


BIG BITES



Wholesome,
Comforting Recipes
That Are Big on
Flavor, Nourishment,
and Fun

KAT ASHMORE

CREATOR OF KAT CAN COOK



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IT ALL STARTED WITH A SALAD.

Well, that's not quite where it *all* started for the twelve-year-old girl who was reading cookbooks before bed like novels, but it's where this book, *Big Bites*, started. I've wanted to write a book for years—in culinary school, while working in food at Martha Stewart—but I felt that I would simply be jumping into a conversation that didn't require my input. There were so many amazing cookbooks out there, what was I going to say that really mattered? I knew that I'd feel excited writing it, but *why* I was writing it felt more self-serving than community serving at the time. So, I waited, until now.

The desire—no, the need—to write this book came to me in January of 2022 when my Hungry Lady Salads broke loose on the internet.

With the New Year, New You haze on the horizon, I knew what you were thinking. I knew, because I am you. I am hungry, not just physically but emotionally and mentally, for food that makes me feel something: big bowls of slurpable noodles, crackling chicken skin, creamy salad dressing, and comforting crumb cakes. I also want to feel good in my body and thoughtful in my eating. I want to be healthy and well fed—is that so much to ask? Dreading the onset of January as the traditional month of deprivation, I was inspired to create a series of big meal-in-a-bowl, have-to-eat-it-with-a-large-spoon salads. My approach to food is about what we can add to our plates, not what we “should” take away. These salads weren't dainty—they were hearty, meant to be

devoured in big bites, and again the next day, and again the day after that because they just kept getting better. I called them Hungry Lady Salads and TikTok exploded. My audience steadily and quickly grew as you begged for more Hungry Lady Salads and eventually Hungry Lady Soups, and started using this language with excitement and pride. Not only was it okay to be hungry—it was *fun*. I receive messages daily from worn-out moms and busy home cooks saying that my approach and recipes have made you fall in love with cooking again, that your families wouldn't touch kale and now ask for my Tuscan Kale Salad with Lemon Tahini Dressing ([this page](#)) weekly, that you no longer buy salad dressings and order takeout. You tell me that you made one of my desserts for a party and everyone begged for the recipe. You tell me that your burly, carnivore husband asked for three bowls of veggie-packed soup. You tell me that my food has helped you feel more nourished, more satisfied, more creative. I knew I was onto something—healthy food for food *lovers*, and my mission became even more clear. I knew it was time to write my first cookbook.

Did I set out to produce a beautiful, high-quality cookbook? Yes. But make no mistake, I want you to make a mess of this book. That's right, mess it up right along with your favorite kitchen apron that you reach for time and time again because it feels good and has seen you through so many kitchen adventures. I want *Big Bites* to become a mainstay in your kitchen, dog-eared and coffee-stained and reached for every time you need a recipe for dinner, a cake to bring to brunch, a casserole for a sick friend. With this book, my mission is to empower hungry readers everywhere to serve yourselves and your families well, and have fun doing it. These are simple, stress-free recipes and

strategies you will love making and eating, sharing big bites of personality and joy. These recipes are abundant, not restrictive. Creative, not fussy. Thoughtful, not complicated. These are recipes to feel proud to serve and proud to eat.

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THESE RECIPES ARE ABUNDANT, NOT
RESTRICTIVE. CREATIVE, NOT FUSSY.

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I suppose you might call me a “flexitarian,” as I don’t completely exclude any foods from my diet, but I am keenly aware of what makes me feel my best and what does not, so I let that guide me 90 percent of the time. My training is as a chef, not a dietitian, so making amazing-tasting food always comes first. My recipes are trustworthy and reliable, and infused with years of training and technique. I encourage home cooks, especially moms on a self-love journey, to focus on what we are adding to our plate rather than taking away. Because my goal is to make recipes that anyone can make, I offer lots of variation with dairy-free, gluten-free, vegan options and the like. I don’t want anyone to feel left behind. Whole foods are beautiful, and with a little finesse and creativity, everyone at the table will be excited to eat them. Just ask my husband, who swore he hated brussels sprouts and now eats them with pleasure. The first time I served them, piled high in a heap under a spicy caramel glaze, he expected the gray-ish mush boiled to oblivion that gave them a bad rap for so many of us. Turns out, he quite likes

brussels sprouts and all other veggies too. My motto is if you think you don't like vegetables, you're eating them the wrong way.

