"The Best American Recipes 2002–2003 is a collection of recipes from people who fully understand the strange and fabulous powers a well-prepared meal can have." — Anthony Bourdain, from the Foreword

"The cream of the crop . . . McCullough's selections form an eclectic, unfussy mix." — People

From the sublime to the sophisticated, The Best American Recipes 2002–2003: The Year's Top Picks from Books, Magazines, Newspapers, and the Internet (Houghton Mifflin, October 2002), edited by Fran McCullough with Molly Stevens, offers savvy, proven recipes that are sure to become part of your permanent cooking repertoire. The culinary radar of our editors goes into overdrive as they scour every possible resource to find out what's going on in the world of food this year. They look for trends, innovative ideas, and the very best recipes as they test and retest to make their final selections for this year's keepers.

In making their decisions about what's in and what's out, McCullough and Stevens have great instincts. As a leading cookbook editor, McCullough discovered many of today's most talented cookbook authors. Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking magazine, a cookbook author, and cooking teacher.

"The trouble is that what's on the page isn't always a good indication of what it will taste like in your mouth," the editors explain. They can spot a promising recipe, but the proof is in the testing.
McCullough and Stevens describe a "Best American Recipe" as not just great-tasting and useful, but one that

- Makes a cook of any level look good
- Has an inner logic and room for imprecision or improvisation
- Is even better if it calls for pantry ingredients, keeps well, and can be used in a number of different ways
- Gets bonus points if it comes from an obscure source or teaches a new way of doing something that's been written in stone for decades
- Is the absolute best version of a classic dish
- Is one you have to tell everybody about and can't wait to make again.

A dish that can make any cook look good and has an inner logic is Nigella Lawson's Green Pea Risotto, which Anthony Bourdain describes as "natural . . . simple, beautiful, lush, a little sinful — it should serve as convincing evidence that yes, you can cook well." Rigatoni with Sausage and Cannellini Beans, by Barbara Lynch, published in the Boston Herald, delivers big flavor and is made almost entirely from pantry items. A killer version of a classic dish is the moist and honest Blue Plate Meat Loaf from Beth Dooley's New American Cooking. Buttermilk-soaked bread crumbs make the difference.

Simplicity and innovation are the trademarks of many of the recipes in this collection, including appetizers like Edamame with Szechwan Pepper-Salt, in which the popular soybeans are roasted and dusted with Asian peppercorns and salt, or Almond Cheese Straws, made from just five ingredients in a few quick steps.

Desserts, too, are mouthwateringly simple, from old-fashioned, sensational Snickerdoodle cookies to Anarchy Cake, which you can throw together in minutes using either fruit or chocolate, to an over-the-top Intense Chocolate Torte from a California food market's flyer.

The Best American Recipes 2002–2003 also has fabulous recipes from chefs at top restaurants across the country: Union Square Café, Craft, and Prune in New York City; Boulevard and Zuni Café in San Francisco; Dahlia Lounge in Seattle; Palena in Washington, D.C.; and Boston's No. 9 Park.

Our editors are always on the lookout for sophisticated holiday dishes that are geared for easy entertaining and yield superb results, such as a Morning Bread Pudding that you can make the night before (by New York Times reporter Amanda Hesser). Seattle chef Tom Douglas's Spice-Rubbed Turkey with Sage Gravy and Wild Mushroom Stuffing (Food & Wine) will be a hit for Thanksgiving. Roasted Winter Squash by Napa chef Michael Chiarello (Wine Country Living) underscores the natural sweetness of squash with a touch of molasses and balsamic vinegar. And talk about simple: Cranberry and Dried Cherry Relish, by cookbook author Rozanne Gold (Bon Appétit), can be made ahead, and you don't cook it at all.

The Best American Recipes 2002–2003 is the premium resource for must-have recipes and is filled with tips, menu suggestions, and cookware recommendations. This collection will give you incredible standout recipes that will make you look like an entertaining star, plus great fast dishes for every day and fabulous holiday recipes to spruce up your table.