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# THE PRIMAL BLUEPRINT COOKBOOK



MARK SISSON  
WITH JENNIFER MEIER



# PRIMAL

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# BLUEPRINT

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# COOKBOOK

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## The Primal Blueprint Cookbook

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Primal. Paleo. Low-carb. Gluten-free. Dairy-free. These are all at least partially descriptive of the latest revolution in cuisine—a revolution that eschews grains, man made fats and other processed foods in favor of tastier, more natural fare. It's also a revolution that promises to let you enjoy sumptuous feasts of some of nature's most satisfying foods, while allowing you to almost effortlessly lose excess body fat, improve energy levels, get sick less often and possibly even live longer.

Long ago, our hunter-gatherer ancestors feasted off the land—and sea. Foraging, fishing and hunting for their meals, they evolved to thrive on whatever they could pick, catch or spear. As a result, there was a rich and varied diet of plentiful meat, seafood, fowl, fresh vegetables and fruits, and wild nuts and seeds. With this natural bounty came a veritable trove of nutrients: copious antioxidants, polyphenols and minerals, ample protein, nourishing and sustaining fats. These are the nutrients our genes expect from us at every meal, the nutrients that ensure that we will be lean, fit, and healthy.

Fast forward to 10,000 years ago, and human health in much of the world took a decisive turn. The advent of the agricultural revolution overturned some 150,000+ years of hunter-gatherer sustenance. Grains, the centerpiece of cultivation, now largely supplanted the nutrient-rich foraging diet. *Archaeological evidence reveals, human health and stature took a blow with this nutritional downgrade.* Despite this shift, the evolutionary hunter-gatherer blueprint continued to be passed down through each generation and, in fact, governs our bodies to this day.

More than ever now, we live in an aberrant culinary universe. Our culture's penchant for sugar and grains (including whole grains) and processed foods constitutes a striking—and costly—incongruity between what our bodies evolved to thrive on and what we actually feed them. We see the results in the surging lifestyle diseases that plague us today: obesity, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, autoimmune disorders and more.

The answer, of course, lies in re-harmonizing our diets with our abiding evolutionary genetic mandate. This is exactly the heart of the Primal Blueprint, a constellation of lifestyle principles that seek to realign our daily life with our inherent physiological design. Informed by the elegant logic of biology, the Primal Blueprint model adapts the nutritional cornerstones of hunter-gatherer fare for the culinary tastes and unprecedented variety of the 21st century. I think you'll find that the recipes in this book represent the gratifying pinnacle of that convergence.

In this collection, you'll enjoy user-friendly recipes for Primal cuisine with incomparable flavor and sumptuousness as well as tips for creating your own Primal kitchen. These recipes are part of my own permanent rotation, and they never disappoint. Many of the selections in this book offer Primal versions of classic, comfortingly familiar dishes. Think succulent Italian pot roast with balsamic vinegar and herbs or rich chocolate custard. Other selections infuse popular ingredients with fresh original tastes like tender shrimp cakes with coconut almond dressing or fried eggs over zesty green chili burgers.

Readers new to Primal eating might notice—but certainly won't miss—what these recipes don't include—specifically the grains that bulk up so many modern dishes. Despite the current love affair with whole grains, the fact remains that they provide few nutrients and introduce substances like gluten, lectins and phytates that disrupt our physiology rather than support it. Their minimal amount

of protein, micronutrients and fiber are more efficiently obtained through more nourishing sources like antioxidant-rich vegetables and fruits and hearty meats. After all, it really isn't the grains themselves we relish in dishes but the savory sauces and meats, the flavorful herbs and veggies and other "toppings" that we add to them!

You'll also find that another staple of the modern diet, dairy, plays a limited and optional role in Primal recipes as it did for our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Although some dairy foods like pasture-raised butter and aged cheeses can offer outstanding flavor and richness to Primal dishes, the preponderance of dairy in our modern diet again often displaces foods to which our genes are perhaps better adapted. The occasional and intentional use of dairy ingredients like pastured butter and cream in these recipes highlights their best nutrition and taste; however, non-dairy substitutions offer flavorful alternatives for those who don't wish to include dairy.

