

Jess Dang:

Hi, there. You're listening to Episode number 29 of the Cook Smarts Podcast. I'm Jess Dang, the founder of Cook Smarts, and I'm here to help you become a more confident and organized cook in the kitchen. Hi, friends. How are you? This is not an empty greeting. I truly want to know how you're doing, because if there's one thing that we've learned in the last month and a half, it's that a global pandemic is no joke. It's going to affect every single person in this world to some degree.

Jess Dang:

I so admire those who are on the front lines, whether it's medical workers or those who continue to show up at the grocery store or food bank and stock the shelves so the rest of us can shelter in place and enjoy meals at home. Honestly, every single one of them deserves a Medal of Bravery. Also, each and every one of you deserves some sort of medal for getting through this, because nobody has had it easy. The uncertainty and just the not knowing of when we're going to resume normal life is just hard on everybody's mental state.

Jess Dang:

For parents, I know that this has been unrelenting for you because it has been unrelenting for me. My husband and I have been wiping bottoms non-stop, breaking up fights between our two older kids all day long, navigating screen time negotiations, and just juggling three kids with three different nap schedules and three different bedtime schedules, all while running our respective businesses, it's been a lot.

Jess Dang:

Basically, it feels like we are being asked to run a marathon but at a sprinting pace. I am so out of breath and don't know how I can sustain this. Yet, the end feels so far off. I'm just wondering if anyone else feels this way?

Jess Dang:

For me, the breaks have actually come with the meals. I know you're thinking, "Jess, you are so weird." I'm sure you have cooked and cleaned up after more meals than you ever thought possible. When all the days blend together, for me, the meals are what makes the days distinct. When Wednesday is no different than Saturday anymore, I can at least say, "Wednesday was the day we ate that delicious bowl of ramen and Saturday was the day that mama made that pesto pasta you really liked." Yes, we have been having a lot of carbs at our house.

Jess Dang:

The meals are the moments where we can just stop and nourish ourselves. In other words, they kind of feel like my rest stops, if I'm comparing this to a marathon. I even enjoy the cleaning up process, because it just provides another moment of reset, both mentally and physically, for me before I have to get back onto the course again.

Jess Dang:

By no means am I saying that you should cook every meal while we're stuck at home. Believe me, there have been plenty of frozen chicken tenders and even some popsicles and brownies for lunch in my

house. If you can just shift your mindset a bit to allow the meals to be a moment of rest, it might just be what you need to sustain this marathon we're all doing together.

Jess Dang:

While we are a meal planning service, one of the most powerful features of our service is actually our recipe database. There are over 1,000 doable recipes in there that can be used for breakfast, lunch, or dinners. So many of our members have been just taking full advantage of it during this time when groceries are still a little bit uncertain. They get what they can get at the store and then plug it into our search bar to figure out what they can make with the ingredients that they've got. Even if meal planning isn't what you're looking for right now, it's still worth checking out the service just for access to our recipe archives. If you're not a member, just grab our free trial at [CookSmarts.com](https://www.cooksmarts.com) and bring, hopefully, a little rest to your day.

Jess Dang:

Now, on to today's podcast. Today, I invited Yvette Marquez to teach us all about Mexican food, specifically, all the pantry staples that define the cuisine. Yvette is a second generation Mexican-American, and she has been sharing cherished family Mexican recipes since 2010 on her food blog, *Muy Bueno Cooking*, which has been turned into its own cookbook. Yvette has also won an Emmy for her short film about *Dia de los Muertos*, and has also met two of my heroes, Oprah and Michelle Obama. This lady has accomplished a lot outside of her culinary achievements as well.

Jess Dang:

There are two reasons why I'm really excited about today's episode. One is that Mexican food is such a great cuisine to dig into for quarantine cooking. So many of their staples are just pantry staples that last forever, either dried beans, dried peppers, tortillas and cheese that can be frozen. The second reason is that I just love Mexican food. Like all cuisines, it can feel a little bit intimidating when you're getting started. There are ingredients that you've never heard of, a new set of pantry staples to get to know, and new techniques that might not feel familiar. I selfishly had a lot to learn from our conversation as well. I know you will, too. Let's dig in. Make sure to listen to the very end for details about our first birthday giveaway.

Jess Dang:

Yvette, welcome to the Cook Smarts Podcast. I'm so excited to have you on and have you be our guide to all things related to Mexican cooking.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Thank you. I'm excited to be on.

