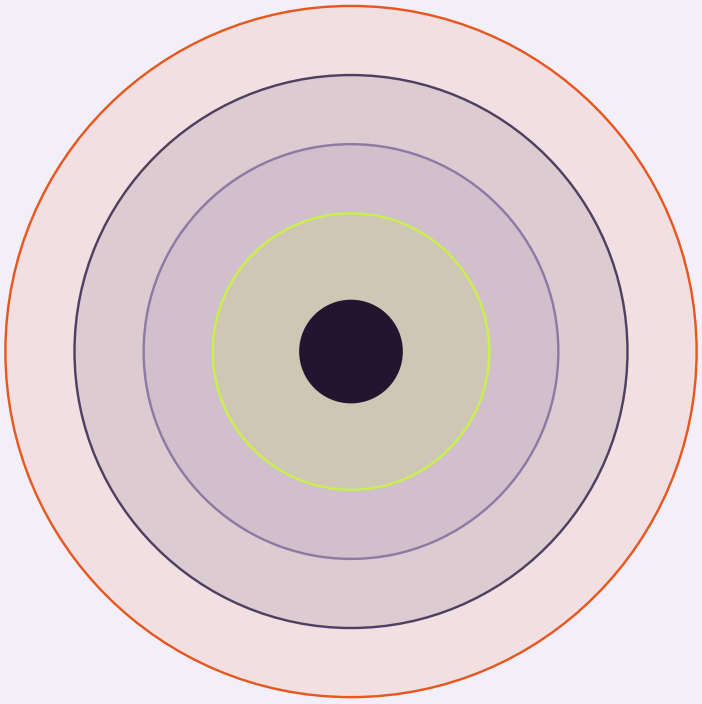


Bowls: Vibrant Recipes with Endless Possibilities

A reading of the book by America's Test Kitchen (2019)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Bowls: Vibrant Recipes with Endless Possibilities, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

America's Test Kitchen is the Boston test kitchen behind the magazines Cook's Illustrated and Cook's Country and the public-television shows America's Test Kitchen and Cook's Country. Bowls collects 75 one-bowl meals in four chapters: salad bowls, grain and bean bowls, noodle bowls and soup bowls. Its approach is that a satisfying meal can be built from a few parts, such as a base, something hearty, vegetables, a sauce and a crunchy topping, and that most of those parts can be made ahead. A closing Bowl Basics chapter covers the building blocks on their own, from grains to quick pickles, dressings and sauces, so readers can mix and match. Most recipes are sized for two, each explains why it works, and many end with suggested swaps, including vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free versions.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A bowl is a meal made of parts, so you can cook the parts and assemble the meal.

The book builds each bowl from a few pieces: a base, something hearty, vegetables, a sauce and a topping. Once you see dinner that way, it stops being one big task and becomes several small ones you can do at different times.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Most of the work can happen before you are hungry.

America's Test Kitchen stresses that almost every component can be made in advance. Grains, beans, roasted vegetables, pickles and sauces keep for a few days, so a weeknight bowl becomes assembly instead of cooking.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The sauce is what turns a pile of good things into one dish.

Plain grain and vegetables are fine. A bright dressing or a savory, spicy sauce is what ties them together. The Bowl Basics chapter treats dressings and sauces as building blocks of their own, so one jar can carry several different meals.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Crunch and acid keep a bowl from tasting flat.

Soft grains and tender proteins need contrast. Quick pickles, toasted nuts and seeds, and crisp raw vegetables supply it, and Bowl Basics includes quick pickles for exactly this job. They are often the cheapest part of the bowl.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Change the base and the same ingredients become a different dinner.

The four chapters, salad, grain and bean, noodle and soup, are really four kinds of base. Put the same protein and vegetables on greens one night and in broth the next, and the week feels varied without a longer shopping list.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A recipe is a starting point, not a rulebook.

Many recipes close with a Customize It note that suggests swaps and additions, and the publisher counts more than 100 of these suggestions. The point is to cook with what you have instead of shopping for one perfect list.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Small households deserve recipes sized for them.

The recipes are sized for two to four servings rather than a crowd. That suits couples, small households and anyone tired of leftovers they never finish. Small batches of several parts go further across a week than one big pot of one dish.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Know why a step works and you know what you can change.

Like other America's Test Kitchen books, each recipe explains why it works. Understanding the reason behind a technique tells you which parts you can swap freely and which ones hold the dish together.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Color in the bowl is a quick check on variety.

The book's bowls are meant to look vibrant, with greens, oranges, reds and purples side by side. A bowl that is all beige is usually missing a vegetable or something fresh.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Pick two bases for the week
- [ ] Make one sauce and one dressing
- [ ] Start a jar of quick pickles
- [ ] Set up a toppings shelf
- [ ] Batch one protein for three bowls

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Hold a weekly prep hour
- ◯ Assemble, don't cook, on weeknights
- ◯ Change one part at a time

30 days · Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Pick two bases for the week

Choose two bases, such as one grain and one noodle or a bag of sturdy greens, and write them at the top of your shopping list.

Two gives you variety without a crowded fridge.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Make one sauce and one dressing

Pick one creamy or spicy sauce and one sharp vinaigrette.

Make both on your prep day and keep them in labeled jars in the fridge.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Start a jar of quick pickles

Thinly slice one vegetable, such as carrots or red onion, and cover it with a simple vinegar brine.

A jar adds sharpness to bowls all week.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Set up a toppings shelf

Keep three crunchy toppings together in one spot, for example toasted sesame seeds, roasted peanuts and pumpkin seeds.

When you can see them, the last step is easy.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Batch one protein for three bowls

Cook one protein in a quantity that covers three bowls: a tray of tofu, a few chicken thighs, a pot of beans or a batch of eggs.

Store it on its own so it can go into different bowls.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Hold a weekly prep hour

Pick one hour on the same day each week to cook the base, the protein and the sauce.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Assemble, don't cook, on weeknights

On busy nights, only reheat, slice and top.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
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30						

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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Change one part at a time

When a bowl starts to bore you, swap one part, such as the sauce or the base, and keep the rest.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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30 ○						

December 2026

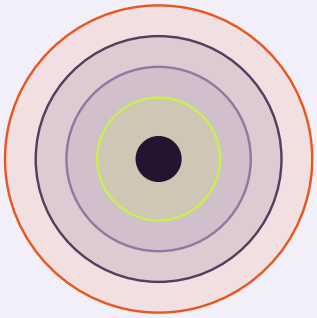
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Cook the parts once. Build a different dinner every night.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN