



# Magnolia Table

*a collection of recipes for gathering*

JOANNA GAINES

*photography by*  
AMY NEUNSINGER



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— a collection of recipes for gathering —

JOANNA GAINES

WITH MARAH STETS

*photography by Amy Neunsinger*



WILLIAM MORROW  
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## Dedication

*To Chip and the kids,*

*You inspire me not only in the kitchen, but in every part of life. I love to cook, in no small part, because of the excitement and appreciation you have shown for my home-cooked meals all along the way. Our time together in the kitchen and the countless hours we have spent around the table are my favorite memories of all.*





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## *About the Publisher*



## INTRODUCTION

I like to compare our first month of marriage to free-falling through the air with no idea how or where we would land. Chip and I had just started renovating a really small house that I couldn't wait to call home, while also renovating my little shop on Bosque. If you're familiar with our story, then you may remember that we bought the building on Bosque because Chip had encouraged me to start my own business after I'd quietly dreamed about it for years. Before then, I had never really taken any true risks. I didn't like trying things that I might not be good at because I believed that failure was a bad thing, and therefore, not an option. Looking back, there's no telling what I missed out on because I was too scared to try something new or because I gave up on something that may have been a little uncomfortable before I could see the reward in it. I preferred feeling safe to being stretched. But after only a month of marriage, Chip was already somehow making risk look fun. He sincerely believed that failure could be a valuable thing, and I was beginning to see that it didn't need to be something I feared. Chip was teaching me that even if I failed at something, I could just get back up and try again.

We were newlyweds and uncertain about how to do this thing called marriage. As we got closer to finishing the updates on the house, I had two looming thoughts in the back of my mind: "How do I even begin to decorate a house?" and "What in the world am I going to cook in our new kitchen?" I was feeling way out of my comfort zone as a new wife and putting a ton of pressure on myself. But I was determined to put my best foot forward and try my hand in the kitchen. My sister-in-law,

Shannon, had given me one of the best wedding presents: a cookbook full of Gaines family recipes. To be honest, at the time I was mostly just intimidated by the thought of cooking full meals, but it still meant so much and made me feel truly welcomed into their family.

As we got close to spending our first night in the renovated house, I started combing through the recipes Shannon had shared with me, looking for inspiration. They sounded delicious, but really unfamiliar. Since I wasn't one to try something new and was terrified of ruining a beloved family recipe, I decided that the very first thing I'd serve Chip was *my* mom's spaghetti. It was one of my favorites, and it was really simple to make. She browned ground beef in a skillet and added a jar of store-bought marinara sauce while she boiled thin noodles. Mom would mix it all together in a bowl after it was cooked and serve it with warm bread and butter on the side. This meal embodied comfort and safety to me. It felt like home. To this day, whenever I eat spaghetti, that warm, fuzzy feeling hits me and I feel like all is right in the world.

That evening, I set the table with our new dishes, lit a few candles, served water in nice wineglasses (we were on a tight budget, but the glasses made the water seem fancy), and dished out the spaghetti for Chip. I was feeling pretty confident that this was a fail-safe meal to serve to my new husband in our new home. He took two bites and didn't say anything. That was probably the first time since we'd met that he'd been at a loss for words. I figured he was just in awe of what was in front of him and trying to process how much he loved it. After six bites I couldn't handle the silence so I asked him what he thought.

And then he said these words: "Welllll, umm, it doesn't taste like my mom's spaghetti."

I almost choked on my noodles. A few not-so-nice thoughts (and

words) were running through my mind, but I kept quiet and let him continue to dig himself even deeper into this hole.

“I just love my mom’s spaghetti. I wish you would have asked her for her recipe. This tastes different, and I’m just used to my mom’s.”

I got up from the table, cleared away his plate, and told him he could do the dishes and clean up the mess in the kitchen. I was *done*. Let’s just say he learned his lesson. But I learned a valuable one that night as well. Food is *personal*. It’s like the musical soundtrack of our lives, and it can take us back to a particular moment in time—good or bad. Food is also emotional. It connects us to our past. Chip’s deep loyalty to his mom’s spaghetti is actually really sweet. I love and appreciate it now, fifteen years later. And back then, I eventually realized that we were both just missing our mamas and anxious about adjusting to this new, unfamiliar chapter of life. Food was the symbol of everything we’d known up until then. And through my cooking that meal and Chip’s reaction to it, we were in fact communicating everything we were experiencing in that moment, as newlyweds at our own table, in our own home.

It wasn’t until I was pregnant with our first son, Drake, that I started to step it up in the kitchen. This happened mainly because I was having the oddest cravings. Many times I would want something so particular that I had no choice but to whip it up myself. I don’t think I ever made anything too amazing; I just know that I tried. Chip also knew by then to encourage me in my efforts—or else he’d have to go get takeout.