Jess Dang:

Before we dive into our Mexican cooking lesson, I'd just love for you to share how you got into food and cooking. Can you just tell us about the role food has played in your life and how you first learned to cook?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yeah, for sure. Being Mexican-American, my grandma was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and my mom was a single parent. We lived next door to my grandma. I grew up with seeing my grandma constantly in the kitchen and my mom constantly in the kitchen. It's so funny because people ask me all the time, "Did you eat Mexican food growing up?" It's like, "Yes, but we didn't call it Mexican food. We just call it food."

Jess Dang:

Yes, that makes sense.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

My grandma or my mom were always cooking. It was definitely a big part of my upbringing. All the celebrations that we had as family get together were always revolved around food. Food and family, and Mexican food is a part of who I am.

Jess Dang:

You've got this great food blog, Muy Bueno Cooking. Can you tell us what inspired you to start it?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Thank you. I started it in 2010. It was actually my daughter, who was eight years old at that time, suggested that I write a cookbook because my mom was visiting. When mom visits, I was craving all the foods that I just didn't have the time to make, because at that time, I had a full time job. I'd get home and my mom would make enchiladas or chicken mole or chili rellenos, and all these delicious recipes. My daughter's like, "You really should write a cookbook so I have these recipes when I go to college," which is crazy to think of because that was in 2010. Now, this is her senior year and she's really going to go off to college.

Jess Dang:

That's amazing that the project has come full circle. She has it now. She has these recipes.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yes. We published our cookbook in 2012. The blog started off as just a journey of writing a cookbook. Never ever, ever did I think the blog would turn into a business. Well, I was laid off from my job in 2012. I really was determined to figure out how to make blogging my business. Thankfully, it's been 10 years now. It's crazy to think that a passion project has turned into my business. It's all three generations of Mexican recipes, recipes from my grandma, from my mom, and recipes that I continue to develop.

Jess Dang:

Well, congratulations on that, because I know so many people want to make that happen, but you did it. That's just great.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Thank you. I think if I would have done it thinking it was going to be a business, I might have not have succeeded. I'm glad I started when I did. I think it's just so hard for people now because people stop themselves so much or doubt themselves or compare themselves to so many blogs that are out there. I think it's hard when you have that competition against yourself to try and succeed at something. I

always recommend, don't look out there and just do what you want to do and what your passion is. Somebody will relate to it and somebody will fall in love with it.

Jess Dang:

Clearly for you, it just came from such an authentic place of wanting to do this for your daughter and the fact that these are recipes that people really want. Mexican cooking is such a big part of the American story. It's so great that you have that information to provide to people.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Thank you.

Jess Dang:

Well, speaking of Mexican cooking, there are so many aspects that I want to cover today. Let's start with the basics. We can't cook without the pantry essentials. Can you guide us through the pantry staples in Mexican cooking? There are so many ingredients that are just truly unique to Mexican cooking. The first thing that comes to mind for me are peppers. I definitely get a bit intimidated by, not only all the varieties I see at the store, but when do you use dried or when do you use fresh? Can you just give us, maybe, a Peppers 101 to start with, because I know that's such an important part of Mexican cooking?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yeah. When it comes to dried chili peppers, that's usually for a red chili sauce base. You can get anywhere from guajillos or New Mexico or California chili peppers, which are the red dried chili pods. From that, you can make a red chili sauce. With that chili sauce, what I usually do is I make it in bulk. I have a recipe on my blog. You can just search red chili sauce. You can freeze it. I buy these plastic deli kind of thick plastic containers. With that, you can defrost it and have sauce to make enchiladas or chilaquiles or red pozoles. There's so many dishes that you can make just with that one red chili sauce.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

For the fresh chilies, it's usually the green chilies. You have jalapeno, serranos, Anaheim chilies or poblano chilies. I always recommend roasting those types of chilies. Not all of them, it's usually the long green chilies that you want to roast for sure. Same thing with those. I pre-roast them. I have my freezer stocked with green chili. With that, you can make green enchiladas, you can make green pozole, you can make pork green chili. There's so many different recipes that you can make with different types of chilies. And I have so many recipes on my blog. It's just amazing. It's just a staple food of a simple chili, how it could be transformed into so many different dishes.

