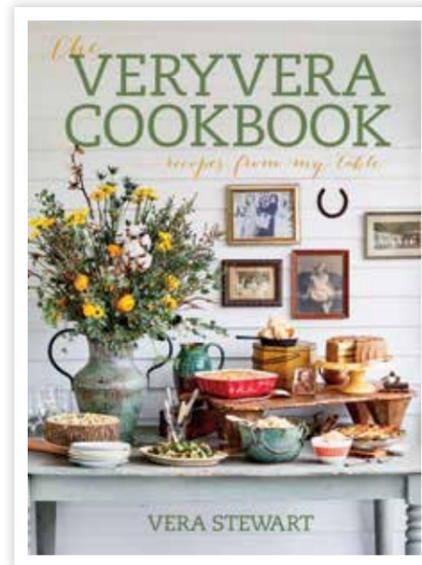


Tried and True

Plan a no-fuss, no-fail party with *The VeryVera Cookbook*

BY BETTY TERRY / RECIPES AND PHOTOS REPRINTED, WITH PERMISSION, FROM *THE VERYVERA COOKBOOK: RECIPES FROM MY TABLE* BY VERA STEWART (STORY FARM, 2018)



VERA STEWART DIDN'T SET OUT TO BECOME A FOOD INDUSTRY MOGUL. In 1984, she started a catering business in Augusta, Georgia, because she thought it would give her more time to spend with her two growing boys, John and Daniel. Today she is a well-known entrepreneur and businesswoman in Augusta, thanks to her successful catering business, widely sold mail-order confections, summer cooking camp for children, and cooking show, *The VeryVera Show*, which is syndicated in eight markets. In her new cookbook, *The VeryVera Cookbook: Recipes from My Table*, she shares recipes from her mail-order gourmet foods business and a little bit about her approach to working in the food industry.

In the introduction to your cookbook, you say, "It all starts with a recipe." How so? When I was young, I was fascinated by the exchange of recipes—in conversation over dinner, at family reunions. Someone would always ask, "Will you give me the recipe for that dish?" Back then, most of the recipes were handwritten, and you knew whose recipe it was because you recognized their handwriting. My business all started with a recipe. I couldn't start a catering business without recipes that I knew were tried and true, that worked well whatever the occasion might be.

Your business has spanned a lot of incarnations—from catering to your mail-order businesses, VeryVera and Gourmet to Go, to now *The VeryVera Show*. Did you have a plan? I was raising two little boys. I didn't want to be in a business where I wasn't able to be home when they got home from school. Catering was just a perfect world for me. My husband was extremely supportive. If I had to work on Friday night or all day Saturday for a wedding, that was time the boys spent with their dad. My idea for diversification was the mail-order business. I adapted my grandmother's cake recipes to be ordered online.

What was it like to go up against Bobby Flay in a Food Network throwdown for carrot cake? In 2011, I was approached by a scout from the fledgling Cooking Channel, who asked, "Would you consider yourself an expert on carrot cake?" I would have said yes to whatever they asked. They came to Augusta to film the show, and a few minutes into the show, I noticed people pointing at the front row. My whole life flashed before my eyes as I made eye contact with Bobby Flay! As soon as I saw his face, I knew I was on *Throwdown with Bobby Flay*. I had no idea I was going to be on his show. But he was wonderful. He was extremely gracious and very nice. And I won.

The recipes in your cookbook seem very approachable—easy recipes that every Southern hostess should have in her repertoire. Most of them are from your mail-order business, right? The thing that sets my cookbook apart is that I had a product that was extremely successful. VeryVera was a recognized name in the food boutique



business. We had mail-order customers in every state. My former customers haven't been able to get VeryVera products in four years. If you were going to make a cake, whose recipe would you choose?

When someone is planning a party, what's the most important element—the menu, the food, the table setting? All of those things are important, but I would start with the presentation. What I think puts a modern twist on any party is to decide what serving pieces you're going to use first. What's the look you're going after? Go

ahead and pull out the pieces you want to use. Ask yourself, "What food would look good in those pieces?"

