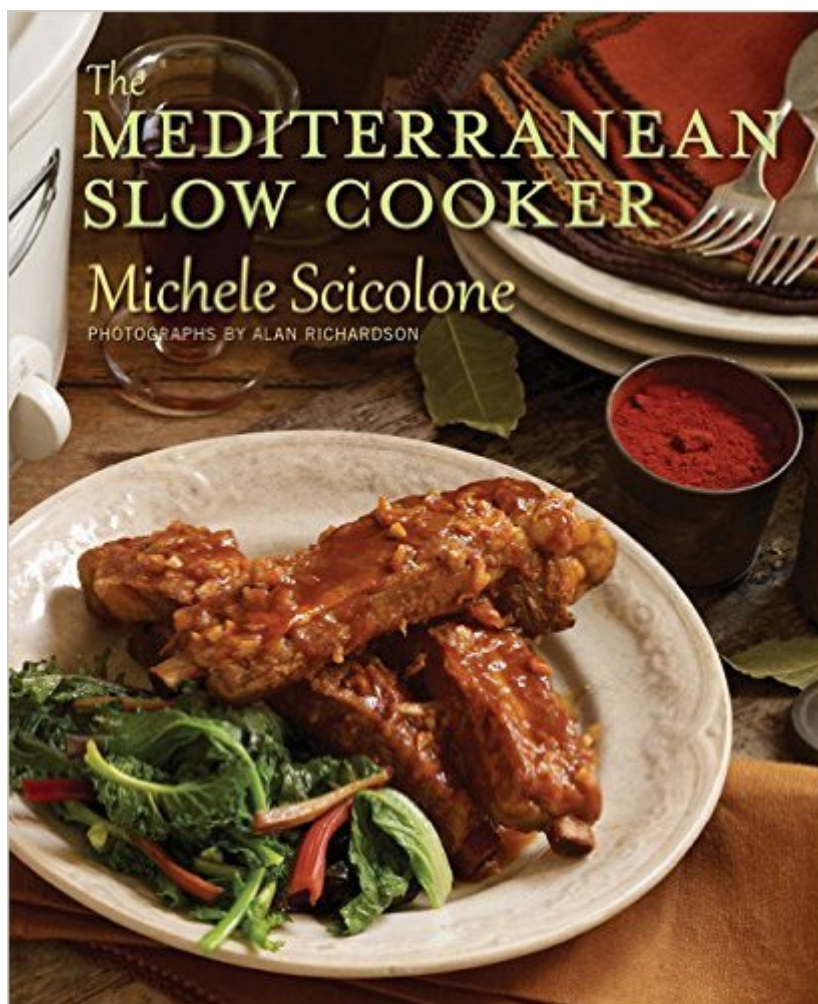


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The Mediterranean Slow Cooker



Synopsis

With the combination of tradition, innovation, and ease that have made her recipes so popular, Michele Scicolone gathers intriguing dishes from every corner of the Mediterranean and streamlines them for the slow cooker. The range is eye-opening: from simplified and freshened classics like Greek shrimp with tomatoes and feta, to Israeli sweet and sour meatballs, to Moroccan vegetable tagine, to coffee-caramel flan from Spain. But Scicolone also serves up a profusion of fascinating lesser-known dishes: a creamy polenta lasagna, a port-braised chicken from Portugal, a spiced frittata from Tunisia, and Bandit's Lamb, as well as her own seductive creations, like Cannoli Cheesecake.

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Customer Reviews

I own both of Michele's The Italian Slow Cooker and The French Slow Cooker books, and they are in frequent rotation in my Hamilton Beach Premiere Cookware 5-1/2-Quart Slow Cooker for their winning combination of authentic flavors and relatively easy prep. I preordered her latest, Mediterranean Slow Cooker, and quickly bookmarked several recipes that caught my eye. In the French Slow Cooker, Michele demystified soufflés for the slow cooker. Here, you'll find a variety of egg dishes like spinach and feta omelet, spicy vegetable eggah, Israeli breakfast favorite shakshouka, and a delicate green bean and scallion torta that would all make fantastic brunch options. The poached salmon in court-bouillon was a winner, especially when paired with the suggested tzatziki, and the shrimp with tomatoes and feta (my personal preference was to switch

