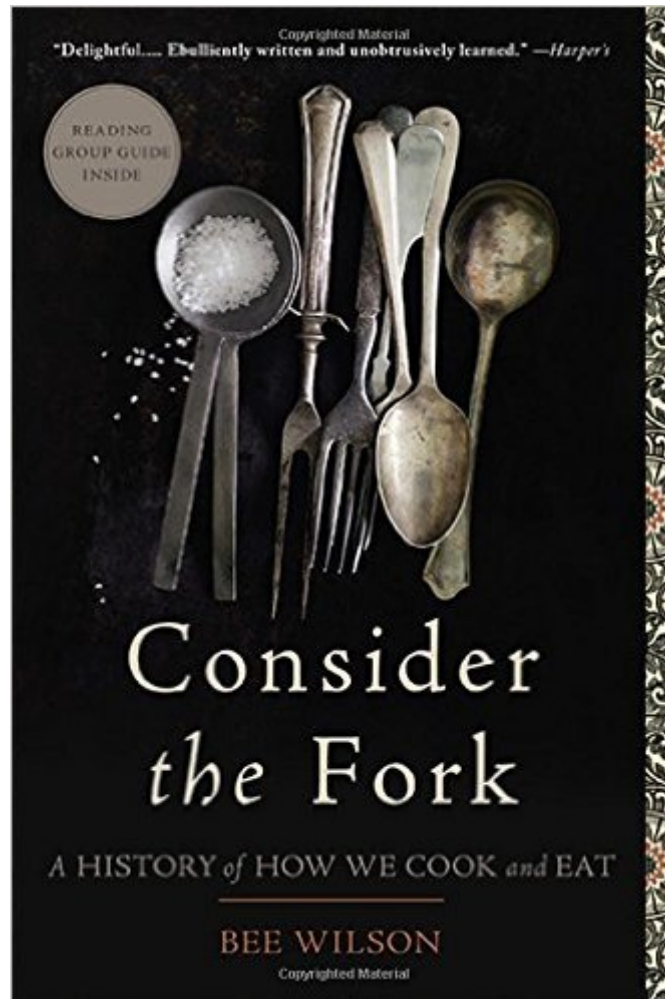


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Consider The Fork: A History Of How We Cook And Eat



Synopsis

Since prehistory, humans have braved sharp knives, fire, and grindstones to transform raw ingredients into something delicious—or at least edible. Tools shape what we eat, but they have also transformed how we consume, and how we think about, our food. In *Consider the Fork*, award-winning food writer Bee Wilson provides a wonderful and witty tour of the evolution of cooking around the world, revealing the hidden history of everyday objects we often take for granted. Technology in the kitchen does not just mean the Pcojets and sous-vide of the modernist kitchen, but also the humbler tools of everyday cooking and eating: a wooden spoon and a skillet, chopsticks and forks. Blending history, science, and anthropology, Wilson reveals how our culinary tools and tricks came to be, and how their influence has shaped modern food culture. The story of how we have tamed fire and ice and wielded whisks, spoons, and graters, all for the sake of putting food in our mouths, *Consider the Fork* is truly a book to savor.

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Customer Reviews

Consider the Fork. And the knife. Pots and pans. Measuring cups. Items so basic that we rarely wonder how they came to be and what people used before. Bee Wilson considers forks and more in a book about the tools of cooking and eating. That may sound prosaic, but the result is simply fascinating. Wilson gets down to basics in an informative, wide-ranging, and witty book. What about pots? It was a big step to apply fire to food and another big step to apply indirect fire to food. Humans were grilling and charring food for thousands of years before they tried putting something

between the food and the fire. It was some time before they could devise a material that would stand up to fire but allow the food to heat through it. Once that was accomplished, humans could boil food and fry it. It isn't hard to imagine how humans discovered that fire could make unpalatable food edible or good food even better, but I'd never appreciated the gigantic steps it took to reach boiling and frying. What about something as simple as timing a soft-boiled egg? Before clocks, before egg timers, how did people time their eggs, or anything else? Often by reciting a well-known prayer. The prayers would be familiar since everyone went to church often enough to know the prayers and the standard tempo to recite them. Six Lord's Prayers and the egg is done. It was only in the past century that measuring amounts became at all standard. Recipes were rather tricky before standard measures. But in America they are still trickier than they need to be, because we are the only country that uses a cup to measure dry volume. The rest of the Western world uses weight measures (and metric weight at that, which we Americans still refuse to adopt).

I thought I would love this book; it's the kind of thing that's usually right up my alley, and I enjoyed her "Swindled: the Dark History of Food Fraud." But "Consider the Fork" just couldn't hold my interest. In addition to the shortcomings mentioned by other reviewers (repetitions, dry writing, and jumping from subject to unrelated subject), there were several factual errors that made me wonder what else was wrong that I didn't know enough to catch, and I can't enjoy a non-fiction book when I'm questioning whether I can trust what I'm reading. Besides there being two pints in a quart and how the length of a mile was determined (as another reviewer here mentioned), Wilson writes that Handel composed his "Water Music" during the Restoration of Charles II, when in fact Handel wasn't even born then. George I and II were Handel's kings. I can hardly believe a British author would make that mistake, but even worse, how did her editors not catch it? Wilson explains Americans' supposed "zig-zag" style of eating as (I'm paraphrasing, since I don't have the book in front of me) "The meat is cut completely into lots of little bits and then the fork zigs and zags all over the plate stabbing and picking them up," which is ludicrous. Even if we do switch our fork from side to side (many of us don't), we still know that etiquette dictates that we cut only one bite at a time. The actual reason this style of eating is so called is because we put down the knife after cutting each bite and switch the fork back to the right hand to pick it up and eat it; i.e., the fork zigs and zags from one hand to the other. And I wonder if it was really Emily Post who dubbed it "zig-zag eating"? Who can tell, since Wilson got so much else wrong?

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