There are two things I remember distinctly about those early days in our marriage. One, I really loved the act of putting on an apron. I think it was because it felt nostalgic and also because it reminded me of my grandmother. And, two, I had a domed glass cake stand on our counter that I never liked to see empty. There

was something about having it filled up that made the kitchen feel right to me. I always had fresh cookie dough in the fridge so I could quickly bake a batch of cookies or I'd make a quick Bundt cake to put on that stand.

It was in that season that I learned how to prepare a lot of the meals from the book of family recipes that my sister-in-law had given me, like the Gaines chili and a favorite breakfast: warm Malt-o-Meal served with butter and brown sugar and a side of toast for dipping. Chip also tried some of my family's favorites, like my mom's bulgogi (Korean marinated beef) and the Stevens family breakfast tradition: toasted peanut butter and jelly sandwiches dipped in black coffee. Apparently both families liked to dip, a tradition all of our children happily carry on.

Fast-forward to life with three more kids, and by then even an occasional meal at a restaurant wasn't really an option anymore. Our first four children are pretty close in age, and when Emmie Kay was born, we had four kids aged four and under. We quickly realized that it was just easier to feed them at home rather than in public. That season of my life wasn't about making the most beautiful meals. It was just about *making* a meal that would nourish my growing family. I really appreciated cookbooks that made things easy for a busy mom. Simple ingredients, minimal prep time, and really yummy dishes for young and adult palates alike. Casseroles, Crock-Pot dinners, and big pots of hearty soup that could simmer for a while became my go-to meals. Even today, these are my favorite choices when we have a busy week.

Then, as our kids got older and could better articulate their preferences, I began to really enjoy cooking for them. I loved hearing what they liked and what they were craving. There's nothing sweeter to me than the time we spend around the table. The moments shared over a meal are well worth the preparation and the work that go into making it. Food has come to play such an integral role in our family that the meaning of "seasonality"

has expanded beyond just what's growing in the garden. It's also about what's happening in our lives. When I plan the meals for the week, I really take into account each of our individual schedules. It's important to acknowledge the season of life we're in as well as the season unfolding outside and make practical food decisions to support both. When it's a quiet week, each kid gets to pick the menu for a night. They would much rather eat a warm meal at home than go to a restaurant in town. The kids seem to be growing up quicker than ever, and a home-cooked meal is the thing that connects us all the most. When Drake went to summer camp for the first time this past year, he mailed me quite a few letters that said things like "Dear Mom, when I get home, can you please make me a lemon pie?? And also fatayar?" There was something about the thought of his mama's cooking that consoled and was a comfort to Drake when he was missing home.

Life is busier these days and honestly it can be harder to find the time to cook meals from scratch, but it's important enough to me to prioritize it. Cooking has become something that's not only good for my family but for me, too. When I'm at work, I'm making so many business and creative decisions that my mind gets into a mode that's legitimately hard to turn off when I get home. I find it difficult to be fully present when I am still processing all that happened during the day.

But then . . .

I stick my hand in a bowl of flour to begin to make a pie crust, or peel some potatoes, and all of a sudden my thoughts slow down. I begin to unwind. I turn on my favorite music, open the kitchen window, and let the background noise of the kids playing with Chip set my mind at ease. These are the sounds that signal to my heart and my mind that I am home.

The kitchen actually reminds me a lot of the garden. You put

your hands to work and tend to it, and when the harvest comes, it gives back to you a hundredfold. There is a reward that comes from working with your hands, whether it's in your home, garden, or kitchen. We can choose to view the everyday tasks of life as either chores or gifts. It's powerful how just a slight change in perspective can transform something that you dread into something you look forward to. For me, this whole cooking thing has become one of the things I look forward to most and I wouldn't trade my time in the kitchen for anything.

This cookbook is a celebration of bringing people together. I share many of my favorite personal recipes as well as some from friends and family, and of course from our restaurant, Magnolia Table. You'll see in every recipe that I've included prep, cook, and cool times. These are estimates, so please don't take them too literally. This is just how it works for me when I'm cooking for my family. A recipe that takes me 30 minutes to prepare might take you half or twice the time. Just as some people chop faster than others, some ovens heat quicker as well. If the recipe takes you longer or doesn't look like the photograph, please don't be hard on yourself. A huge part of cooking is owning and enjoying the experience. Similar to my design philosophy about making your space uniquely yours, I want you to feel inspired to personalize these recipes and adjust them as you need for your family's tastes. If you don't like onions, take them out! If you love mushrooms, add more! Just because a recipe is in the breakfast chapter doesn't mean that you have to serve it for breakfast. In fact, I encourage you to switch it up more often than not. There are no gospel truths on these pages. I'm not a professional chef. I'm just a busy, working mama who loves to cook and share recipes.

