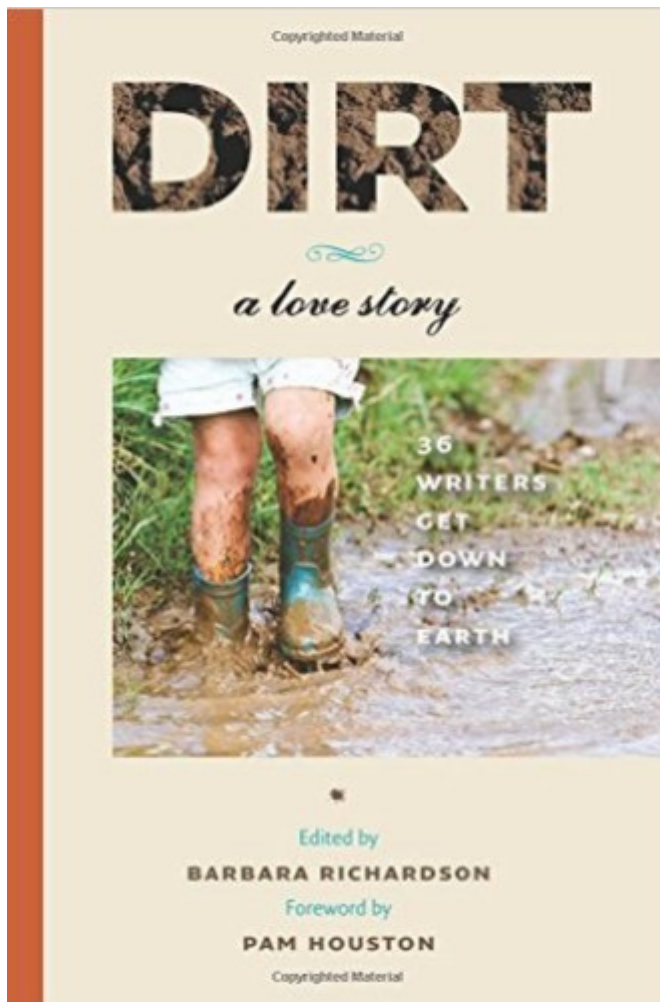


Terra Brockman's Christmas picks

selected by [Terra Brockman](#) in the [December 9, 2015](#) issue

In Review



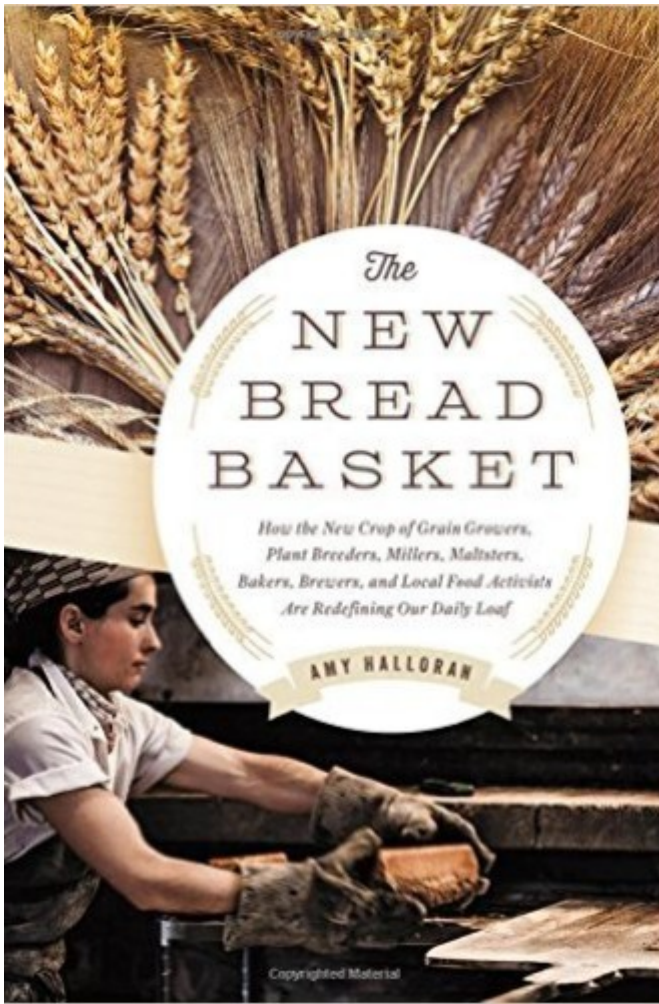
Dirt

edited by Barbara Richardson
ForeEdge



City Creatures

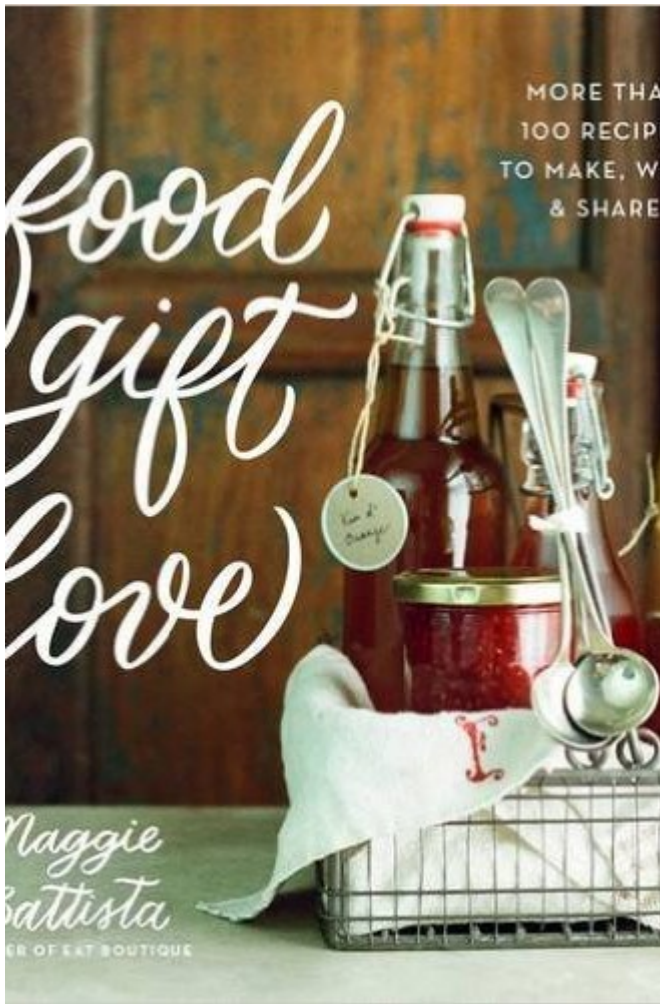
edited by Gavin Van Horn and Dave Aftandilian
University Of Chicago Press



The New Bread Basket

by Amy Halloran

Chelsea Green Publishing



Food Gift Love

by Maggie Battista

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

My Christmas picks take you from the soil to the supper table. The essays in *Dirt: A Love Story* (ForeEdge Books) celebrate the mystery and meaning of soil. Artists, scientists, farmers, and writers take you from community gardens transforming the Bronx to the oldest soils in the world in Venezuela to the past and possible future of the Oklahoma Dust Bowl. In the essay “We Are Soil,” Vandana Shiva reminds us that what we do to the soil we do to ourselves. From cautionary tales to joyous down-and-dirty revels, these essays will have you agreeing with filmmaker and essayist Deborah Koons Garcia that “soil is one of the true miracles of this planet.”

Even more wide-ranging is *City Creatures: Animal Encounters in the Chicago Wilderness* (University of Chicago Press). Over 50 artists, poets, and essayists

explore the seeming oxymoron “Chicago wilderness.” From the boundary-blurring still-life photographs of Evanston artist Julie Meridian to biologist Curt Meine’s wrenching essay about the alewife of Lake Michigan, this book will move you in unexpected ways. (*City Creatures* includes an essay about urban chickens that I first wrote for the *Century*.)

Bread has been around for some 30,000 years, yet over the past century we’ve lost the love of bread, largely because we’ve lost many varieties of wheat and other grains, the local infrastructure for milling, and the art and science of true artisan baking. In *The New Bread Basket* (Chelsea Green Publishers), Amy Halloran introduces us to the seed breeders, farmers, millers, bakers, and food activists who are working to return great bread to its rightful place on our tables.

Finally, since it’s the season to prepare, share, and enjoy food, I recommend *Food Gift Love*, by the food-gift guru Maggie Battista (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). No amount of advertising glitz can compete with making food with love, wrapping it with care, and presenting it to someone. If you’re not a cook, make a gift of one of the homemade flavor-infused salts or sugars mentioned in this book. If you know your way around the kitchen, whip up some Cranberry Crumb Muffins, Smoky Candied Popcorn, or Red Wine Chocolate Truffles.