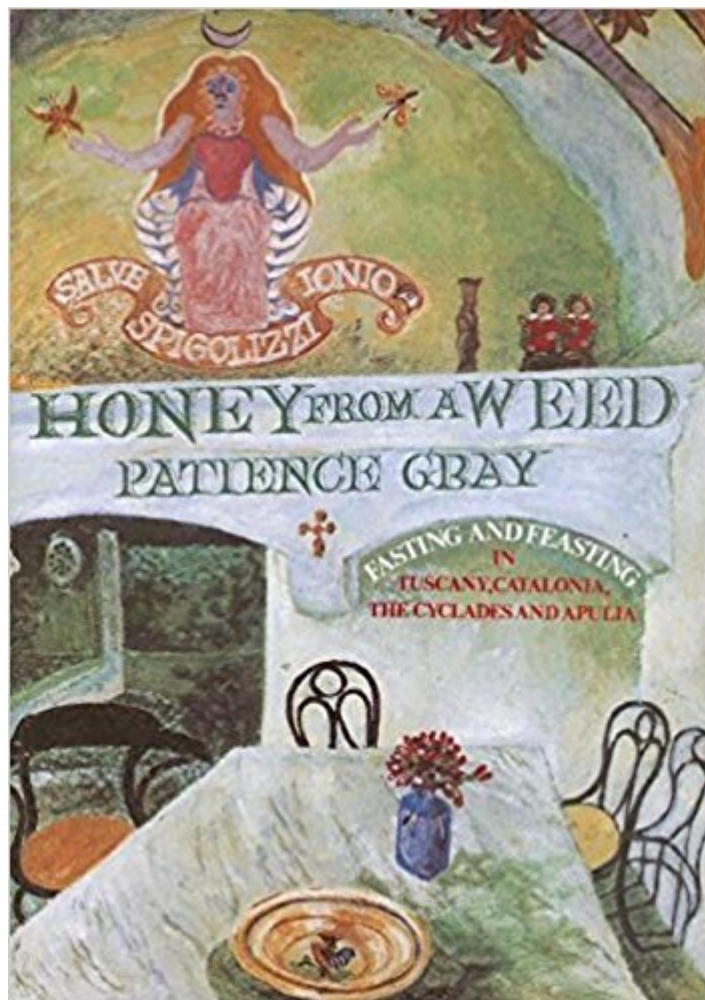


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# Honey From A Weed



## Synopsis

This book is perhaps the jewel in Prospect's crown. Within a few months of its first appearance in 1986 it was hailed as a modern classic. Fiona MacCarthy wrote in *The Times* that, "the book is a large and grandiose life history, a passionate narrative of extremes of experience." Jeremy Round called *Patience Gray* "the high priestess of cooking," whose book "pushes the form of the cookery book as far as it can go." Angela Carter remarked that "it was less a cookery book than a summing-up of the genre of the late-modern British cookery book." The work has attracted a cult following in the United States, where passages have been read out at great length on the radio; and it has been anthologized by Paul Levy in *The Penguin Book of Food and Drink*. It was given a special award by the André Simon Book Prize committee in 1987.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Simply put, *Honey from a Weed* is a jewel of a book. Reading it, one realizes the true artistry of the author, a person whose relationship with the world around her is both intimate and immediate--someone who can transform the fruits of the earth--beans, potatoes, garlic, herbs--into a gustatory masterpiece. The subtitle of Gray's book is *Fasting and Feasting in Tuscany, Catalonia, the Cyclades and Apulia*, but there's far more feast than famine in this culinary odyssey. Recipes for such Mediterranean favorites as rabbit with garlic sauce or polenta punctuate wonderful reflections on such varied topics as wine, pigs, and edible weeds; chapters on feasts and festivals; and

