

Speed reading for fast feasting

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There's a new weapon in the race against the clock and children's hunger pangs: a fresh crop of cookbooks embracing speed, shortcuts and fast-food cravings. USA TODAY's **Lynne Perri** picks five:

Tasty

Get Great Food on the Table Every Day

By Roy Finamore
Houghton Mifflin, 479 pp., \$30

The emphasis here is on trying a lot of different things, with Roy Finamore, a cookbook and lifestyle editor for more than 20 years, urging readers to cook simply and often. The divisions are more traditional — breakfast, lunch, week-night dinners, salads, sides and desserts. He has good tips to help you prepare each meal, good points about seasonings, and is helped with color photos of both finished dishes and some in progress, such as homemade ricotta cavatelli (for the weekend cooking section). To meet time constraints, Finamore has recipes to get you up and going in the morning, with oatmeal you bake overnight, for example, and foolproof raspberry or blueberry muffins.

Fast Food Fix

75 Amazing Recipe Makeovers of Your Fast Food Restaurant Favorites

By Devin Alexander
Rodale, 228 pp., \$14.95

Devin Alexander has loved fast food since high school, so she feels for those of us who want to satisfy the cravings but without the calories, fat and sodium. Alexander does an excellent job of re-creating these dishes to be healthier and still taste good. Her tales of how she went about doing so are a funny, fast read, whether she is badgering her local Pizza Hut about their pans, tracking down the varying costs of a Big Mac nationwide or trying to figure out exactly how much meat is in a Subway sandwich. She convincingly makes the point that you'll save money and more than a few calories even if you follow some of these recipes only occasionally. Most everything is for one serving only. It's a nice idea, but if you're cooking for a family, it makes buying and preparing the meals a little tricky. The bonus: the appeal of fast food to children. Mine don't think to order the Filet-O-Fish at McDonald's, but this healthy version was a big hit.

Faster! I'm Starving!

100 Dishes in 25 Minutes or Less

By Kevin Mills and Nancy Mills
Gibbs Smith, 264 pp., \$18.95

The authors of *Help! My Apartment Has a Kitchen* have given us a slew of creative dishes, many of them relying on some prepared help, such as frozen onions, grated cheese or cold cuts for tortilla fillings. They advocate grilling and stir frying and using thin cuts, as they do in Grilled Steak Slices. The recipes are simple but tasty, and enough for four means just that; there's no guesswork here about whether there's really going to be enough or too much. This is a good choice for those who want to keep dinner from being dull but don't have time to make a big meal each night. It's filled with time-saving, reliable tips.

The Six O'Clock Scramble

Quick, Healthy and Delicious Dinner Recipes for Busy Families

By Aviva Goldfarb
St. Martin's Griffin, 321 pp., \$17.95

Whether it's how to make great sloppy Joes or tips on avoiding kitchen burns, this book is a wonderful addition for those with busy family members going in multiple directions each day. Goldfarb has compiled this book from her online subscription newsletter (thescramble.com). She favors ideas that please children's eyes as well as their stomachs (such as mango-salsa chicken or penne pesto); easy side dishes; a well-stocked pantry; and mixes for biscuits and breads, rather than doing everything from scratch. She provides nutrition information for all the recipes and gives readers weekly menus and serving suggestions. There are no photos, but presentation seems less important here than getting it together for the hungry ones at 6.

Meals Made Easy

Quick and Delicious Recipes for Every Night of the Week

From the editors of *Real Simple*
Time Inc. Home Entertainment/
Real Simple Books, 191 pp., \$24.95

Meals Made Easy is the first cookbook from the successful *Real Simple* magazine, and it has the same outstanding photographs and elegant design. The book addresses the time factor differently from other cookbooks; chapters are divided by "no-cook meals," "freezer meals," "no-shop meals" and "one-pot meals." Most recipes are made in less than an hour, and many in less than 30 minutes. The shortcut section has ideas on putting together dinner in only 15 minutes based on what you already have and a few pre-cooked items from your store. The menus are varied, fun and far from ordinary: inside-out spring rolls and Spicy Chicken Tortilla Soup, as well as classics such as vegetable soup.



By Rene Alston, USA TODAY