And I'm not trying to achieve perfection in the kitchen. If I were, I'd be exhausted by the time we all got around the table to enjoy it—and that would really defeat the purpose. That's why you'll

see things within these pages that might look like contradictions, but are truly the ways I cook for my family. For example, I often buy organic meat and I grow lots of the vegetables we eat, but I consider store-bought refrigerated dough and boxed broth to be gifts from the heavens. I love to make pie crust from scratch when I have time, but I always have store-bought on hand so I can whip up a quick quiche. I keep my pantry stocked with all the ingredients I need to make pancakes from scratch, but oftentimes I make them from a mix or heat up frozen waffles when the mornings are just too busy for anything else. And if I don't have time to bake a fresh pie for dessert, I buy one at the store and make fresh whipped cream for the topping.

Whether you picked up this book because you want to try your hand in the kitchen for the first time or because you want to add a few new dishes to the collection of meals you have been serving for years, my hope is that you are inspired beyond the food and the photography to discover ways to make meals that are uniquely yours. No matter what happens, try to enjoy the process. As Chip told me early on: If you mess up, there's always pizza.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanna". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J' that extends downwards and then loops back up to the start of the name.

# The Pantry

*Here's what I always have on hand in my fridge and pantry for when I want to whip up something quick, whether it's dinner or freshly baked cookies.*

## **REFRIGERATED**

- Salted butter
- Buttermilk
- Half-and-half
- Heavy (whipping) cream
- 2% organic milk
- Sour cream
- Cream cheese
- Eggs (see [Note](#))

## **PRODUCE**

- Bananas
- Lemons
- White onions
- Fresh garlic and jarred chopped garlic

## **DRY GOODS**

- Unbleached all-purpose flour
- Self-rising flour
- Baking powder

- ❑ Baking soda
- ❑ Active dry yeast
- ❑ Refrigerated pie crust
- ❑ Pancake mix
- ❑ Light brown sugar
- ❑ Powdered sugar
- ❑ Granulated sugar
- ❑ Natural unsweetened cocoa powder
- ❑ Semisweet chocolate chips
- ❑ Pecans
- ❑ Ground cinnamon
- ❑ Pure vanilla extract
- ❑ Canned cream of chicken soup
- ❑ Boxed organic chicken broth
- ❑ Assorted types of dry pasta: I usually have a couple of boxes of long pasta, such as fettuccine or spaghetti, and a couple of boxes of short pasta such as farfalle (bow ties).
- ❑ Dark chocolate–covered almonds: These aren't for cooking but for my sanity!

## **SPICES**

- ❑ Kosher salt
- ❑ Parsley flakes
- ❑ Garlic salt
- ❑ Garlic powder
- ❑ Black pepper: I usually buy whole black peppercorns in bottles that have a grinder attached. Black pepper is so much better when freshly ground, and I love the convenience of these.

## **OILS**

- ❑ Extra virgin olive oil: For cooking and vinaigrettes
- ❑ Vegetable oil: I usually have canola oil on hand. Whatever

neutral oil you like will work fine.

- Vegetable oil spray and nonstick baking spray with flour

**NOTE:** *In the United States it is commonly believed that eggs need to be kept in the fridge, which is the case when you buy them refrigerated from the store. We leave ours out on the counter because they are coming straight from the coop and have not previously been chilled.*

## Tools

*When Chip and I were first married, our kitchen drawers didn't have much more than a couple of knives, a vegetable peeler, and a can opener, and we did just fine for a while. After cooking for a few years, I learned that while there is certainly no need for a lot of fancy equipment to make amazing food, a few trusted tools can make it easier and more enjoyable. These are the tools I use most often.*

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### **GLASS MEASURING CUPS**

With graduated lines to measure hot and cold liquid ingredients, these are an everyday essential. I use them for everything, from beating an egg before brushing it on biscuits to melting chocolate in the microwave. I have several ranging in size from 1 cup to 8 cups, and I prefer Pyrex because they're sturdy and dishwasher safe.



## MEASURING CUPS

I use my pretty wood-handled sets for light jobs, but when I'm really cooking up a storm, I need sturdy, dishwasher-safe cups that come in a wide variety of sizes. At a minimum, most sets include  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and 1 cup. For convenience it's good to have a few more sizes, such as  $\frac{2}{3}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup, and even  $\frac{1}{8}$  cup, which is the equivalent of 2 tablespoons. Cups with the measurements embossed rather than printed are ideal because the marks won't fade.



## MEASURING SPOONS

Just as with measuring cups, I like dishwasher-safe spoons in a lot of different sizes, with the measurements embossed. The standard four-piece set usually has  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon, 1 teaspoon, and 1 tablespoon. It's very helpful to have  $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon and  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon, as well as  $\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoon, which is the equivalent of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons.