

## *Cookie Swap Mini Media Kit*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**NEW BOOK – AUGUST 1 RELEASE**  
**COOKIE SWAP: CREATIVE TREATS TO SHARE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**  
**By Julia M. Usher**  
**Photographs by Steve Adams**

Cookie swaps aren't just for Christmas anymore! *Cookie Swap: Creative Treats to Share Throughout the Year* shows that the cookie swap is perfectly suited not only to holiday gatherings, but also to garden parties, bridal showers, children's birthdays, summer get-togethers, and more. A cookie swap has all the same traits that make a potluck so effortless to host. Guests share in the baking and cost burden by bringing their favorite recipes. The exchange of treats leads to more variety, with less work. And, armed with goody baskets or boxes, guests are sure to spotlessly clean up. Plus, the idea of a party all about cookies is simply irresistible, no matter what the season!

As talented baker Julia M. Usher reveals, cookies are infinitely adaptable to different party themes and times of year, resulting in scores of delightful possibilities. Among *Cookie Swap's* eight parties are a kids' summer bash, with Lemonade Slices and Chocolate Chip Watermelon Wedges; a spooky Halloween fest, featuring Witches' Fingers and Friendly Ghosts; and a classic Christmas swap with Hot Buttered Rum Meltaways, Cranberry-Pistachio Biscotti, and Eggnog Cheesecake Streusel Bars.

With dozens of invitation and favor ideas, over 50 delectable recipes, and tips galore on hosting the best swap possible, *Cookie Swap* makes it easy to warm guests' hearts simply by sharing. And with 100 color photographs to 160 pages, the book thoroughly captivates with its delicious and abundant imagery.

Better yet, *Cookie Swap* has as much substance as it has panache. It strikes a timely and resonant chord by showing readers how to create one-of-a-kind events - all without breaking the bank or enlisting high-priced caterers or party designers. *Cookie Swap* is affordable inspiration that puts sweetness at the center of every event.

- \$19.99 • 160 pages • full-color with 100 photographs • 9 x 10 inches • paperback with flaps •
- 978-1-4236-0378-8 • August 2009 •



## **Advance Praise for *Cookie Swap***

Here's what leading culinary professionals are saying about *Cookie Swap*:

A cookie is one of life's most precious, delicious gifts. Swapping them with friends is all the better. Julia Usher's gorgeous and doable ideas inspire us not only to trade cookies at holiday time but the whole year through. Filled to the brim with mouthwatering recipes and delectable photographs, *Cookie Swap* is a sweet treat to savor and celebrate.

**Nancy Wall Hopkins**, Deputy Food and Entertaining Editor, *Better Homes and Gardens Magazine*

This creative book has become my new gold-standard guide to cookie decorating. Talented baker Julia Usher provides foolproof recipes and teaches us decorating techniques, from the simplest bar cookie to elaborate showpieces. Her whimsical designs and ideas make this book as fun as it is informative. Open it to any page—you're bound to be inspired.

**Tish Boyle**, Editor, *Dessert Professional* (formerly *Chocolatier*) and author of *The Good Cookie* and *The Cake Book*

Julia Usher's lovely cookies will inspire you to become a dedicated cookie decorator.

**Nick Malgieri**, Author of *The Modern Baker*, *How to Bake*, and *Cookies Unlimited*

Julia Usher's over-the-top cookies and detailed, theme-inspired swaps promise joyful sharing and sweet memories for year-round entertaining.

**Flo Braker**, author of *Baking for All Occasions*, *The Simple Art of Perfect Baking*, and *Sweet Miniatures*

Julia Usher is one smart cookie . . . and luckily, we can now all be invited to her *Cookie Swap*! Her new book has it all: complete basics for beginners, everything a home baker needs to perfect the simple art of "something out of nearly nothing," and imaginative creativity for pros. Well-tested recipes are reliable, fun, and scrumptious; photos are enticing; and party ideas are both practical and budget conscious. Essential for all bakers, this excellent guide to year-round cookie swap parties is a winner.

**Susan G. Purdy**, author of *Pie in the Sky*

## About the Author – Julia M. Usher

Ever since sampling the dazzling pink daisy cookies at her first cookie swap, Julia has been a lover of all things sweet. As a young child, Julia cultivated her budding cooking skills by riding the apron strings of her mom – an accomplished home baker who ran a tight kitchen. “Make it from scratch or don’t make it at all” was her mother’s favorite mantra. By the age of 12 - while other kids were still tinkering with their Easy-Bake ovens - Julia was wowing friends and families with lavishly decorated yeast breads and multi-layer tortes. (Julia was also known on occasion to whip up a very lifelike soap and mud frosting cake for her sometimes pesky little sister.)

Julia worked as a mechanical engineer and management consultant after graduating from Yale in 1984, but even while climbing the corporate ladder, she never put aside her appetite for baking. In 1994, Julia decided to turn her passion into her profession by enrolling in the Cambridge School of Culinary Arts. She graduated valedictorian, receiving the coveted M.F.K. Fisher Prize for outstanding scholarship in 1996. One year later, Julia opened AzucArte, a boutique bakery widely lauded for its wedding cakes that tasted as wonderful as they looked. Julia now satisfies her sweet tooth with food writing and styling. She is Contributing Editor at *Dessert Professional*, a 2008 James Beard Foundation Journalism Awards finalist, and an entertaining consultant, party producer, and prop stylist for *St. Louis AT HOME* magazine. Her work, written and edible, has appeared in *Vera Wang on Weddings*, *Bon Appétit*, *Fine Cooking*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Mary Engelbreit’s Home Companion*, *Gastronomica*, and nearly every national bridal magazine.

When not baking, Julia serves as a Director of the International Association of Culinary Professionals. She is also a founding member of the St. Louis chapter of Les Dames d’ Escoffier International and a three-time President of the St. Louis Culinary Society. In addition to her degree from Yale, Julia holds a master’s degree in mechanical engineering from the University of California, Berkeley, and an MBA from Stanford.

## Recommended Interview Topics

Having worn a number of hats both within the food world and beyond, Julia is well equipped to handle a diverse array of interview topics related to both *Cookie Swap* and her personal journey toward *Cookie Swap*:

### Directly related to *Cookie Swap*:

- How to easily and cost effectively host an “over-the-top” swap (or party of any kind) that guests will forever remember (following the 3-step framework in *Cookie Swap*: Select a Theme, Focus on the Defining Details, Distinguish the Details)
- Tricks for enhancing your creativity and the ah-ha factor in your events (such as repurposing, personalizing, having edibles do double-duty both on the menu and as décor)
- How to plan a stress-free cookie swap (following the 4-Step “Cookie Swap Countdown” in *Cookie Swap*)
- How to create any one of the magical cookie “construction” projects in *Cookie Swap* (ranging from “planted” cookie garden pots and birdhouses to gingerbread May Day and Easter baskets to wedding cake cookie-toppers and edible Christmas wreaths)
- The tricks to baking great cookies of any kind (general tips that all cookie bakers should know, as well as tips specific to baking any one of the 7 types of cookies – bar, rolled, hand-shaped, etc. – showcased in *Cookie Swap*)
- How to make any one of the whimsical and seasonally themed cookies in *Cookie Swap* (such as the “hamburgers” and “hotdogs” at the summer beach bash, the “peanut butter and jelly sandwiches” in the back-to-school chapter, or the “witches’ fingers,” “cobweb” cookies, and “friendly ghosts” at the Halloween fest)

### Related to Julia’s journey toward *Cookie Swap*:

- As a former mechanical engineer and business consultant who found her calling in food later in life, Julia knows all about the trials and triumphs of career transitions. Julia will candidly share her tips for navigating the often bumpy course of career-changing – a topic likely to be especially resonant with those forced to reevaluate existing jobs - or find new ones - during these tough economic times.
- How to get a cookbook published in today’s dynamic, cost-sensitive, and celebrity-centric book publishing environment. (Julia will share tips on the merits of self-publishing versus conventional publishing, developing a proposal, building a platform as a non-celebrity, and finding and working with a literary agent)
- How to go about marketing a cookbook in a world where publishers are scaling back on traditional book tours and other means of marketing (Julia will address low-cost guerilla marketing tactics that any author can pursue with a focus on Internet and, in particular, social networking strategies.)

## Recommended Event Formats

Julia is open to conducting a wide range of *Cookie Swap* events at bookshops and cooking schools, both professional and avocational. Here is a list of the event formats that she has found most successful to date:

### For bookstores with no kitchen facilities:

- A short 15- to 30-minute cookie talk (covering any of the interview topics above) followed by a Q& A period and book signing
- The above event, but supplemented with cookie samples baked by bookstore employees or friends (Julia can assist with baking when her travel schedule permits, provided kitchen access can be arranged. To help with cookie prep, some of Julia's favorite *Cookie Swap* recipes can be found on her website: [www.juliausher.com](http://www.juliausher.com).)
- A staged cookie swap, where bookstore employees or friends bake off a few batches of *Cookie Swap* cookies and attendees bring others to share, followed by a Q&A period and book signing

### For cooking schools or bookstores with kitchen and demonstration facilities:

- Any of the above event formats, plus:
- A cookie decorating demonstration, where Julia showcases the 11 decorating techniques discussed in *Cookie Swap*. Techniques range from beginner (i.e., top coating, outlining, beadwork) to advanced (i.e., papering, stenciling, painting) and, as such, this format can be easily tailored to both professional and home bakers.
- A hands-on cookie decorating class, where Julia combines demonstration of the 11 decorating techniques in *Cookie Swap* with active class involvement. *Note:* This format generally requires more prep time on the part of the host than does the simpler demo format, above.
- A cookie baking demonstration, typically themed to the season, in which Julia makes 4 to 5 recipes from her book, sharing helpful hints along the way.