out the white wine in the sauce for red) was also a favorite. The crunchy mustard chicken diable has the ingenious solution of slow-cooking bone-in chicken thighs, then toasting panko on the stove and coating the chicken at the last minute so the topping remains crunchy (this would make a great picnic dish!). And the pork ragu with broken lasagna Maialino-style was an unexpected gem; the simple sauce is served over irregular sheets of lasagna noodles tossed with Parmigiano and arugula. Fans of lamb will find plenty to rejoice over, including numerous Greek recipes like Bandits' Lamb (stuffed with salty Greek cheese) and Middle Eastern lamb and pine nut meatballs. Vegetarians will also find some offerings, such as red lentil soup, winter squash and chickpea soup, polenta with herbs, wheat berry tabbouleh, bulgur and toasted walnut pilaf, and farro with spring vegetables. Like her other slow cooker cookbooks, you'll also find "out of the pot" recipes that use precooked beans, etc.; here these offerings include a Greek country chickpea salad, hummus, and Turkish beet and goat cheese dip. For me, the real star of the book was the desserts. The entire section is crammed full of intriguing finds, like several Greek-inspired cakes (sunny orange cake with orange syrup, walnut cake with cinnamon syrup), decadent cheesecakes (the first recipe I tried was the awesome cannoli cheesecake; see above for a photo) including Nutella, several flans, bread puddings, and fruit (blushing pomegranate pears, warm fruit compote with mascarpone sauce). This is a worthy investment if you enjoy Italian, Spanish, and Greek food, and most of the ingredients should be easy to find at your local supermarket. Yes, there is some prep involved in the chopping and sautéing of veggies (and browning of meat) before cooking, but this adds a wealth of flavor to the final dish that is well worth the extra time (and if you have a slow cooker with a metal insert, you can sauté and cook in the same dish). The desserts alone are worth the cost of the book; Michele taught me that I can make showstopping cheesecakes in my slow cooker, a trick I never would have thought to try on my own! (I used a Nordic Ware Leakproof Springform Pan, 7 Inch set on a Spice Ratchet 16812 Blossom Multi-Use Silicone Trivet, Black).

****Update 1/20:** In addition to the cannoli cheesecake, I've also made the sunny orange cake with orange syrup (which is basically a revani or basbousa, in this case lightened by folding in whipped egg whites), coffee flan, and the chocolate hazelnut cheesecake (see photos above). Maybe it's just my particular slow cooker, but I found that my cakes baked much more quickly than the suggested times, so check at least 30 minutes before the book times to play it safe.

*****Update 5/26:** I have also tried the roasted beets and beet and goat cheese dip, basic recipe for chickpeas and the country chickpea salad and hummus, and next up is the coconut flan (everybody RAVES about the coffee caramel flan, so I wanted to try the variation!). I have enjoyed every dish I've tried from the Mediterranean Slow Cooker!

During winter I love to take advantage of the slow cooker when making meals. Often, however, it is too easy to resort just to soup as the best slow cooker dinner option. As a vegetarian, I also am looking for healthy ways to make delicious meals. The Mediterranean Slow Cooker by Michele Scicolone is full of delicious, healthy meal ideas, and while it is not a vegetarian cookbook, it has enough vegetarian recipes to make it worthwhile. With recipes from Turkey, Italy, and Spain, among other countries, there are all sorts of delicious flavors. Polenta with Herbs, Vegetable Bulgur Pilaf, Apricot Almond Cake, and Chickpea and Lentil Soup fill the pages of this cookbook, as do beautiful pictures and essential details about Mediterranean spices and cooking styles. This book has recipes for vegetables, desserts, and main entrees, and makes delicious recipes that are even more impressive because they were made in a slow cooker with minimal effort. The Mediterranean Slow Cooker is a great find and makes healthy cooking on a weeknight even easier - it will definitely become part of my cookbook rotation.

I have tried five recipes in this book so far and all have turned out great. Her instructions and directions are precise. Follow them! I let one chicken dish cook on too long, and the chicken fell off the bone. Didn't hurt it much. I tried the "Portuguese Pulled Pork," and it turned out great. If I didn't love Tennessee barbecue so much, this would become a staple. The greatest thing about her recipes -- in addition to being delicious -- is that she uses very few of the rare, hard to find items and expensive trendy ingredients that seem to be in vogue with so many of the famous celebrity chefs these days, especially in the ethnic and international cookbooks. (You've seen them: "1 cup of fresh feta cheese from black goats herded by monks and grazed on grass on the north slope of Mt. Athos above 2,000 feet." An obvious exaggeration, of course, but you get the idea). When she does use something exotic, she always includes at least two or three suggested substitutes. As most of these recipes are adapted for a slow cooker, it is entirely possible that if you're in a hurry you can do a stove top cook for a lot of them. I haven't tried this yet, but a luscious-looking omelettes look very tempting to whip up for breakfast. One disappointment is that I would like to see more pictures. I rarely cook a dish that doesn't have a picture. I like to see what the dish is supposed to look like when it is done, and there nothing like a great photograph to whet my appetite for the dish and make me want to cook it. But, there are enough pictures to keep me busy for awhile.

I am not a huge fan of slow cooking because it can all taste alike, but I am a huge fan of Mediterranean cooking. This author is able to provide some remarkably delicious dishes using the

slow cooking process. The recipes are varied, creative, and delicious. It is "a cut above" most slow cooker cookbooks.

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