Jess Dang:

I want to go back to that meal prepping part that you talked about in terms of prepping some of those green chilies. You roast them in the oven. Then, you freeze them after you roast them before you puree them into a sauce. Is that right?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yeah, for sure. I recommend doing that with anything that you can grow. Tomatillos, tomatoes, onion, jalapenos, the long green chilies. What I do, especially, during gardening season, when you have too many tomatoes and you could just freeze them, put them in Ziploc bags and just have them ready, and

just make sure you label them. For roasted green chili, that's just kind of what I grew up with, was always in our freezer. Especially, if you like hatch chili, that's super seasonal and that's only in the fall, a couple months out of the year. We always would make sure to go to the farmers and get all of our chili that we could and roast it and freeze it.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Some people like to peel it and then freeze it. What I like to do now is, if I'm doing a bulk, I just freeze them with the peel on. Then, once you just pull them out and defrost them, then you just remove the peel. Then, you can use them for any type of recipe. I usually freeze them in packs of eight or 10. That way, once you defrost the bag, you're not going to let it go to waste. You can make salsa with it or a sauce, or whatever it is you're going to make with that one package.

Jess Dang:

Yes. I always would pull that too, like don't freeze 100 chili, or freeze the whole thing of lasagna because, then, you're eating it forever. Maybe, you don't want to make a gallon of sauce. One of the things I found out, I feel just a couple years ago, I should have known, was green chili is the fresh one, as you said. Then, when they dry, they become red. They're just different names. Chipotle pepper that's been dried out, it starts off as a jalapeno. I never knew that. That, really, just was such an enlightening thing for me to be, "Wow, these peppers are the same. They just have different names between their fresh version versus their dried version."

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

It's so interesting. You're saying the jalapeno, they sell the chipotle chilies dried, or you can buy them, the chipotle and adobo sauce canned. It's a whole different chili.

Jess Dang:

That drying process, what does it do to the flavor? It definitely tastes very different, a Chipotle pepper from a jalapeno pepper.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yeah, for sure. Same thing with a poblano. It's green and fresh and plump. Then, when it's dried, it's just a sun-dried process and it becomes an ancho chili to make a red chili sauce. Just that whole drying process, sometimes, a chipotle is smoked, then you're definitely getting those smoky flavors.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Also, I always think about it as grapes. You have your fresh grapes. Then, they're dry and then you have your raisins. A lot of these dry chilies kind of have a raisin flavor, especially some of the more exotic type of chilies, like pasilla and ancho, the darker chili when they're dried. They kind of have that raisin flavor in them.

Jess Dang:

That's so interesting. I never thought about it that way. I guess in terms of when you're deciding on what chilies to use for your sauces, is basically heat kind of the basis for what pepper you're picking?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yeah, for sure. Say, for instance, mole. There's so many varieties of moles. There's green moles. There's red moles. There's sweet moles. There's spicy moles. It really all depends on what you're trying to make.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

What I always recommend is just trying a variety of different chilies in mole. Then, that way, you're getting more of the flavors versus too much of a spice. Ancho and pasilla, they're both dark chilies, which are very popular in mole, but they're not spicy. If you want a little more heat, then you can try guajillo chili or Colorado chili. Those are little more spicy. While we say be careful with the tiny ones, like the chili japones or chili de arbol. Those are kind of similar to the Asian red chili peppers. Those are crazy spicy. If you want anything spicy, just throw one in there and it's going to take it a whole other level of spice.

Jess Dang:

Got it. We've already started talking about sauces. There are so many sauces in Mexican cooking. If we start with those dried chilies. How do you turn that dried red chili into a typical red sauce?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Some people do it differently. The way my family does it is we just rehydrate them. What you want to do is you want to make sure that you rinse those chilies. Because they're dry, depending on how they're packaged or where they're packaged, sometimes they're dusty. You want to make sure that you rinse them. I always recommend rinsing chili in cold water, because if you rinse it in hot water, it's just going to bring out the heat. You want to be careful with your hands and not rub anything after that. Just give them a rinse. Then, rehydrate them. You just bring them to a boil in some water.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

What some people do is they still use that same, basically, cooking liquid to blend the chili. I don't because I just feel like you just rinsed the chili and your chili still might be dirty. I use fresh water to add to the blender. You want to get those softened chilies that have already been simmered and boiled. There's no time. It can be 10 minutes. Once they're just soft and pliable to the touch, then you want to just make sure to take off the stem and put them in a blender with fresh water, some garlic, some salt. That's basically it. You blend it.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

What my mom does is she adds a little bit of flour to the mixture, just to thicken up and make that sauce more velvety. Depending on what kind of blender you have, I always recommend a high speed blender. With that, you're going to really get a really nice sauce. An added tip is to get a conical sieve or a chinois and pour your sauce into that. It's basically to really blend out any of the peels or seeds. The remaining of the sauce is just really liquidy and velvety.