What you *will* find and truly savor in Primal fare, however, will reward both your senses and well-being. Welcome to a whole new eating experience: it's all about fulfillment—and vitality—from here on out!

## Variety

Variety equals optimum nutrition—and taste. The typical modern diet revolves around a depressing, narrow selection of foods more limited than even our parents and grandparents enjoyed. This restriction not only diminishes the nutritional value of our meals, it's frankly unsatisfying. Primal cuisine restores our ancestors' culinary abundance and then some by taking full advantage of a wide-ranging 21st century assortment of meats, vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and herbs. With the likes of rosemary and bay-infused roasted lamb, tangy herb and caper marinade, and blackberry ginger mocktails, dinner will never be the same old, same old again.

## Freshness

The fresher our food, the more nutritious it is. Freshness was obviously a key benefit to the traditional hunter-gatherer diet. In keeping, Primal eating maximizes nutrition and taste by favoring the freshest, most naturally grown/raised ingredients. Wherever possible, recipes prioritize pastured, organic, seasonal and locally grown/raised ingredients. Imagine cream of greens soup made fresh after a farmers' market run. Or how about peachy chicken salad on a warm summer evening?

## Richness

Among the highlights of Primal fare is the enjoyment of sumptuous, nourishing fats. For those uninitiated in the Primal Blueprint, Primal cooking makes liberal and gratifying use of healthy oils and "clean" animal fats (fats as free as possible from agricultural contaminants like growth hormones, antibiotics and pesticides). Although frequently and falsely maligned, certain select fats offer key nutrients unavailable in other foods—nutrients critical to the functioning of many physiological systems. Besides all that, many natural fats lend incredible flavor and more satisfaction to each dish.

Envision a chopped yellowfin tuna salad rich with creamy avocado and thick bacon, or braised beef shanks with meat so tender it's falling off the bone. You'll wonder why you ever ate any other way.

Just as the Mark's Daily Apple blog and my recent book, *The Primal Blueprint*, share the essential principles behind the Primal Blueprint diet, this cookbook serves up some of the best that Primal eating has to offer. The recipes are ideal for Primal Blueprint adherents as well as those following Paleo, Atkins, South Beach, Zone and other low carb diets. Although the recipes are based on the Primal Blueprint, they're great for anyone looking to live a healthier life. If you want more from your eating experience—more flavor, more nutrients, more satisfaction, more vitality throughout your day—this book is for you! Whether or not you're currently a Primal Blueprint follower, I'm confident that you'll savor these dishes as outstanding samples of Primal eating—and enticing evidence that the Primal Blueprint is truly a recipe for thriving. Enjoy!

Before you turn on the stove or light the grill, the first step in making a recipe is gathering your ingredients. Keeping your kitchen well-stocked with a wide variety of fresh, healthy ingredients takes effort, there's no question about that. But shopping for food doesn't have to be a chore. It can even be fun once you start discovering new ingredients and new ways to source them.

Use all your senses when you shop—touch and smell produce, let yourself be drawn towards bright fresh colors and be curious. Read labels, ask questions and try things you've never tried before. Begin establishing relationships with the people you buy food from—you'll be surprised how much you can learn.

No matter where you live, you probably have more options than you think when it comes to gathering ingredients. If you can't find a specific ingredient for a recipe though, don't sweat it. Use whatever you have on hand or even better, what's fresh and in season.

### **Grocery Stores**

For most of us, whether it's because of economics or convenience, shopping at supermarkets is an inevitable part of life. Luckily, you'll be able to find many Primal foods in supermarkets. Supermarkets are a great place to stock up on frozen and canned foods or items you might want to buy in larger quantities. Specialty markets, co-ops, ethnic markets and online retailers often carry the harder-to-find ingredients that regular supermarkets don't. Wherever you shop, just make sure to read the labels so you know exactly what's in the food you're buying.

