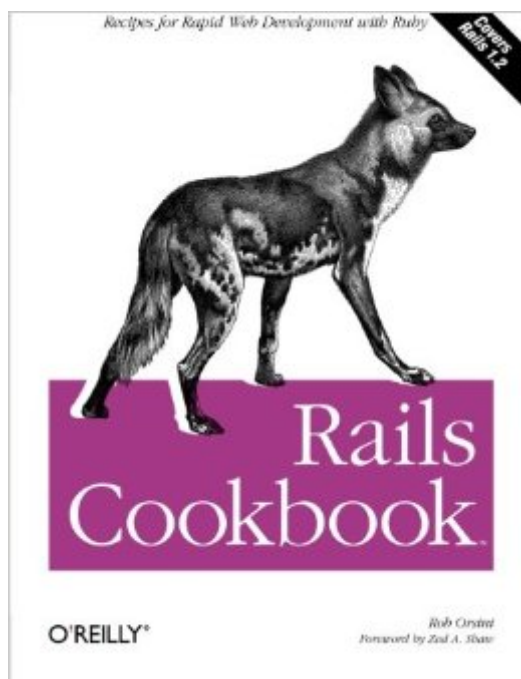


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Rails Cookbook (Cookbooks (O'Reilly))



Synopsis

Rails Cookbook is packed with the solutions you need to be a proficient developer with Rails, the leading framework for building the new generation of Web 2.0 applications. Recipes range from the basics, like installing Rails and setting up your development environment, to the latest techniques, such as developing RESTful web services. With applications that are code light, feature-full and built to scale quickly, Rails has revolutionized web development. The Rails Cookbook addresses scores of real-world challenges; each one includes a tested solution, plus a discussion of how and why it works, so that you can adapt the techniques to similar situations. Topics include: Modeling data with the ActiveRecord library Setting up views with ActionView and RHTML templates Building your application's logic into ActionController Testing and debugging your Rails application Building responsive web applications using JavaScript and Ajax Ensuring that your application is security and performs well Deploying your application with Mongrel and Apache Using Capistrano to automate deployment Using the many Rails plugins Working with graphics Whether you're new to Rails or an experienced developer, you'll discover ways to test, debug and secure your applications, incorporate Ajax, use caching to improve performance, and put your application into production. Want to get ahead of the Web 2.0 curve? This valuable cookbook will save you hundreds of hours when developing applications with Rails.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This really is not intended to be a tutorial on Rails, but as with all of the O'Reilly cookbooks, it is a collection of solutions to common problems involving Rails. However the recipes in the early chapters are so basic, it in fact, serves two purposes. The early chapters gets the Rails novice up and running, and the later chapters serve up answers to many of the problems that Rails developers of all skill levels have. Therefore, the reader should already be experienced at web development, and be a Rails user of any level of experience including novice. Other frameworks are often designed such that if you can make the leap of understanding their complexities, you can solve many problems. The core developers of the Rails framework differed in their approach and designed a framework that solves simple problems easily and very well. From that juncture, you can easily work up to more difficult problems. The following is the table of contents:

Chapter 1. Getting Started - Deals with the basics such as joining the Rails community, finding documentation, and installation.

Chapter 2. Rails Development - Recipes on setting up your environment, starting your first Rails applications, and generating Ruby documentation for your application.

Chapter 3. Active Record - 22 recipes on "Active Record", which is a persistent storage mechanism for interacting with a relational database.

Chapter 4. Action Controller - 16 recipes on "Action Controller", which receives requests and passes them on to a specific action.

Chapter 5. Action View - 16 recipes on dealing with the presentation details of your Rails application.

Chapter 6. RESTful Development - An odd little chapter of only 6 recipes about breaking down HTTP requests to a natural, human-language type structure where there are verbs and nouns. This chapter has an academic feel to it.

Chapter 7. Rails Application Testing - 24 recipes on the subject of testing from the perspective of test driven development. Covers Rake, Rcov, YAML fixtures, and CSV fixtures.

Chapter 8. JavaScript and Ajax - 13 recipes on using Javascript and Ajax from within the Rails framework. Shows you how to deal with JavaScript using Ruby code, among other things.

Chapter 9. Action Mailer - 6 recipes that show show the three different ways to retrieve email and forward it to the receive method of your mailer class.

Chapter 10. Debugging Rails Applications - 12 recipes that include Rails' robust automated testing features and a number of tools that expose bugs in the inner workings of your program. Specifically Firefox extensions, the Javascript shell, and ruby-debug are mentioned, among others.

Chapter 11. Security - A short but important chapter of only 5 recipes that include security best practices, SQL injection, and cross-site scripting (XSS).

Chapter 12. Performance - 8 recipes dealing with web application performance. Covered topics include measuring, benchmarking, and improving performance as well as dealing with cached content.

Chapter 13. Hosting and Deployment - 14 recipes on the deployment of your Rails application. This section contains quite a bit of information on Capistrano, the tool of choice for the automated rollout of Rails applications.

Chapter

14. Extending Rails with Plug-ins - How to find and install plug-ins for tasks Rails was not designed to handle. Talks about some specific plug-ins such as `acts_as_versioned`, `acts_as_authenticated`, and `acts_as_taggable`, including what problems each plug-in solves. Chapter 15. Graphics - 7 recipes for dealing with tools for handling visual output. Topics include RMagick, which is an equivalent of image processing tool ImageMagick. Also described is how to generate PDF documents, Gruff, and accessing images via databases.

When reading the foreword of Rails Cookbook I felt a strong kinship with Zed Shaw, I too have fond memories of the first edition of Perl Cookbook and the way I relied on it once I'd taken the training wheels off. Since that one I have relied on several of the O'Reilly Cookbook series. It is only when I discard the early tutorial and dive in the deep end with a "cookbook" on my desk that I really start to learn proficiency. I felt timorous and unsure when I finished "Agile Web Development with Rails", a marvelous tutorial that introduced me to my first real web development framework (I must have enjoyed it, I just bought the second edition). Since I have volunteered to develop a fairly large and complex web application in Rails I awaited the arrival of my copy of Rails Cookbook with hopeful anticipation and bated breath. Rob Orsini, his fellow contributors (15 in all) and the team at O'Reilly have once again delivered. Compared to the previous titles in the series I've owned "Rails Cookbook" seems to have fewer recipes but as it is tackling an entire application framework and some serious issues, some of the solutions and discussions run a lot longer. The book is targeted at programmers who know something about web development but are early in their use of Rails, though it should be helpful to all Rails developers. The book starts with tackling issues of installation and getting development tools installed in the first two chapters. Despite already deploying a couple of simple Rails apps I found that there was the odd useful tip in these chapters. The book then covers each of the three main sections of Rails; Active Record, Action View and Action Controller. The rest of the book goes on with large chapters on testing, Javascript, debugging, performance and hosting and deployment. Along the way it also covers REST, Action Mailer, security, plug-ins and graphics. The extremely large section on Active Record was to me the most useful. I seem to spend an inordinate percentage of my Rails coding time with Active Record and it contains a large part of Rails power so I appreciated the size of this chapter. By contrast the chapter on graphics is almost entirely unread. It seems obvious that this book should be compared to Pragmatic's "Rails Recipes". The first point of difference is that Rails Cookbook covers installation and setup. The second point is that is 'Recipes' covers Rails 1.1 while 'Cookbook' targets the brand new Rails 1.2. As a project fairly new on the scene Rails is a fast moving target so the six months between the two

books makes a difference. Both books have excellent coverage of the various aspects of Rails, with a great deal of overlap. 'Recipes' has more, shorter pieces while 'Cookbook' tends towards longer pieces with more discussion. 'Cookbook' is also more general, with more recipes more likely to be useful in every Rails project you write. The style is different between the two. Here Cookbook comes off second best, it feels as though tightly edited by a number of hands and ends up lacking personality; functional but cold compared to Recipes. The writing, however, is good. It's easily read, at times it feels like a good textbook. The layout is clean, it is easy to find the information you need from each recipe when you want. With almost all "cookbook" style books I seem to be left feeling that a number of the recipes are just a little too obvious and covered well in beginner tutorials. There is some of this in Rails Cookbook, most notably the first two chapters, but overall the book will be useful to any beginner to intermediate Rails programmer. Personally I had a couple of moments where I read a tip and wanted to scream as it demonstrated and explained in a few short sentences and half a page of code what had taken me hours to discover for myself. The "Cookbook" series all seem to be books worth the price and shelf space. This one is no exception. I'd give it three out of five with an extra half for its timely information on Rails 1.2 and would recommend it for all Rails programmers from the absolute beginner through to all but the most experienced. If you already have a copy of 'Recipes' and are happy with it then you might want to stick with that till either volume is updated for the next major revision of Rails, otherwise you will almost certainly appreciate a copy of Rails Cookbook.

I've read Agile Development with Rails and Rails Recipes, but this book was still helpful for me. ADWR is more of a "This is how it works" while this book, like Rails Recipes, is a "Here's how to do the things you want to do" kind of book. I liked that the sections are presented in a problem/solution format; if you don't want to solve that problem, keep flipping. The recipes covered a range of beginner to more advanced topics: from installing rails to RESTful development, to invaluable information on different ways to deploy your rails application. The writing is straightforward, and I found it much easier to read and understand than Rails Recipes (IMHO). I have a feeling I'll be going back to reference this book frequently.

This book was probably extremely helpful to people starting out with Rails three or four years ago. However, Rails has changed significantly now and the code in this book is now out of date. This is especially true of the plugins it recommends. It is probably safe to assume that buying books on Rails that are more than two years old will mean relearning much of the content.

I just spent about 2+hr trying to figure out why one of the example recipes was giving me an error. Turns out the book covers Rails 1.2 and the latest (As of the time of this writing, August 2010) version is 2.1 (but it might have revved since I started typing this; it's Ruby after all). Shame on me for not checking. You might be able to use this book if you're totally brand new to Rails and/or Ruby and are just looking to get your feet wet PROVIDED you also have another tutorial/cookbook/website available to turn to when the recipes don't work.

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