Jess Dang:

That sounds so good. I really want to try. I've made red sauces before, but I feel like not with dried. I don't know. I'm super excited to just take all these tips and get started.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

It's really simple. It could be intimidating at first. Once you get the process, it's really not that hard. What's nice is you can have your pantry stocked with a variety of chilies. They're not going to go bad. As long as you can put them in Ziplocs, also, to keep them from going bad. As long as they aren't brittle, really brittle, become super, super dry, then they're still good. They can last for years in your pantry.

Jess Dang:

We are all looking for pantry staples right now, as we're all doing some quarantine cooking. I feel like Mexican cooking is just a perfect cuisine to pick up if you haven't done so already.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yeah, for sure. I was telling somebody else we were meant for this. It's our time to shine. Everything that's in our pantry, we can live off with, especially, pinto beans and chilies and rice. All of these staples that make so many different dishes.

Jess Dang:

That's your typical red sauce, or kind of your master sauce. For your green sauce, you're saying that you freeze a lot of these fresh chilies after they've been roasted. Pretty much the same process as well? Just adding some water and garlic as well?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yes, you can do it that way as well. My mom's secret little recipe is she uses, it's called suero in Spanish. It's basically a whey. It's a byproduct of cheese. You can also use buttermilk. It gives a crazy creamy texture. Oh, my gosh. If anybody asks me, "What's your favorite dish?" It's my mama's green enchiladas made with roasted green chili sauce and that little buttermilk creamy sauce. It's so good.

Jess Dang:

Is the buttermilk instead of water or just in addition to water?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

It's just a whole different recipe. A lot of people make green chili sauces with tomatillo and just jalapenos and serranos. That's a traditional salsa verde type of sauce. My mom's is more roasted green chili. We use roasted green chili a lot. That's definitely probably more, I don't want to say, Tex-Mex. It's more El Paso, Northern Mexico influenced.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

It's just a completely different type of chili sauce. There's some that don't have, like I'm saying, a creamy base at all. You can do tomatillos and the roasted green chili. There's so many different types of sauces. That just happens to be my favorite with that buttermilk mixture.

Jess Dang:

Got it. I guess with the fresh green chilies, do you even need the water because they tend to be more watery already? They retain moisture, I'm guessing.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Depending on what you're going to use it for. Say, if you're going to use long green chili and tomatillos. Tomatillos have a lot of liquid already, so you wouldn't want to add more water. It just depends. I would say you're definitely going to need some kind of water in your green chili sauce, or it will be very thick. It all depends. If you're just going to make a salsa, then you could totally try. It's going to be spicy. You're going to remember, depending on what you want to use it for. If you want to use it more of a salsa, then you can just definitely blend it, maybe, with some garlic and some fresh tomatoes or roasted tomatoes, and you can use it more of a salsa. It just really depends on the type of recipe that you're going to use it for.

Jess Dang:

Got it. Actually, that's exactly what I want to ask next, which is about sauces. How is the salsa different than a sauce? Is salsa really just a type of sauce?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

We have this one salsa. We call it salsa casera, which is just a homemade salsa. It's roasted green chili with canned tomato, the whole tomato. It's just green chili, tomato, and garlic. It's such an addicting salsa. My grandma always, always had that salsa at her kitchen table. We use it for dipping or we use it as topping on her caldo de pollo, which is a chicken soup, or just to roll up in a corn tortilla. It's just a simple salsa, but with that same salsa, you can use it as a sauce and you can make dishes like chili verde con carne, which is a green chili and beef and potatoes. It's like you're using that same sauce. We also make a lot of that salsas in batches. Then, we either can pull it out of the freezer to have salsa for a party or to make a completely different recipe, like green chili and beef.

Jess Dang:

Got it. It's probably more just the intention of how you're using it that you would call it a salsa versus a sauce. If it's a dipping thing, more of a salsa; or, maybe, if it's a little thicker. Otherwise, all the same.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Right. Because then, with the salsa, just depending on what you're making, you can just add broth and your beef, then you're making a stew type of thing. It's just basically the same premise. When you go and buy a salsa verde, already pre-made, you can use it as a dip or you can use it in a recipe. It's basically the same. This is just a homemade version of it.