### **Farmers' Markets and Roadside Produce Stands**

Go directly to the source. These days, most cities hold farmers' markets at various times during the week where you can buy most of your produce and sometimes eggs, meat and fish. A visit to a farmers' market can even be a social event, a way to meet your neighbors and the farmers who supply your food. If you have kids, bring them along. Farmers' markets are kid-friendly and usually offer samples of what's in season.

### **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**

Have the source come directly to you. Become a "member" of a local farm by buying a share of the annual yield. Boxes of seasonal produce and in some cases meat, eggs, and dairy products will be delivered (or available for pick-up) on a regular basis and are often less expensive than buying organic produce from grocery stores.

# Grow Your Own

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Whether you have space for just a few outdoor pots or a large plot of land, growing your own food is something to seriously consider. Almost nothing tastes better than a ripe, juicy homegrown tomato plucked from a vine right outside your door. More and more people, even city dwellers, are also starting to raise their own chickens for eggs. Grow, raise, fish, and hunt your own food and you'll never have to guess how it was treated and raised.

## Foraging

Foraging for wild plants, nuts, and seeds has been key to the survival of the human species until fairly recently, when most of us stopped foraging and started buying food in stores. Modern-day foraging is often less about survival and more about a desire to get closer to our food source and have a little adventure in the natural world. Some upscale restaurants now hire foragers to find interesting ingredients for the chef. Not all food in the wild, however, is fit to eat so before you bring home some wild greens or mushrooms it's wise to know exactly what it is you're eating. Spend time educating yourself, or better yet, sign up for a guided walk with an experienced forager.

In addition to a wide variety of fresh vegetables, meat, seafood and select fruits that you buy regularly, it's helpful to have a pantry that is well stocked with less perishable staples. For both fresh ingredients and non-perishables, buy the most natural version you can, avoiding unnecessary ingredients, hormones, antibiotics and pesticides. Buy from local producers whenever possible, even for items like honey and nuts.

Here are a few key ingredients you'll want to keep on hand as you cook through the recipes in this book:

**Herbs:** Most fresh herbs will keep for up to a week if wrapped loosely in paper towels and stored in an airtight bag or plastic containers with tight lids in the refrigerator. Packed the same way, herbs can also be frozen for several months. Herbs with more delicate leaves, like cilantro and basil, tend to keep best outside of refrigeration in a jar of water. Herbs can also be dried. Tie them in bunches by the stem and hang them upside down in a cool, dry place for several weeks. After drying, pull the leaves off the herbs and store in airtight jars.

**Spices:** Most spices are sold in whole and ground form. Ideally, buy whole spices and grind them right before using—a coffee grinder reserved just for spices works well for this. Pre-ground spices tend to have less flavor and aromatics than whole spices. Either way, store spices away from heat, light and moisture. Every six months, think about replacing spices with fresh ones.

**Healthy Fats and Oils:** Our bodies need fat, and so do pretty much all recipes if you want them to taste good. It's good to have a few different types of cooking oils for different uses. Nut oils, avocado oil and higher quality (i.e. more expensive extra virgin olive oils) are best for flavoring food after it's cooked, rather than heating the oil up during the cooking process. Less expensive extra virgin olive oil and butter are good for sautéing and browning food at lower temperatures. Lard, coconut oil, ghee, clarified butter and unprocessed palm oil are good for high heat cooking and frying.

**Nuts and Seeds:** Staples for our cave-dwelling relations and good to have on hand in modern days too. Ideally, buy raw nuts and seeds and roast them in your own oven at low heat if needed. Instead of stocking up on pre-made nut and seed butters, simply make your own by grinding nuts or seeds in a food processor with a little oil.

**Sea Vegetables:** Most forms of sea vegetables (i.e. kelp and seaweed) are dried and will keep in airtight packaging for months.

**Broths:** Consider making your own chicken, beef and vegetable broth and storing it in the freezer.

**Non-Dairy Milks:** Unsweetened coconut milk is used in many recipes in this cookbook. This canned milk keeps well for months in a cool pantry.

