

Organic cooking more than tofu

Most of recipes are favourites of customers

By LOIS LEGGE
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Their names may not automatically make mouths water.

But Diane Shaskin says there's plenty of delicious taste behind recipes like Trans-fat Free Pie Crust and Chocolate Tofu Icing and a host of other dishes in her new book, *The Planet Organic Market Cookbook*.

"I'm a foodie ... and all of these recipes that are in this book, they have to taste good," says the Victoria author, who has personally made and taste-tested all the appetizers, entrées; snacks and desserts in the book.

"I stand behind each one of these recipes."

Most of those recipes have already stood the taste test of consumers across the country. They're staples at the delis located inside the *organic food* stores founded by Shaskin and her husband, Mark Craft.

The couple started the *Planet Organic Market* in 1993 as a small store in Edmonton. Then, with their business partner Darren Krissie, they took the company public in 2000, expanding it into a national chain.

Planet Organic now has eight stores from Victoria to Halifax, selling 100 per cent certified organic produce and other pesticide- and chemical-free foods.

The cookbook, available only in those stores for now, is an extension of an ever-expanding market for the more flavourful, chemical-free foods that come with organic growing practices, says the author, who became a "convert" of *organic foods* after opening her first store.

Many of her customers first started buying organic as the result of a serious health scare, digestive problems or allergies, Shaskin says during a recent telephone interview. But she says they get hooked by the fresher taste.

"People will come in and they'll buy a few things and they'll try it out and they'll test it and they'll say, 'You know what? Those organic strawberries were so good'" and that will kind of reinforce in them that maybe we should go back" and try other things.

"They notice the taste. ... It tastes more like what it's supposed to taste like. You know, we've all gone to the store and bought big red-looking strawberries and brought them home

and you're like, 'Oh, these taste like cardboard.'"

But despite the benefits, buying or baking organic doesn't have to mean a complete lifestyle change, Shaskin says.

Consumers should start small by buying their children organic fruit juice, for instance, or by introducing a caffeine-loving spouse to organically grown coffee, she says.

"There you've made one decision. ... You haven't said, 'Oh, I'm going to change everything in my life.'"

In the case of the cookbook recipes, using more organic ingredients such as tofu, or sea salt, or cane and Demerara sugars, can green up main and other courses without washing out taste.

Those sugars and sea salt, for instance, have trace minerals missing from their processed cousins, says Shaskin, who doesn't even keep white sugar in the house.

And despite tofu naysayers,



the author insists that too is a treat.

"I hear a lot of people say, 'Oh, I don't like tofu.' And I'm like, 'What is not to love?' Tofu is like the chicken breast of the vegetable world. It absorbs every flavour you put on it. It's easy too, it tastes good, it's high in protein, it's low in fat," she says, adding the Tofu Sesame Snacks in the cookbook are especially popular and delicious.

So are desserts like Vegan Cupcakes and Cosmic Cookies, she says.

Planet Organic's Edmonton store sells 1,500 of the cookies each week.

"And in Halifax . . . they can't keep enough people making those cookies," Shaskin adds, although she didn't have exact sales figures for that store.

"We could actually have a team of people just making cookies."

COSMIC COOKIES

560 ml (2 1/4 cups) quick-cooking oats
 500 ml (2 cups) spelt flour
 250 ml (1 cup) sunflower seeds
 210 ml (3/4 cup + 2 tbsp) pumpkin seeds
 125 ml (1/2 cup) shredded coconut, unsweetened
 60 ml (1/4 cup) flax seeds
 250 ml (1 cup) granulated cane sugar
 15 ml (1 tbsp) cinnamon, ground
 11 ml (2 1/4 tsp) sea salt
 430 ml (1 3/4 cups) dark chocolate chips
 310 ml (1 1/4 cups) raisins
 60 ml (1/4 cup) water
 60 ml (1/4 cup) blackstrap molasses
 180 ml (3/4 cup) canola oil

250 ml (1 cup) soy milk

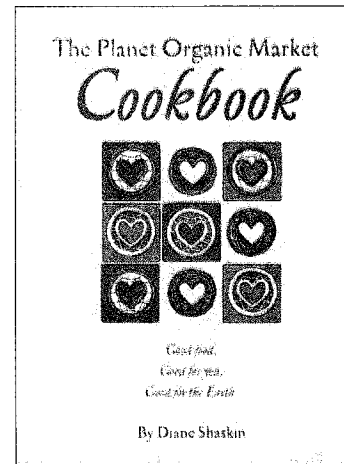
Preheat oven to 177 C (350 F). Line baking trays with parchment paper. In large bowl combine dry ingredients. In separate large bowl, combine wet ingredients, from water to soy milk. Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients and mix at low speed (or by hand) until just combined. Do not over-mix.

Portion cookie dough using a 75-ml (1/3-cup) measure and place onto lined baking tray. Gently flatten cookies before baking. Bake for 24 minutes or until lightly browned. Yields 24 cookies.

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Diane Shaskin and her husband started the Planet Organic Market in 1993 in Edmonton. Now there are eight stores across the country and Shaskin has a new cookbook based on organic cooking.



The Planet Organic Market Cookbook includes recipes featured at the stores, including Cosmic Cookies, one of the stores' most popular items.