great deal about early modern domestic life, nutrition, and the role of household cooks in maintaining and promoting health. The widow of first a town clerk and then a physician, Wecker's recipes demonstrate the usefulness of food as medicine and the importance of nutrition for the ill, the frail, pregnant women, and new mothers.

Source

A Fine New Cookbook: For All Kinds of Food—Vegetables, Fruit, Meat, Poultry, Game, Fish, and Baked Goods.

Elegant and useful not only for healthy people, but also and especially for sick people with all manner of illnesses and infirmities, as well as pregnant women, those who are lying in after childbirth, and elderly frail people to prepare and enjoy.

The like of which has never before appeared in print.

Diligently set out by Mrs. Anna Wecker, the widow of the late blessed Doctor Johann Jacob Wecker, the renowned physician.

Amberg.

Michael Foster.

1598

[...]

For the Most Serene Highborn Princess and Lady, Lady Louisa-Juliana, Countess and Electress of the Rhineland-Palatinate, born Princess of Orange, Countess of Nassau and Katzenelnbogen, and my Most Gracious Electress and Lady.

Most serene highborn Electress, most gracious Lady, shortly before her blessed end my pious and beloved mother Anna Wecker finally prepared the present cookbook, which she compiled diligently for many years from her own longtime practice and experience and through industrious questioning of many good-hearted and knowledgeable people, for print and was most eager to dedicate it to Your Princely Grace.

But when, after she finally finished the aforementioned book, Almighty God called her to Himself, from this fleeting life into eternal joy and blessedness, it was all prepared to be given to the printer. Thus I thought to bring my blessed, beloved mother's last wish and desire to completion. As an obedient daughter I ought not and could not neglect to shepherd this highly esteemed work into print for better remembrance. And may Your Princely Grace most graciously and generously remember the most humble motives and affection found in the dedication written to you by my most submissive, oft-mentioned late beloved mother. We hereby submissively beseech Your Princely Grace that you do not receive this work

differently than it was intended—that is well meant—and take it up graciously, and also let me and mine be commended to the same in all grace. Written in Altorf on August 10th, 1597.

Your Princely Grace's most obedient and humble

Katharina, Wife of Dr. Nicolai Taurelli, professor of medicine, in the same place

[...]

Most serene highborn Electress, most gracious Lady, it is almost undeniable to everyone what great diligence and effort my late beloved lord and husband, Dr. Johann Jacob Wecker, the erstwhile physician and city doctor of Colmar, applied to the praiseworthy art of medicine in his lifetime. His many published writings and books also testify to this. But it is especially known to those, of whom there are still many in Alsace and other places he lived, who either knew him or received useful and profitable help from him, with divine assistance.

After all this he, as a sensible and experienced Doctor, knew well how appropriate good discipline in eating and drinking was for the healthy, but also and especially remarkably the sick—not less so, indeed sometimes kinds of medicine, which to tell the truth can do little and almost nothing for someone with an undisciplined life. But above all else, in his practice of curing, he saw excellently to and placed great stock in cookery, and he always whenever possible preferred to offer cures and help from the kitchen than from the apothecary. And since he noted that not only I had in all ways greatly enjoyed cooking, but moreover our dear Lord had granted me a particular grace and gift for serving and waiting on sick people, especially by preparing all manner of useful and agreeable foods, and by means of such sustenance I, at his side and by the grace of God, restored many frail people to health, including very prominent people. For this reason not only was he always glad to have me at his side with sick people, but also often admonished me to make note of and write down the things I had observed, practiced, and found useful to sick people.

[...]

A tart or pancake made from rice

Take rice, well cooked in rich milk. Stir it well, then crack in eggs, or better yet use only the yolk. Add as much good cream or almond milk as you prefer. Mash the rice until it has the same consistency as a fritter dough. Sweeten it and salt it a little. Add wild rosewater. Prepare a pot with a crust as you know to do, let it firm up, and pour in the rice filling. When it is set, sprinkle it generously with sugar and bake until lightly browned. If you wish, colour it green with herb juices. Or, if you wish to prepare it like a pancake, prepare as above but add currants, bearberries, raisins, or chopped figs and bake it nicely as you would other pancakes.