Jess Dang:

Got it. I want to move on to another very important part of Mexican cooking staple which is spices. Where do spices typically come in for you, and what are the main set of spices, and how are they typically used?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Our spices are very simple. I think the more that I've cooked, the more simple I've become with spices. I'd rather use the flavoring with fresh garlic and fresh onion. On the occasion, you'll use garlic powder or onion powder, garlic salt. For the most part, it's just salt and pepper. Dried oregano, we use that a lot. A lot of Mexican recipes use cumin. That's my least favorite spice. That's just a whole personal thing. If I could smell the cumin, it's just a complete turnoff for me. It screams Tex-Mex or Taco Bell.

Jess Dang:

That's so interesting. Is cumin more of an American-adapted spice for Mexican cooking? Has it been Tex-Mexified?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I think it's become more Tex-Mex because they do use it a lot. In Mexican food, it's definitely used, but in very small quantities, or a whole cumin seeds, which is ground up. I think with the whole cumin seeds that if I use cumin at all, it's going to be the seeds that I will grind myself, because it doesn't have that really strong scent. It's so funny. Somebody said it smells like BO or armpits. I was like, "Yes, that's what it smells like."

Jess Dang:

That's so interesting.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I just don't like cumin. I use oregano, salt, and pepper, and just very basic ingredient, very basic spices.

Jess Dang:

Got it. I feel the same way about cumin. I feel so bad about saying that because I feel like it's one of those things that is used often, especially, in American chili. An American chili is not an American chili unless there's quite a bit of cumin taste to it. I am much more a fan of, if I'm going to do a ground spice and try to make something feel like a Latin meal, I'll use a lot of coriander or ground coriander, or ground chili powder. I'm guessing, if you're true authentic Mexican cooking, you get so much of that chili from just the dried chilies. You don't really need the extra powder in there. That's kind of redundant.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I never even knew that you can buy chili powder until later. I was like, "I didn't know there was such a thing." There are some really good chili powders, so I'm not knocking chili powder. If you know that there's a good brand, then I've definitely cheated a few times and made my own red chili sauce with chili powder. If you can find a good one, a good reputable one, then they can be really amazing.

Jess Dang:

When you said you're making salsa, instead of using a dry chili, you're just kind of mixing the powder with enough water that it becomes a sauce?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yes, and you can also add a bit of spicy chili powder. Then, you just add a can of tomato sauce to it. You're getting just more of that consistency but the same texture. It's really, really yummy. Like I said, if it's a good one that you know is fresh. I've never found one at a grocery store that's been a good one that I would do that with. We go to the chili farms a lot and we buy a big package of red chili powder. That's great just to have on the occasional cheat day. You want to just hurry up and make some chili sauce.

Jess Dang:

Well, chili powder, definitely, is one of my go-to spices for everything like nachos. I just like that smokiness, so I'll add it to tofu. I'll just add it at my eggs for breakfast. It's just a nice flavor to have. I find it to be really accessible. If I'm not doing the dried chilies, just to throw a little bit of spice on.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

For sure. I do that all the time. If I'm just kind of needing a rub on salmon or cod, or just a fish, or even for shrimp, it's so good.

Jess Dang:

I don't know if this is sacrilege, but Trader Joe's has a chili lime spice mix. I do that a lot on seafood. I'll just sprinkle it on salmon and shrimp and toss it in my air fryer. I'm like, "I have sort of a Latiny meal," when it comes up.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I haven't tried that brand, but I know which one you're talking about, probably. There's a brand that is super popular with Mexican food called tajin and all it is is a red chili powder with kind of the lime and salt. We use that for everything. Sprinkling on cucumbers or mango, or we'll drizzle it with lime and, oh, my gosh, it's just so good. It's like typical Mexican street food vendor food with corn on the cob and sweet corn and, oh, my gosh. It's so good.

Jess Dang:

Yes, chili powder on fruit is underrated, like mango, pineapple. Those things really benefit from just that little bit of heat and smokiness.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Now, I want to go to Mexico.

Jess Dang:

I know. Hopefully, it won't be long until we can travel again. Oh, gosh. Speaking of not being able to travel and quarantine cooking, one of the staples that everyone has been loading up on are beans. Of course, dried beans, canned beans. I know I could eat beans and rice every single day. We might have to if this quarantine continues for longer. I would just love to know what beans do you stock and how do you typically make your beans?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

We grew up with frijoles de la olla, which is basically fresh beans from the pot. They're pinto beans. Every day, my grandma and my mom always had a pot of beans on the stovetop. That's usually my go-to. Just recently, last year, I started working with Instant Pot. Now, that thing is so magical. When you make traditional frijoles, it's going to take a good two hours on the stovetop. To have an Instant Pot to make them in 30 minutes is quite magical. That's kind of my latest obsession, is just pinto beans made in the Instant Pot in 30 minutes.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

As far as any other beans, that's kind of our go-to, is pinto beans. We always have black beans or just a different variety of beans, but usually, in canned form. I don't know why I really don't make any other

fresh beans. It's always pinto beans that we always like to have homemade. With that, when you have that, then you can make refried beans, or make tostadas, or make burritos. Just even have fresh pinto beans with a side of rice, it's so versatile.

