



# **The Hands-On Home: A Seasonal Guide to Cooking, Preserving & Natural Homekeeping**

*Erica Strauss*

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**The Hands-On Home: A Seasonal Guide to Cooking, Preserving & Natural Homekeeping** Erica Strauss  
Want to create an organized, productive, and beautiful kitchen and home? Popular Seattle blogger, Erica Strauss (*Northwest Edible Life*) shows us how in this modern homekeeping handbook for thrifty DIYers who care about sustainability. A fresh take on modern homemaking, this is a practical (and sometimes sassy) guide to maximizing your time, effort, and energy in the kitchen and beyond. With a focus on less consumerism, it will teach you how to organize your kitchen and home to make the best use of your time. For those yearning to live a more ecologically minded, grounded lifestyle, this book is full of practical, no-nonsense advice, fabulous recipes, and time- and money-saving techniques.

## **The Hands-On Home: A Seasonal Guide to Cooking, Preserving & Natural Homekeeping Details**

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Author : Erica Strauss

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### Deirdre says

It's probably no coincidence that my two favorite genres currently are post-apocalyptic fiction and canning how-to (thanks, Walking Dead), but the end result is I've read pretty much every back-to-the land homemaking book to cross my library's shelves. This one is exceptionally good—not just because of the quality of the recipes, but also because of the friendly, witty (e.g., "Make hay when the sun shines and make sauerkraut whenever"), approachable writing. I already do some of the stuff covered in this book—gardening, canning, scratch-cooking, and chicken raising—but the author inspires me (rather than pressuring/shaming) me to do more. I'd recommend this to anyone looking to begin or further his/her living-off-the-land pursuits.

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### Victoria says

Love it all.

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### Janelle Fergus says

This is the best compendium of DIY household cleaners that I have ever read. The introduction section at the start explains the chemistry of cleaning very simply and then the recipes are simple permutations of just a few ingredients: borax, vinegar, baking soda, essential oil, rubbing alcohol. I spent about \$12 and made glass cleaner as good as Windex, a good oven cleaner, and a grout cleaner that is the best I've ever used.

There are also food recipes, which are fairly basic. If you're new to seasonal cooking, these would be a good start.

I liked a lot of the seasonal reminders: like a spring mattress airing, sunning white linens in summer, etc.

This is a beautiful book that is relaxing and do-able.

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### Beth says

I have been a follower of Erica Strauss' blog 'Northwest Edible Life' for quite some time now, and have gotten so much wonderful information from it. However, I have found that sometimes the successful blog does not translate well into book form. So I was alternately very excited and somewhat apprehensive when I saw this was coming out. I'm thrilled to say that it's fabulous!

Strauss takes the reader on a seasonal "homekeeping" journey, imparting hints, tips, recipes and more to help the curious, the lost, and the frustrated figure out a way to do it better. What I loved the most is that she never preaches, nor is it her way or bust. There's a very friendly "we're all in this together" kind of vibe going

on, and it was...sort of...comforting?

The book is divided up into six sections: Basics & Techniques, Year-Round, Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. Within those sections are hints & tips, suggestions, and recipes for cooking, preserving, home care and personal care. Year-round recipes include flatbread, one-hour ricotta cheese, infused vinegar, all-purpose cleaner, and "potty powder". Spring has watercress salad with stir-fried beef and peanuts, vanilla cream tart with fresh strawberries, pickled asparagus, carpet freshener, and two-in-one facial exfoliant and moisturizer. Summer has grilled nectarines with red onion, basil, mint, and blue cheese, grilled strip steak with fresh herb chimichurri, simple jam with flavor zings (well worth reading for the "zing" information alone), lacto-fermented pico de gallo, stink stopper toilet spray, comfrey and aloe skin-soothing gel. And on it goes, season by season, full of amazing information and wonderful recipes. All easy to do, all with the goal of simplifying and making your home cleaner and more natural.

The book itself is gorgeous. The cover is embossed and thick, the pages are thicker-weight, and the bookmark ribbon was the best touch. Sadly, there is only one ribbon, and I have already marked multiple pages.

If you're in a rut with your home, frustrated, or just want to explore new options to benefit your family and your home, this book is well worth the purchase price. I highly recommend it for just about everyone who wants to be a little more hands-on while feeling less overwhelmed.

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### **Hannah says**

This felt like she had done a lot research and practiced what she preached. I felt like the cleaning product recipes would do the trick and were scientifically sound. The recipes for food were seasonal, but had lots of meat and cheese in them so I didn't make any. Her ideas for cleaning were good and practical. If you are looking for a book to help you be a thorough homemaker this is the one to get.

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### **Sarah Hefner says**

Fun collection of recipes and DIY home projects for each season.

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### **Sonja Tennant says**

I loved everything about this book. It's a sturdy, hard backed large book, with thick pages. It has a variety of DIY ideas- from cooking to canning to cleaning. Everything seemed pretty simple and straightforward. I have done a little canning before but I loved her explanations for why to do things certain ways. I have only done water bath canning up to this point but I am eager to try pressure canning now! I really like her cleaning products, not sure if I will venture into the beauty side of things- but if I do, she has some great things to try.

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## **Emily says**

This is a beautiful book. I've tried a couple of the cooking recipes and they've been great. Her jam flavor combination ideas are spectacular. I made peach jam with whiskey and vanilla, which was delicious. I'm going to stay far away from the personal care recipes, though. I don't trust anyone who says to put essential oils on your face.