My cooking is a celebration of nature and the seasons and encourages home cooks to rethink familiar ingredients. Beautiful food does not need to be complicated; it just has to be considered and thoughtful. More than anything, I want readers to be inspired by my recipes, to make them and love them, so I'll always offer substitutions should they be of better use within a particular lifestyle. I believe in green smoothies and cinnamon rolls, sometimes at the same time, and that true wellness is about balance and inclusion. No food is "clean" and no food is "dirty." Make the most of the real, plentiful food that is all around us, and take big bites of it. That is my food religion.

I don't come from a family of elaborate cooks so much as a family of enthusiastic eaters. In fact, most of my treasured childhood memories revolve around food. I remember running around our neighborhood in the rain with my father, competing over who could jump into the biggest puddle. We returned home, soaking wet, and my mother wrapped me in a towel so we could all eat steaming bowls of homemade macaroni and cheese. I don't remember a perfectly juicy Thanksgiving turkey, but I do remember my brother and I chasing each other with black olives (canned, always) on our fingers and thumb-wrestling for the bigger half of the wishbone. I felt free to play with food, and associated food with feeling supremely loved. Big bites, big laughs, and big love.

As I grew into my teen years, my fascination with food turned into a fascination with creating food. I would insist on bringing half a dozen cookbooks on family vacations, much to my luggage-carrying father's

chagrin, and read them like novels before bed. One might say I was a bit obsessed. One would certainly say I still am.

Flash forward to July 2020. I had been a stay-at-home mother for three years (my kids were one and three years old) and I was struggling without a creative outlet. I'll be honest: I wasn't a very good stay-at-home mom. I'd always tremendously valued what I was creating and producing professionally, and I didn't realize how much that part of me impacted my self-esteem, my self-respect, and my overall happiness. I'd left my career as a corporate recipe developer and producer to care for my children, and as the newborn haze started to clear I looked around and barely recognized myself. I was anxious, overwhelmed, and lonely. I was burdened by weight, emotionally and physically, and longed for a purpose that had nothing to do with being a mom. My passion for food hadn't waned, but in the absence of a way to channel my creative energy, I'd turned all my passion into eating. And eating. And eating. I told you, food has always had a bit of a hold on me, sometimes feeling like a hug and sometimes feeling like shackles. I made the fateful decision to launch a healthy recipe blog and start a TikTok account and put my passion for food to good use.

Having worked for large corporations, where my production and development roles were specific and delineated, it became clear that I had a lot to learn when it came to being an entrepreneur. I had a lot to learn about wearing all the hats at once. My first videos were of helpful kitchen tips, like how to choose a ripe watermelon at the supermarket, and how to get the most juice out of a lemon. I didn't know exactly what people wanted to see, so I focused on really listening to what

people responded to, what pain points they had, and let that lead the way.

I watched in amazement as a community began to form around my videos and more specifically around the food and how it made them feel. I started walking taller and laughing louder and feeling more energized than I had in years. I woke up excited and motivated, and I felt like I was offering something valuable—but I was getting something so valuable out of it too. The videos and interaction with this community has been an act of self-care—every day, putting myself out there and sharing my love for food, along with the passion I brought to what I made, what I ate, the food I nourished my family with, let me rediscover a spark that had almost gone out. To know that I’ve played a part in your healing your family’s idea of what “healthy” food is is an honor and responsibility I don’t take lightly. The big headfake is, I’ve been healing right along with you.

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WELCOME TO THE BIG BITES CLUB.

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Big Bites is about simple, comforting recipes that portray “healthy food” in a whole new way. Food that is abundant in colors, textures, nourishment, and flavor. Big bites of big food that is salty, chewy, crunchy, sweet, creamy, and full of personality. This is a book about falling in love with real food, and in turn, maybe falling in love with yourself.

For so many, even me, cooking every day for a family can feel burdensome. If you feel a sense of dread as you stare down the dinner hour, it's not too late to change your approach. I believe wholeheartedly that we all have the agency to create a loving relationship with ourselves, and that healthy, delicious food can be a way to do that daily. I'll be sharing hearty, abundant, voluptuous food that just happens to be good for you, and encouraging home cooks to shake things up and cook real food with enthusiasm. There are so many "I can't believe I made that" moments waiting for you in this book.

Welcome to the Big Bites Club.