That's why at the end of the book, I have included menus with page numbers for each recipe. Instead of serving meatloaf for dinner with mashed potatoes and creamed spinach, serve it as a stack. That's what's popular now. Layer potatoes, spinach, then a slice of meat loaf, cut in half, on top with French-fried onion rings. You've taken your granny's recipe for meat loaf and turned it into something that you might eat at a five-star restaurant.



Raspberry Swirl Cake

MAKES 1 (12-CUP) BUNDT CAKE

With its pink swirl in the center, this Raspberry Swirl Cake is a beautiful cake to serve for teas, for bridal parties, or even for Mother's Day.

CAKE:

- 1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 3 cups granulated sugar
- ¾ cup heavy cream, at room temperature
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon lemon extract
- ¼ cup raspberry liqueur*

- 3 cups cake flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 6 large eggs, at room temperature
- ½ cup raspberry pie filling
- Floured baking spray

GLAZE:

- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon water
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ⅛ teaspoon butter flavoring
- 1 tablespoon raspberry liqueur*

1. For cake: Preheat the oven to 325°.
2. Beat butter and sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle

attachment on medium speed for 20 minutes, or until light and fluffy.

3. In a small bowl, whisk together cream, vanilla and lemon extracts, and raspberry liqueur. In a separate bowl, whisk together cake flour and salt.

4. Scrape sides and bottom of butter mixture bowl. Add eggs one at a time with mixer on low speed, beating well after each addition. Scrape sides and bottom of bowl again. Let mixture beat on low speed for 5 minutes.

5. With mixer on low speed, alternately add flour mixture and cream mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Mix until well blended. Scrape sides of bowl and incorporate any unmixed batter, if necessary.

6. In a separate bowl, add 1 cup of batter and raspberry pie filling; mix by hand until well blended. Pour raspberry mixture back into mixing bowl with remaining batter, and swirl with a spatula. This process should take no more than 3 folds.

7. Spray a 12-cup Bundt pan with baking spray with flour.

8. Pour batter into prepared Bundt pan until it is about 1 to 1½ inches from the top. Tap pan on the counter to ensure there are no air bubbles. (If there is remaining batter, use it to make muffins.)

Bake for 1 hour and 20 minutes. Insert a wooden skewer into the cake, and if there is no cake on the skewer, it is done. Cool cake in pan, on a wire rack, for 15 minutes. Place wire rack on top of cake pan and flip the pan over. Gently lift pan, being careful not to remove any of outside crust.

9. For glaze: Combine sugar, lemon juice, and water in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes or until mixture is smooth and not grainy.

10. Remove from heat and add vanilla, butter flavoring, and raspberry liqueur. Stir until well blended.

11. Using a pastry brush, generously douse curved top of cake with glaze. Cake should appear shiny with glaze but not saturated. Allow glaze to dry, about 30 minutes, before wrapping. Any leftover glaze can be refrigerated for up to 2 weeks.

*We used Razzmatazz®



Visit veryvera.com for more information about Vera Stewart and her cooking show, VeryVera.

Roasted Tomato Basil Soup

MAKES 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

Served every Wednesday at the VeryVera Café, this soup was a favorite of customers in Augusta. It's a labor of love, but the result is completely worth the effort.

- 6 Roma tomatoes, sliced in half lengthwise
- 2 tablespoons garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Kosher salt, to taste
Ground black pepper, to taste

- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes, with juice
- 1½ cups fresh basil, roughly chopped
- 2 tablespoons salted butter
- 3 cups Vidalia onions, finely chopped
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons garlic salt
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 6½ cups chicken broth
- 1 cup whole milk
- Parmesan cheese, hand-shredded, for garnish

1. Preheat the oven to 325°.
2. Toss tomatoes with the garlic, oil, salt, and pepper. Place tomatoes on a

parchment-lined sheet pan and roast in the preheated oven for 25 minutes.

3. When cooled, remove skins of tomatoes and discard.

4. Purée peeled and roasted Roma tomatoes, canned diced tomatoes, and basil in a food processor until smooth.

5. In a large soup pot, melt butter and sauté chopped onions until translucent.

6. Add flour to onions and stir, making sure there are no lumps. Add garlic salt, sugar, chicken broth, milk, and tomato purée to the pot and stir until thoroughly blended. Cook until heated through.

7. Serve hot with shredded Parmesan cheese as garnish. ■