

# Nigella delivers ripe prose, easy recipes, and pretty pictures

By **T. Susan Chang** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT    MARCH 12, 2013

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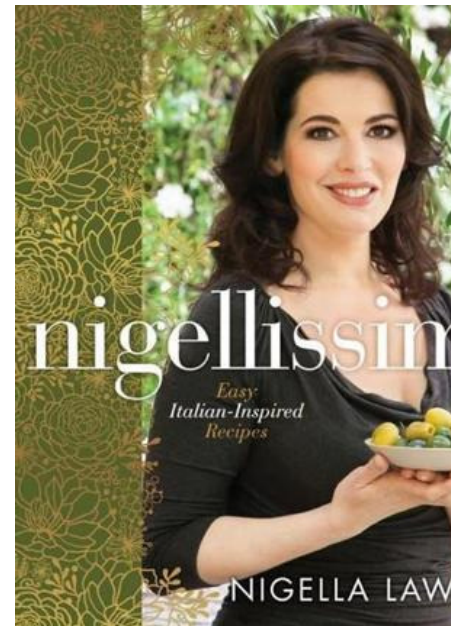
Much of what you've always expected from Nigella Lawson is what you'll still get: ripe prose, easyish recipes, pretty pictures. The latest, "Nigellissima: Easy Italian-Inspired Recipes," makes an effort to be simple and quick, but sometimes simply seems rushed. Headnotes are lush but hasty, and a few of the recipes hardly merit the name. Is "Prosciutto-wrapped grissini" really a recipe if the ingredients are prosciutto and grissini (breadsticks), and the instructions are to wrap one around the other?

Still, part of Lawson's charm has always been her easy-does-it attitude. If she relies heavily on store-bought ingredients, she chooses them for their impact, and the effort is rarely wasted.

For example, fettucine with mushrooms, Marsala, and mascarpone features a handful of dried porcini. Blended with the creamy cheese and a dash of nutmeg, the dish is a swooner.

Even better is a pasta built around golden smoked mackerel. Capers and raisins lob sweet and sour flavor back and forth over the smoky, briny fish notes, and toasted pine nuts add both fragrance and bite.

Often, though, you can't help but feel that Lawson's shortcuts come at a price. Squid spaghetti comes together in 15 minutes, but the sauce is nothing more than a can of diced tomatoes with some garlic and shallot, with just as much depth as you'd expect. Spinach baked with ricotta and nutmeg is a sort of Nigellized creamed spinach, made with baby spinach so you don't have to chop. But because



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**NIGELLISSIMA: Easy Italian Inspired Recipes**

**Author:** Nigella Lawson

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there's no chopping, it also lacks the delicacy of creamed spinach, coming out more like a frittata.

Lawson draws on Sicilian flavors in a cauliflower salad with olives, lemon, saffron, and pine nuts. It's a nice idea, though I find the deliberate crunchiness of the barely blanched cauliflower hard to take, and would have gladly sprung for a few more minutes in the pot.

Pork chops with fennel seeds and allspice offer the flavor of sweet sausage in the form of a chop, though it would benefit from more juiciness and sauce. A gorgeous image of crisp pork belly slices, scattered with fennel seeds and chili flakes, is too tempting not to try. But the slices need an hour longer than indicated to turn crisp. Chicken with a tarragon salsa verde is pretty to look at with its vibrant green sauce. But in the end there's no getting flavor into chicken breast just by roasting it with a couple of sprigs of tarragon in the neighborhood.

A chocolate olive oil cake, though, is fairly fussless and immediately gratifying. Dense and gluten-free (made with almond meal), it is as "squidgy" in the middle as the headnote promises, and just crisp on the edges where the oiled crust meets the hot air of the oven.

The book's quantities are a little odd. The majority of these recipes serve either two people or more than six, perfect, I suppose, for the busy couple who entertains on the weekends. Photos are gorgeous, evoking the unhurried enjoyment of food that has always been part of Lawson's message. But the recipes themselves could benefit from more of that slow care.

**Number of pages:** 288 pp

**Book price:** \$35

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