**Flour Alternatives:** Coconut flour, nut meal or nut flour are all good options.

**Sweeteners:** Although only used in moderation, maple syrup and raw honey are good to have on hand and keep for months.

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The single best way to improve the quality of your meals and “get Primal” is to choose and prepare food yourself. In your own Primal Kitchen you are in charge of the quality of ingredients. Therefore, you determine the quality of your food, and ultimately the positive or negative effect on your health and well-being. Cooking at home requires some advance planning and preparation but is well worth it, especially when you have leftovers the next day to pack up for lunch. Here are some tips on how to become a tried and true Primal chef.

If you are a beginner in the kitchen, start by reading all the way through a recipe before you begin. Don't be put off by long ingredient lists, as they don't necessarily mean a recipe is going to be more difficult. Give yourself enough time to cook without feeling rushed. As you gain confidence in the kitchen you'll be amazed by how quickly you can get a meal on the table. Be prepared for some things to not turn out as expected and for some recipes to not match your palate. The more you cook, the more comfortable you will become with changing recipes to suit your personal tastes. If you are already comfortable in the kitchen, expand your experiences and try something new: add timeless techniques to your repertoire, such as preparing bone broths, long cooked roasts or homemade mayonnaise.

A well-equipped workspace saves time and effort in the long run, and can even take much of the drudgery out of meal preparation day after day, year after year. Kitchen tools and equipment come in a vast array of options, ranging from basic and manual to fully automatic with all the bells and whistles. You know the basics: sharp knives, cutting boards, spatulas, pots and pans, measuring cups and spoons, etc., but what about the tools and appliances that may not be a necessity? Here are a few of our favorite Primal Kitchen tools that will make life in the kitchen that much easier.

**Dutch Oven or Casserole:** A large, heavy, lidded pot that can be used on the stove and in the oven and is extremely handy for cooking large roasts or braising meat.

**Handheld (stick) Immersion Blender:** Blends ingredients right in a pot, bowl or other container. Use it to blend soup, batter, smoothies, etc.

**Food Processor:** For slicing, grating and chopping, as well as some mixing tasks. Some households will manage quite well with only a very small model, but a machine with an 11-cup bowl is the standard size and most convenient.

**Thermometer (dial or digital):** A thermometer takes the guess work out of cooking meat to desired doneness (rare, medium, well-done).

**Slow Cooker:** Otherwise known as a Crock-Pot, this appliance will slowly and safely cook meat and vegetables to unbelievable tenderness while you're busy doing something else.

**Pressure Cooker:** The opposite of a slow cooker. Cooks meat and vegetables in a fraction of the time it would take with traditional cooking methods. Ideal for cooking soups, stews and large cuts of meat.

**Mandoline:** Slices fruits and vegetables into extremely thin and symmetrical shapes. Great for making zucchini noodles and vegetable chips and for making salads more interesting.

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**Dehydrator:** Dries fruit and vegetables and can even be used to make jerky.



# MEAT

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Meat is a concentrated source of protein and nutrients, not to mention a tasty and satisfying part of any meal. The recipes in this chapter range from simple, juicy steaks to shanks seasoned with an array of aromatic spices and braised in a silky coconut sauce. Some of the recipes take hours of cooking and are perfect for weekend meals; some recipes take no time at all and can easily be thrown together on busy weeknights.

Each of the recipes suggest a specific type of meat that will go well with the seasonings, but let the recipes be a guide, not a strict set of instructions. The type of meat you use for each recipe should be determined by what you crave, as well as by what is available from your butcher, or what you already have in your freezer.

## Meat That's Fit to Eat

The combination of hormones, antibiotics and fortified grains most mass-produced animals are raised on (not to mention their objectionable living conditions) makes conventionally raised animals less than ideal. There is no question that the modern system of concentrated feedlots is an affront to both our health and our desire to live harmoniously with nature. Hunting and butchering your own meat would be ideal, but isn't realistic for most of us. So what is a compassionate omnivore to do?

Buying the entire animal directly from the farm—or at least in portions after divvying it up with friends—is a good way for anyone with the proper motivation to understand their meat.