[...]

A delicate milk for the sick and the healthy

Cook rice in good, whole milk. When the rice begins to cook, do not stir it. When it has cooked an hour and a half, as it should, the thick part of the mixture will have settled at the bottom of the pan while the thinner part remains at the top. Now as is proper remove the skin from the top. Then strain the mixture, both the thicker and thinner parts, through a thin cloth so that no grains of rice remain. Add sugar, and a little rosewater if you wish—it will be all the healthier. Put it in a platter and let it cool. If you wish, stir beforehand one, two, or three egg yolks, as you prefer, in a measuring pan. Stir in the milk and put it over the fire. Stir it and remove it as soon as it simmers. Prepare it as before. When it is cold, if you wish, sprinkle in raisins or *Zuckererbsen*,^[1] or place chopped almonds over top.

[...]

A Pear Tart

Cook the pears in whatever way you prefer out of all the methods described above, only cut it into slices as for apple or pear sauce. Then prepare it in a pot in this way: mix ginger, cinnamon, and nutmeg together. Sprinkle the tart shell with cleaned currants. Then arrange pear slices to cover it. Sprinkle it [with spices] and add another layer of pear slices, and then again a third time. Arrange the layers one after the other from the rim inward, so that it is highest in the middle. Then sprinkle it well and sufficiently [with spices] and seal it with a nicely cut and well decorated pastry lid. Bake it, and when you remove it from the oven sprinkle it with sugar. If you wish you can also make this with raw pears, as you have with apples, but they should definitely be ripe pears. *Speckbirnen*^[2] are good as well as other varieties. If you use those, add fat and a good amount of sugar, but if you use an inherently sweet variety they should also be nice and crispy under the pastry lid.

[...]

A meal for pregnant women and young children

Take as many steamed or fried pears—some use raw pears, but I don't hold with this—as you need, and as much softened white bread in a pea broth. It should be merely swollen. Bake them together, then add cinnamon, sweet herbs, saffron, sugar, and currants, and a little salt. Put fat in a pan, as for baking a pancake. Put in a portion of dough, then top it with figs. Add more—this should happen three times. Bake it like a pancake. If you want to know when it's cooked sufficiently, stick a knife in it. If the knife emerges dry it is cooked enough. If you wish, make a sweet broth to go with it.

[...]

A splendid meal made of meat

If the sick person does not like to eat poultry or meat, take meat, e.g. from calves or hens, and chop it so finely it seems as though it were ground. Then season it well with sweet herbs, add saffron, then finely chop some nutmeg seed to add. You may also wish to chop and add marjoram, thyme, and parsley. Add currants. If you wish, add sea grapes with pits or seeds removed. Salt it properly. Put it on a baking platter or in a little pot that is not wide. Add wine and water, let it simmer and do not stir. In this way the meat will be cooked together again. If you have leftover broth, hold on to it. Let the meat cool a little then cut it into slices like white bread. Put it in hot fat and bake it quickly until it browns. Put it in a bowl and make a good sweet little broth from cinnamon, sugar, and strong wine to pour over it, or take the broth the meat was cooked it, which is best, only prepare it with cinnamon and all manner of spices. Sweeten it or leave it as is. You may well also add sugar to the meat to sweeten it as well as the broth, season it better. Add currants, let it boil, pour it over, sprinkle it generously with cinnamon. If you let it dry on a board and brown it nicely. This is better than baking it in fat, and with a broth poured over it like fish, or if you are cooking for healthy people you can chop bacon to add if you trust yourself. You could also add animal fat or beef marrow. So much for notes—you should not cook animal fat for sick people.

NOTES

[1] Literally sugar peas. This could either refer to sugar snap peas or a type of candy called *Zuckererbösen*.

[2] Literally fatty pears. This refers to a variety of pear that is softer and juicier than regular pears.

Gemüsen/ Obs/ Fleisch/ Geflügel/ Wildpret/ Fischen und Gebackens. Amberg: Michael Forster, 1598.

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