sharp-eyed observations about the lives of those Gray has lived among for so many years. Literate and lyrical, *Honey from a Weed* is a feast for both body and soul. Read Gray's wonderful portraits of the places she's lived and the cooks she's learned from, and let your mind wander over the sunbathed hills, through the rustic villages and deep quarries Gray knows so intimately. Though reading *Honey from a Weed* may not influence you to take up stone-carving or cooking, at least you'll have spent your time in charming company. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This singular volume is a pastiche of personalities, customs, landscapes, mythology, recipes and history drawn from veteran food writer Gray's 20 years in the Mediterranean. In prose that demands a leisurely reading ("Pungent the mint trodden underfoot on the way to the orchard"), she discusses societies in which food is "grown for its own sake, not for profit." The recipes are a varied lot. "Widowed" potatoes (with tomatoes, grilled almonds, pine kernels and onion), spinach with raisins and pine kernels, and fried chicken in walnut sauce invite a visit to the stove. But date-shell soup, tomato concentrate and a recipe for fox are unlikely to be reproduced in the kitchen. A section entitled "Some Products of the Pig" yields such diverse entries as a discussion of how pigs are used on the island of Naxos, an incident from the *Odyssey* and a recipe for pigs' tongues with pomegranate sauce. A chapter on anarchism whimsically diverges from the main food-centered themes. Simple pen-and-ink sketches offer decorative views of foods and settings. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I bought this as a gift for my significant other. From the reviews I've read people seem to like it or hate it, "get" it or not. She likes to travel and eat healthy for some strange reason, so it seemed like a good march, and she loved this book; she devoured it in a couple days.

A masterpiece from one of the finest and most charismatic British food writers of her generation, and it was a generation that included Elizabeth David, Jane Grigson and more.

`*Honey from a Weed*' by Patience Gray, by my very informal survey of approximately 400 cookbooks over the last year is probably the single most cited culinary book after Harold McGee's `*On Food and Cooking*' and Julia Child's `*Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. And, I have been trying to place this most distinctive work in the world of culinary writing for about the same time. I think I am finally able to identify its niche in a way that will assist potential readers to know what it is

they can look forward to. It is no whim to the publishers, Lyons & Burford, tagging the work as 'Cooking/Literature'. The quality of the writing is easily on a par with the greatest food writers in English and this talent is directed to producing an almost unique genre that can be approximated by combining at least three common genres of culinary writing. First, take 40% from culinary diarists such as Amanda Hesser's 'The Cook and the Gardener' and Elizabeth Romer's 'The Tuscan Year'. Then, leaven with John Thorne's brand of culinary reporting and bake in the oven of Elizabeth David's culinary sophistication and cosmopolitan outlook. Like Hesser in 'The Cook and the Gardener', Ms. Gray is 'embedded' within the milieu's on which she reports. But like Hesser of 'Cooking for Mr. Latte', Ms. Gray is also participating in these cultures of Tuscany (Beantown central), Catalonia (Spain on the Mediterranean coast just south of France), the Cyclades (Greek islands in the Aegean), and Apulia (the heel of Italy). She is living and working in these worlds in a way very uncommon for a typical journalist or scholar. The events driving the book's backstory are the travels of Ms. Gray with her partner, never identified more exactly than by the references 'the sculptor' and 'a stone carver' to various sites around the Mediterranean which are homes to marble quarries for giving up raw materials for statuary. A sample of the poetic imagery in the book describes this fact as 'A vein of marble runs through this book. Marble determined where, how, and among whom we lived; always in primitive conditions.' These primitive conditions place Ms. Gray and her companion smack into the heart of environments which well-fed culinary commentators such as Mario Batali have been describing as the wellspring of great cuisine in Italy and other parts of the Mediterranean. Making do with local seasonal ingredients is not an ideological position for Ms. Gray; it is a daily fact of life! I am generally not impressed with authors' lists of kitchen equipment offered as suggestions for your kitchen in order to pad out an extra ten pages in their books, when whole volumes cannot deal with this subject. Ms. Gray's recitation of her kitchen gear is not to teach, it is to aid us in understanding her kitchen environment in these rocky corners of the world. The text is divided fairly evenly between chapters that deal with the author's experiences in these places with chapters dealing with a class of recipes typical of the local folk. This means one can pick up the thread of Ms. Gray's dialogue with her environment at just about any page and follow its thread through the Mediterranean labyrinth of cuisine, as suggested by John Thorne in his Foreword. Just now, I open the book at random to a description of the rural Tuscan method for preserving 'lardo', the fat from the pig's rump which is rubbed with salt, sprinkled with some dried thyme and bay, and sealed in an earthenware jar, where it stays as sweet as the day it was stored. The finer fat from around the pig's organs, 'lardo strutto', is saved separately and used for yeast cakes and pastry. In a single paragraph there is information which some authors have used to fill

