



## INTRODUCTION

I lived in New York City—Brooklyn, mostly—for six years. My closest friends lived as near as the upstairs apartment in our brownstone building and only as far away as a few subway stops. Most weekends, ours was the apartment that collected all the overworked and underpaid twentysomethings who needed a good meal, though our crew of struggling actors was among the most frequent diners. I am a cook by training, profession, and nature, so I cooked for them. These friends—hungry, creative, and new to the kitchen—helped give me the confidence that the fresh and simple way I liked to create meals when alone after a long day was the way they wanted to cook, too. It is for them, and the meals we shared (more memorable than the bad movies or bottles of wine in the background), that I wrote these recipes: real food, cooked quickly and inexpensively.

Like all the meals I try to prepare, whether I'm alone or not, these recipes use simple cooking techniques, fresh produce, and ready ingredients that don't sacrifice flavor or healthfulness for time. These recipes are written to serve four people and accommodate a variety of appetites. My driving philosophy is one that is common among many of the busy cooks I know: the willingness to look at dinner differently. On some nights, dinner consists of a heaping plate of meat and vegetables, while on others it's just a simple puréed soup and a piece of crusty bread. For me, deciding what to bring to the dinner table isn't only about what is in my refrigerator; it's informed by the weather outside, what I ate that day, if I went to the gym, and if my hands are tired already. Sometimes dinner is eaten while perched on my kitchen counter before running out to a movie. Other times it's paired with dinner guests and a simple dessert that exchanges the small amount of extra time and cost, like the sweet (and quick!) recipes



## Spaghetti Cacio e Pepe

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook **1 pound spaghetti** according to package directions.

Drain the pasta (reserve  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup pasta water) and return it to the pot.

*or regular black peppercorns*

Meanwhile, heat a small skillet over medium heat.

Place **2 teaspoons black peppercorns** and **2 teaspoons**

**Szechuan peppercorns** in the pan and toast until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes. Place the peppercorns in a mortar and crush with a pestle until coarsely ground.

*or put in a ziplock bag and bash with a rolling pin*

Transfer the pepper to a medium bowl with **3 large egg yolks** and **2 packed cups finely grated Pecorino Romano cheese**.

When the pasta is done, stir  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of the reserved pasta water into the egg mixture, add the pasta, and toss to coat. Stir in the remaining pasta water, if needed, to reach the desired consistency. Season with salt, and serve immediately.

### OR TOP WITH:

fresh or frozen (thawed) peas

*Serve with a simple salad and crusty bread.*

## Baked Fish in Packets 3 Ways

**BASIC TECHNIQUE** Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Arrange four large pieces of foil or parchment on a work surface and place each of **4 fish fillets** (tilapia, trout, or catfish; 1 to 1½ pounds total) in the center of each; season with salt and pepper. Dividing evenly, scatter the fish with the toppings.

Crinkle and gather the edges of the foil (or fold if using parchment) to create packets. Transfer the packets to a rimmed baking sheet and bake until the fish is cooked through, 12 to 15 minutes.



### Baked Fish with Browned Butter + Balsamic Vinegar

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar  
2 tablespoons cold salted butter, cut into pieces



### Baked Fish with Cherry Tomatoes, Chile + Ginger

2 cups cherry tomatoes  
1 sliced hot fresh chile  
2 tablespoons peeled, chopped fresh ginger  
1 tablespoon olive oil



### Baked Fish with Oranges + Olives

1 navel orange, unpeeled and sliced into rounds  
1 cup pitted green olives  
¼ cup fresh parsley leaves  
1 tablespoon olive oil

*Smash the olives with the bottom of a can to split and pit them.*