Jess Dang:

Yeah, I love beans. When you make your beans, whether on stovetop or in the Instant Pot, do you add anything to it aside from water? Do you do anything to flavor it ahead of time?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Just onion, I like to add. It's so funny because me and my mom have had this debate. She's like, "I don't like it." They just did water and salt, and that was it. Salt has always been a weird thing, too. Some people say if you put the salt too early it turns your beans dark. I've never encountered that. What my mom has always taught me to do is to soak your beans. She likes to soak them overnight. Then, that way, they become plumper and lighter in color. Even if you just do that for an hour or two hours before, I feel like it's going to really clean your beans and it is going to give them that lighter look also. I just simmer them with half an onion and with water and salt, and that's it.

Jess Dang:

Then, the onion, do you chop it or you just throw in half an onion?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I just throw half an onion. I quarter it up and throw it in there.

Jess Dang:

That's so smart. That will just take it out easily, if you don't want that as part of the-

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yeah, exactly. It gives it a really good flavor. My mom, like I said, she used to be like, "We never do it with onion." I was like, "Mom, it's really good." Now, she's like, "I have to have it with the onion." I was like, "Aha."

Jess Dang:

Let's move on to meats, because I know that is also a huge part of Mexican cuisine. What are some of the meat cuts you always have on-hand for all the dishes you like to create?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I go through phases. We eat a lot of beef and chicken. It's just kind of funny. Growing up, it was more ground beef. That was always the thing with picadillos, ground beef mixture to make tacos. That was always a staple growing up. What was funny is it's called the poor man's meat, the ground beef. I hated it when I was a kid because we would have it all the time. It took me a long time to get an appreciation of ground beef again. Now, just eating it, it's so comforting, just classic and comforting. It could be made into so many dishes. You can use it to stuff bell peppers, or you can make tacos, or you can stuff poblano chiles. You can just use that same mixture for so many different types of recipes.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

We always have ground beef. Living in Colorado, my husband usually buys a lot of ground bison. It's just a healthier cut. It's even healthier than chicken. We do a lot of ground bison. Whether it's in sausage, a chorizo format or ground beef, we eat a lot of that. Then, now with the Instant Pot, I think we've been eating a lot more chicken than we usually did, because it's so simple to throw in chicken in the Instant Pot and just have shredded chicken. Since I have roasted chili all the time, I throw in chopped roasted chili.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Another staple that I would say to have in your pantry is just canned tomatoes. I always buy fire-roasted diced tomatoes. I throw that in the Instant Pot and just with some broth. Then, you have some great chicken that you can use for all week in nachos or tacos, or salad, or meal-planning, or whatever it is. It's just so convenient.

Jess Dang:

It sounds like you're making kind of these batches of things for meal prep just you have that one component of meat that you don't have to make over and over again, that you can just use in a bunch of different dishes.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Exactly.

Jess Dang:

It seems like it could be a lot of components to manage Mexican cooking. You're making fresh sauces. You have your salsa and sauces, tortillas, maybe, soaked beans. Was your grandmother cooking all day? How did you do it?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

It's so funny, because I just made flour tortillas yesterday, homemade flour tortillas. It's a process. We rarely, rarely ever make homemade flour tortillas. They're so available nowadays that you can go to a Tortilleria or a Mexican market and get really good tortillas. I've gotten lazy and I don't make tortillas. I made them yesterday because what else am I going to do?

Jess Dang:

Yes. We're all stuck.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

It was just so therapeutic. It's so nice. I just felt like I was back in my grandma's kitchen and just hearing the rolling pin click on the cutting board. Every time that I would roll out a tortilla, it just reminded me of sitting at her kitchen table and being there for hours. She would be in the kitchen all day long, all day long. I just always say that it was, what is that, the Bible scene of the miracle of the fish and the bread? It was like she could just feed anybody who came. It was always food at the kitchen stovetop. She always had beans. She always, maybe, had a little stew simmering on a little kind of a slow cooker roasting pan that she used to have, or and always homemade flour tortillas, and always homemade salsa on the kitchen table.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

It's just funny because I made, maybe, the recipe is about 18 or 20 tortillas. It took me a couple of hours to make. It was so sad. I looked at the pile this morning, it's like only one or two left. Oh, gosh.