whole articles in 'Saveur'. One especially delightful confluence of the book's themes is the chapter on mushrooms found near the marble quarry used by Michelangelo. Having read more than one book on mushrooms by such experts as Antonio Carluccio and Patricia Grigson, I find Ms. Gray's writing on these mycological treasures to be as entertaining and as informative as some of the best known works on the subject by other culinary writers. While virtually all of the recipes can be done in a modern American kitchen, Ms. Gray typically describes them as they are done 'in situ' on the campfires and coal burning ovens available to her. This enhances her work as a study of primitive cookery, leaving it to us to translate the primitive to our electric All-Clad kitchens. The book is also a feast of words. Everything is labeled with its proper Italian, Spanish, or Greek names, with complete translations. This is, after all, a work of scholarship where names in the original language are needed to be certain that references in Italian, Spanish, or Greek books are matched up correctly. While this is a book of scholarship as much as it is a literary effort, I am delighted that Ms. Gray has included two items that I consider essential to good culinary studies. The first is not one but an entire set of excellent maps identifying the locations that are the subject of her writing. The second is an excellent bibliography arranged by site that cites not just the usual sources such as Elizabeth David and Alan Davidson. It includes both ancient and modern sources in English and Spanish, Italian, and Greek. But, we are not left to our own devices with ancient Latin or Greek, as classical works are cited in good English translations. The author has also been so considerate as to provide a list of Corinna Sargood's line drawings that contribute much to the charm of the book. I must encourage you to seek this book out if you love reading about food. The author lives and paints the culinary environment most other writers simply report. Very highly recommended.

This is a fascinating read, with the life of a cook-scholar and a sculptor as the setting for a study in the feeding of the soul. I have read it several times, each time finding new treasure. The author brings her love of the "simple" life and food to us, sharing times gone by and providing a window to a past that while hard also had pleasures that we do not appreciate now. Highly recommended.

I used to have it in paperback. well worn and well used. unfortunately I lent it to someone and can't remember who. I have to have this book in my kitchen! Wonderful recipes, so very simple, wonderful reading. I highly recommend it !

This is not just great food writing, it's also anthropology, sociology, perhaps even botany. Gray lived in several places around the Mediterranean -- remote places, by current standards, and learned

how to eat and cook from the locals. Perhaps much of this is lost now.

Traditional cultural habits of eating, involving foraging for foods growing wild in the area, have always fascinated me, but I have found that most books talk about the foods harvested in general terms, and give little of substance to work with. Patience Gray opens the door to the world of wild food foraging, describing and discussing in great detail the species used, with the local names for each, when they are used, and how they are collected for everything from spring salads to autumn seafood, and how wild and cultivated foods are integrated with one another into the day to day cuisine. The best book on European cooking I have ever read. It is so good it has become one of my favorite gifts to give to friends.

I'd choose this book for its history lessons, not for any contemporary description of events. As such, it is interesting and informative. The recipes reflect the author's simple lifestyle and the times she writes about. For me, few of the recipes will be on my 'To Do' list. Still, I give the book high marks if you keep in mind that it's a historical memory.

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