

Review: Creating virtual recipe box can be a snap

August 19 2009, By DEBORAH YAO , AP Business Writer



In this screen grab image released by Lakefront Software Inc., a recipe from www.bigoven.com is shown. (AP Photo/Lakefront Software Inc.)

(AP) -- For years, I have tucked away recipe cards of all shapes and sizes in nooks and crannies of my kitchen, determined that one day I would actually use them. Sadly, for many recipes, that day never came, partly because they were so disorganized.

But cooking has been on my mind lately, thanks to Meryl Streep and her hilarious rendition of Julia Child in the new movie "Julie & Julia." Streep became my inspiration to get organized - and in this digital age, what could be more fitting than using software to create a virtual recipe box?

Finding the right program took time, however.

Some free programs were surreptitiously loaded with advertising and user-tracking software, while trial copies of a few others didn't provide enough access to the paid version's features to let me try before I buy. In one trial copy, an annoying window kept popping up urging me to buy the full version for \$79.95.

Furthermore, some software programs had no download option. With so many recipe software choices out there, I had no patience to wait for a CD by mail.

In the end, I narrowed my choices to three downloadable programs for Windows-based computers: Living Cookbook, eChef and BigOven for Windows Deluxe Edition. All three let me test most or all of the features for 30 days before buying.

The \$39.95 eChef software was the simplest to use, but it lacked some features I wanted, such as automatic nutrition calculation.

Living Cookbook, available for \$34.95 through its Web site, had good training tutorials and the ability to create a cookbook for free, complete with a glossary of recipes. It was my second choice.

BigOven edged ahead with its extensive social-networking features. At \$29.95, BigOven also was the cheapest of the three finalists.

BigOven - the brainchild of Steve Murch, an entrepreneur who previously held management positions at Microsoft Corp. - is easy to use and versatile enough for even the most exacting cooks.

Once you create a recipe, you can share it on the BigOven Web site, from which you can also add the recipe to Facebook. You can upload

videos of yourself cooking, and perhaps be the next Internet star chef. BigOven even has a free iPhone app that links to your free BigOven.com online account.

BigOven offers a tutorial that walks you through the basic features, similar to other recipe programs.

Creating a recipe was a snap, although you have to type them all in, one by one. There is no option for scanning recipes in, though even if there were, converting handwriting could be problematic and potentially more time-consuming because of corrections you might have to make.

I made a digital recipe from memory for my home rendition of pasta puttanesca, my best effort at replicating the divine version I once ate in Positano, Italy.

I could e-mail the recipe or share it on Facebook, but I opted to post the recipe to BigOven.com. It was my first time ever to share a recipe online, and I felt a rush. People can try the recipe and comment on it, but alas, after five days, still nary a response.

To create a virtual recipe box to store my favorite recipes, I simply clicked on "file" followed by "new recipe box" - which I named "French Cooking and more."

I wanted to fill it with other people's recipes from BigOven.com, but only those given five-star ratings by other cooks like me. Why waste time on something substandard? In keeping with the French theme in "Julie & Julia," I chose duck confit, bouillabaisse and Coquilles St. Jacques. After I try their recipes, I'll be sure to leave feedback.

I must confess that I got hooked on the "import" button. I find a recipe and click on "import" and - bam! - it magically saves to my recipe box.

Recipes can be tagged for easier searching. There are preset tags or you can create your own, like "Billy's favorite," giving you an easy way to pull out Billy's favorites whenever Billy's a bit fussy. One downside: Custom tags only give you 15 characters, so "Billy's favorites" actually came out as "Billy's favorit."

There are several search options to find a unique recipe. You can narrow down a recipe by rating, ingredient, cuisine, title and tags. So a search for mom's special turkey meatball recipe that was rated five stars by the family, and is Billy's favorite, will float to the top if these terms were used in the search.

BigOven also sports a shopping list that is a notch above those found in rival programs. I like the fact that it categorizes ingredients by grocery department.

So before I prepare a meal, I simply click "Add Shop" to get all the needed ingredients and their quantities onto my shopping list. I then can delete items I already have. Alternatively, I can drag and drop a recipe into the shopping list. Before heading to the grocery store, I can print the list out or send it to a Palm or Windows mobile device.

Meal planning is easy: Clicking "Add Cal" inserts the recipe into a calendar.

BigOven lets you create a custom cookbook as well, complete with a dedication page and colorful picture covers. It's \$29.95 and up, through BigOven.com, on top of the price for the software.

Other [recipe](#) programs let you make a personal cookbook without an additional charge, but they can look like the amateur efforts they really are. BigOven's custom cookbook is nice enough to be given away as a gift.

It's about time I organized my recipes and BigOven makes it inexpensive, easy and engaging. "Julie & Julia" got me jazzed about cooking again. I still have that collection of French Provençal recipes somewhere around the house. I think I'll start there.

On the Net:

BigOven: <http://www.bigoven.com>

Living Cookbook: <http://www.livingcookbook.com>

eChef: <http://www.echefsoftware.com>

©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Review: Creating virtual recipe box can be a snap (2009, August 19) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-08-virtual-recipe-snap.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--