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## **Jennifer Bardsley says**

Erica Strauss has the goal of helping men and women everywhere turn their homes into centers of production instead of places of consumption. That's a big challenge to wrestle with, but her new book *The Hands-On Home: A Seasonal Guide to Cooking, Preserving & Natural Homekeeping* shows you how.

Instead of dousing our bathrooms in chemicals, Erica gives step-by-step instructions for making "potty powder" and "acidic bathroom cleaner." Instead of buying sugary jam from the grocery store, she teachers readers to can their own preserves without using pectin.

Well, Erica would have to pry the pectin box away from my cold, dead hands, but I'm willing to give her other ideas a try. So are her legions of fans who adore her well-known site: Northwest Edible Life.

Sasquatch Books in Seattle sent me a free, advanced copy of *The Hands-On Home* this summer in exchange for my honest opinions and review. For me as a homemaker, it was love at first sight. The construction of the book is everything I expect from Sasquatch: fine quality pages, beautiful illustrations, and a style that walks the fine line between folksy and hip. *The Hands-On Home* is also enormous. It's almost 400 pages long and feels like *Joy of Cooking*'s younger, prettier sister.

But don't let the girth put you off, because *The Hands-On Home* is divided into easy-to-manage sections by season. It's really like five books in one. First comes the part about basic, year-round instructions. Next comes spring, summer, fall and winter. In each of the seasonal sections there are edible recipes as well as ideas for home and personal care.

Northwest Edible Life fans might be asking themselves, "Do I really need to buy this book? Can't I find these recipes on Erica's website?" For me the answer is yes, because the blog—wonderful as it is—only offers a fraction of what Erica has crafted in the book. Plus, this book would make a lovely holiday present or engagement gift.

As a gardener, I was a wee bit disappointed that there wasn't a gardening section to *The Hands-On Home*. I've given up on the idea of ever getting chickens, but that doesn't mean I don't like reading plans about coop construction. Erica writing a follow-up book about gardening seems like a no-brainer to me. The *Hands-On Garden* perhaps?

I began reading *The Hands-On Home* in summer when tomatoes were abundant. I \*might\* have made myself sick by overindulging in oven-roasted herb confit one August afternoon. But, I'm pretty darn proud

of the multiple mason jars of lacto-fermented pico de gallo in my refrigerator. Now that it's fall, I'm eager to try the sauerkraut with apples and caraway. I've made homemade sauerkraut before, but have totally forgotten how. Now all I have to do is open up the book, and the instructions are right there at my fingertips.

The Hands-On Home is so rich with ideas that it will take me several years to try them all. How lovely it is to have a guidebook to aspire to.

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### **Alyssa says**

Similar subject matter as Little House Living, but the author's voice and POV in this one appealed to me a bit more/was more relatable for me on some levels. As living in Japan gave me a healthy appreciation for the seasons and their changing (read: obsession with), I liked that this one was organized by season, with different recipes and activities for each. A beautifully photographed and designed book. I definitely want to try some of this stuff out!

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### **Audrey says**

To be completely honest, I only skimmed through this to see what it looked like, so I can't speak to how well the recipes and ideas offered here work. Look to other reviews for that. It looks like good information, though -- lots of step-by-step images with captions, as well as immediately useful information, all organized into seasonal sections. The photography is beautiful, but this isn't a photo-heavy book.

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### **Juli Anna says**

I ordered this book from the library fully intending on mocking it and looking forward to writing a scathing review. Lo and behold, this is actually an excellent addition to the ever-growing sector of alternative home economics books! Strauss' writing is cheeky, self-aware, and (usually) shies away from the rural sentimentality that plagues this genre. Her food recipes are inventive, but not cloying; fresh, but not too trendy. Her personal care and cleaning product recipes take into account the actual chemistry of mixing substances together, rather than simply regurgitating the collective "wisdom" (read: hooey) of the blogosphere.

My favorite thing about this book was the "Basics" chapter at the beginning, which works through the nitty-gritty of how to create a home environment that you love, whatever that means to you. Most of these sorts of books expect that you will simply start doing projects; ostensibly, making strawberry jam will lead to container gardening and chickens and suddenly your life is a veritable *Kinfolk* photo spread. But Strauss has her readers make lists of goals--as well as impediments--in their homes, and gives solid advice on creating routines that make a home-based life more feasible, even if you never intend to take on any of the projects in the book. She is refreshingly realistic about the barriers that make running a "hands-on home" difficult for people, and she offers humorous, encouraging, practical strategies for overcoming them. This is far too often neglected by writers in this genre.

For me, this book easily joins the ranks with Eric Knutzen's and Kelly Coyne's *The Urban Homestead: Your*

Guide to Self-sufficient Living in the Heart of the City and Making It: Radical Home Ec for a Post-Consumer World as a practical, creative reference for do-it-yourselfers and radical homekeepers.

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### **Julie says**

Checked this out from the library, and I realized I need to buy this! I want it close to me always!

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### **Justin says**

It does what it says on the tin, perhaps too literally. It stays exactly on path devoting all of its pages to cooking, recipes for home care products and preservation techniques. This is a good overview but I was hoping for more niche material. I suppose I was thinking this'd be more of a homesteading book, but its a bit too focused (yet not focused enough as I'd rather read a preservation book for example) for me

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### **Kathy Peterman says**

Great book written by the season with recipes for meals, preserving and DIY cleaners and personal care items.

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