## Go Organic

Certified organic meat comes from animals that are humanely raised and fed grass or grain feed without hormones, antibiotics, sewage sludge, genetic engineering or artificial ingredients. Yes, organic meat is more expensive, but think of it as an investment in your health. Mitigate the cost by choosing less expensive “thrift cuts”.

## Buy From Local Producers

Visit [AmericanGrassFedBeef.com](http://AmericanGrassFedBeef.com) and [EatWild.com](http://EatWild.com) to find local meat producers.

There is peace of mind that comes from knowing exactly where and how your meat has been produced. As an added bonus, the meat bought directly from a small farm should be incredibly fresh and flavorful. Talk to owners of small farms in your region and you're likely to find out that although they aren't certified organic (a costly and lengthy process) they do follow sustainable and organic guidelines. While individual cuts of meat from local producers may not always be more economical, buying the entire animal and sharing the cost of the meat with others can be. This practice of sharing the meat from a whole animal has become so popular that it's officially entered the culinary lexicon.

## **Cowpooling**

Buying sides of beef or whole butchered hogs from small producers will provide you with healthy clean meat and can end up being less per pound than organic meat purchased at grocery stores. Talk to neighbors, friends and family members about sharing the cost and divvying up the meat. If you eat meat regularly and have a large freezer, cowpooling is for you. Visit your local farmers' market or go online to find out more about producers in your area that you can purchase from.

# GRILLED STEAK

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Properly grilling a good steak is a skill all Primal meat eaters should perfect. Grilled steak is quick and easy to prepare, has little waste, and remains a familiar favorite for many people. When you make steak, try to have the majority of your dinner already prepped and ready to serve to avoid last minute distraction and possibly overcooking the meat.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Defrost steaks (if frozen) in a shallow dish in the refrigerator (may take 1–2 days) covered, or in a plastic bag in a bowl of cold water (for a few hours).

Pat steaks dry with a paper towel. Rub both sides of steak with salt and pepper. Let the steaks sit at room temperature to take the chill off while the grill preheats.

## INGREDIENTS:

Steaks 1–1 ½ inches thick, from tender cuts (NY Strip/Top Loin, Rib or Ribeye, Tenderloin/Filet Mignon, Sirloin/Sirloin Tip, Top Round, London Broil, Tri-Tip, T-bone, Porterhouse)

Coarse sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Minced garlic and herbs (*optional*)

*Gas Grills:* Turn gas on high to burn off residual cooking debris and grease while preheating. Use a wire BBQ grate brush if necessary to remove sticky or thick residue. Turn one gas burner down to a medium-high setting and turn all other burners off.

*Charcoal Grills:* Light charcoal and burn until briquettes are covered with ash and glowing inside. Using a long handled BBQ tool, rake hot coals to one side to create a direct heat side and an indirect heat side.

Place steaks to sear on preheated grill grates over the direct heat for about 2–3 minutes, with lid closed. To make attractive grill marks and prevent sticking, avoid moving steaks once they hit the grill.



Open lid and use tongs to flip steaks. Cook second side about 2–3 minutes.

Move steaks to a grill area over the indirect heat side, close the lid and leave undisturbed until steaks reach 120–140°F internal temperature (rare to medium-rare). Depending on steak thickness, this usually takes about 10–25 minutes. Use a thermometer or the “touch” method to determine doneness.

When done, remove steaks to a warmed platter, cover with a piece of foil (tented) for 5–10 minutes, so the juices will redistribute within the meat. If you cut into the meat too early, you’ll lose too much juice.

Less tender cuts such as the London Broil, Top Round, and sometimes Sirloin are best cut into thin slices across the grain before serving.

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### **The “Touch” Method**

Determine meat doneness like a grilling professional—press the meat surface lightly and quickly with your index fingertip. If the steak feels soft like your cheek hollow, it is cooked rare; if it feels like your chin pad, it’s medium-rare; if it is firm like your nose-tip, it’s cooked medium; if it is very firm like your forehead, it’s well done and you’ve overcooked your steak.



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