Jess Dang:

I'm sure they were so good.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

They were so good. It's like, "Oh, my gosh. Now, I'm going to want to make some more." At the same time, I probably ate six of them by myself yesterday.

Jess Dang:

They are so good, yeah. Last week, I found myself having to make tortillas for the first time, but homemade because I couldn't get them at the store. It is one of those things where people have been buying a lot of, I think probably, storing just in case. I was like, "Wow, this is really hard." I'm like, "We need to pay the tortilla folks more money because this is really hard." And they definitely didn't, they turned out fine. I definitely prefer some of my store-bought brands more than my homemade ones.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Did you make flour or corn?

Jess Dang:

I made flour.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

There's definitely a technique to them. It's so funny, because when I posted a video yesterday, they make fun of them and make say, "Try and find a shape in every tortilla. There are shapes of tortilla, whether California or Texas." I was like, "It doesn't matter what shape they're in, as long as you give them a chance and just have fun and make them." Even yesterday, as I was making them, they were coming out so perfect by the last two or three tortillas. It definitely just takes practice. There's definitely some kind of magical potion. I'm using the same recipe that we have in my blog and in our cookbook. My grandma used to make them amazing. My mom used to make them amazing. I don't know what's missing from mine. They look fine, but they just don't taste exactly the same.

Jess Dang:

Is the technique part in the rolling it out, getting it rolled out? I don't know if it's the gluten issue, where it kind of shrinks back everything when you roll it out. I couldn't get to really stretch.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I think it's all about your climate, too. I know here in Colorado it's very dry. I had to put a little extra water than our original recipe says. It's kind of a feel thing. Just like any dough, you just have to know the texture that it needs to be. You don't want to overwork the dough, either. With flour tortillas overwork, it can kind of give it that stale or some people are like, "Ah," they come out like crackers. Once they cook them, they're like a dried tortilla. It's all about the consistency.

Jess Dang:

What about corn tortillas? This is something I've always wondered, is there some sort of rule for when you should be using corn tortillas and when you should be using flour tortillas?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

It's, I think, all about family and preference and recipe. What I always say with enchiladas, some people ask me, "How do you make your enchiladas, with flour tortillas?" It's like, "No, no, no. Never, never, never." That is a no, no. Never that I know of have seen enchiladas made with flour tortillas. That's always corn tortillas.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Then, flour tortillas are also very northern Mexico, also. Corn tortillas are a big staple in Mexican food. More than likely any dish is going to be accompanied with corn tortillas versus flour.

Jess Dang:

Got it. Clearly, tortillas are a great shortcut to have, since a traditional Mexican meal can take all day to cook. Most of us don't have that time, even though we're quarantined. This might be sacrilege to ask, but are there any other shortcuts you would take or could recommend aside from just tortillas?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Well, I think, like I said, as long as you have things prepped, that's already a shortcut in itself. When you're roasting all of the ingredients, that takes time; but, if you do that ahead of time and you have your freezer stocked with all of your roasted veggies or your roasted chilies and can do shortcuts without, maybe, you don't have tomatoes, but you can use canned tomatoes. There's definitely a lot of shortcuts. In my blog, that's what I try and share, that Mexican food is not going to be all day. Quarantined or not, I still don't have all day to be in the kitchen. Most of my recipes, and in our cookbook and in the blog, so many people have told us that, it's like, "Wow, I didn't realize how it's a lot of pantry staples and it's not going to take you all day to make some of my favorite dishes."

Jess Dang:

That's great. I really feel a lot of the times, when you're trying something new out, it just feels like, "It's going to be so much because there's all these ingredients I don't know." I feel like just in this conversation, I'm like, "This is a lot more simpler than I thought it was going to be." I think people can just, once they get over that hump of like, "I might need to buy a few new things for my pantry," then the actual cooking, it seems, is pretty straightforward, especially, nowadays with Instant Pot and Vitamix blenders.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Exactly.

