



Cover of *Quick and Easy Jell-O Wonder Dishes*, ca. 1930.

Wiggly Wonders

Remember Fig Fluff, a delectable dish of fig preserves mixed with lemon-flavored Jell-O? Or perhaps cardinal salad—a confection of lemon Jell-O, beets, horseradish, and celery—might ring a bell? These mostly forgotten dishes are just two high-

CHF's Jell-O cookbooks offer a glimpse into relationships between producers and consumers in the early 20th century.

lights from a collection of brand-name cookbooks recently acquired by CHF.

The first few decades of the 20th century witnessed the introduction of any number of convenience-based food products that brought chemistry into the kitchen. Manufacturers published cookbooks offering recipes that used their products both as a means of advertising and as a way to teach home cooks how to inte-

grate these new foods into their meals. Titles such as *Twenty-Four Pies Men Like*, for example, instructed young housewives on the proper use of Crisco in pie crusts. Other cookbooks in the collection suggest uses for Borden's Evaporated Milk, Fleischmann's Yeast, Armour's Star Ham, Rumford Baking Powder, and Wesson Oil.

CHF's Jell-O cookbooks, *The New Jell-O Book of Surprises* and *Quick and Easy Jell-O Wonder Dishes*, offer a glimpse into relationships between producers and consumers in the early 20th century. Before Jell-O was introduced in 1897, gelatin dishes were largely the province of the well-to-do. Gelatin could be prepared by extracting collagen either from animal parts directly or from sheets of prepared gelatin that had to be purified by boiling it with egg whites. Jell-O remained a niche product until 1904,

when the brand's new owner, the Genesee Food Company, produced the first Jell-O cookbooks, offering its customers hundreds of uses for its strawberry, raspberry, orange, lemon, cherry, and chocolate flavored Jell-O. Meanwhile, the company launched an advertising campaign with the slogan, "America's Most Famous Dessert." Soon Jell-O salads, desserts, and even entrees were considered the height of fashion and elegance. But Jell-O also used

hydration technologies and bright, modern colors. This scientific edge, when combined with its possibilities for sprucing up leftovers, made cooking with Jell-O a way for housewives to declare their allegiance to modern methods of home economy. Lushly illustrated with drawings of women being served Jell-O at glamorous dining affairs, Jell-O cookbooks served up fantasy with a dash of practicality.—AW

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Distillations, a weekly podcast, brings CHF's historians to the fore, examining current scientific issues through interviews, monologues, reviews, features, and more.



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