Jess Dang:

If someone is cooking Mexican food for the first time or just is still feeling very new about it, what recipe would you point them to in your cookbook?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I would say start with the recipe that we were all taught in the beginning, like beans or Mexican rice. Mexican rice can be tricky, where people are like, "My Mexican rice never turns out well." So many people who have said that who have followed our recipe, it's like, "Oh, my gosh." Whatever those steps that it shares and the ingredients, it comes out perfect every single time. Something that is so simple like a Mexican rice. Another one would be sopa de fideo which is a simple and economical dish. Fideo is kind of little vermicelli dried noodles. You toast it the same like you would with Mexican rice, and a lot of the same ingredients. You have your tomato, your onion, your garlic. It's in a broth. It's kind of a soupy pasta dish.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

That one is very simple to make. It's just one of those comfort foods that is a dish that we grew up with. Especially, when you're a little kid, you're always wanting little pasta, we would call them sopita, a little pasta dish that is very simple to make.

Jess Dang:

Yes. We actually have just featured a Fideo on the Cook Smarts menu. I'm really worried because it's such high pressure when you feature something that has such a story and authenticity to it, because we definitely doctor it up a little. We put a lot of vegetables in it. I'm fingers crossed. Folks that have tried a traditional fideo are not, like, "Oh, my god. This is not what I grew up with." It probably won't be. Hopefully, it'll be something, an adaptation people will be okay with that.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yeah, exactly. That's the beauty of fideo. It's something so simple that you can keep it just broth. If you want it hardier, what I do is add frozen vegetables, some peas and carrots, just to give it a full meal versus just a little side dish type of thing.

Jess Dang:

Exactly. I think we put zucchini and mushrooms in ours. Some of our members are like, "I'm going to put ground beef in it because it just feels like it needs ground beef." It sounds like people can doctor it up however they'd like.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Exactly. It's a great basic dish that you can, kind of like a ramen, it's all about whatever you want to add in. It's all personal.

Jess Dang:

I can't think about Mexican cooking without thinking about just cooking for crowds, big gatherings. What is your favorite meal to cook for a crowd?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I'm all about grilling or slow cooking. We'd also do, which I forgot to mention, is growing up, we did a lot of brisket. That was kind of our special occasion meat for parties. We would slow cook that and just shred that. We would always have, instead of tortillas for a party, we'd have bolillos, which are the Mexican kind of French bread rolls. We'd cut them. I remember that was my job as a kid, to cut the rolls and have a big basket of rolls. My mom would make potato salad. We'd have shredded brisket.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Another big party dish was charro beans, which are pinto beans, but they're kind of doctored up with additional bacon, or borracho beans and they have beer. It's just kind of a meal in itself. It's kind of a cowboy style bean dish, but with the brisket and the potato salad and the bolillo rolls. It was so amazing.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

We still do that today, because it's kind of a classic party food. That's actually one of the things that we always do for Easter. A lot of people do formal type of Easters. Ours are usually outdoors outside, and we either slow cook brisket or we grill outside. A lot of carne asada or anything ribs, things like that that can be made on the grill. That's still what I do.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I do different types of shredded meat. I'll do brisket and chicken. Then, just set up a taco bar. I do that a lot for parties, or a Nacho bar. Growing up, it was always serve yourself. We never had sit down formal dinners. It was like all the food was at the stovetop or at the countertop. You make your plate and then you go to the table. That's still how I entertain. It's not like I'm going to serve you and you're waiting at the table. You'll go get what you want. You'll make your own nachos, or you'll make your own tacos. Then, we all sit together. That's the way that I cook every day. It's the way that I entertain.

Jess Dang:

That's so great, just not making it a big deal. It's something that you just do regularly. There just happens to be more people, but you're just making the same food. I think I actually find that Mexican culture is so similar to Chinese culture, in terms of how we approach food, even kind of that casual gathering and just being with family is the most important thing.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jess Dang:

Before we do our rapid fire round, I was hoping you could give us one last cooking or meal planning tip. It doesn't have to be related to Mexican food. Of course, it can be, if you'd like.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I wish I could be a fancy meal planner. I see all these people who are like, "We already figured out our menu for the week." That is not me. I figure if you have your staples, then you can whip up anything that you want on the fly. That's kind of how I cook. I don't have a plan for what's a week for now. I kind of have a semi-plan like, "We'll have vegetable soup one night. We'll have tostadas one night. We'll have enchiladas one night." I can just make any of that on the fly with what we already have in our fridge or in the pantry or in the freezer. That's kind of my tip. As long as you have those staples stocked up, you can pretty much make anything you want when you want it.

Jess Dang:

I love that. I think being able to do that is such a skill and it does require having the components of it. You've got your spices, you've got your chilies in your freezer. You've got the meat. I think if you have the components and you just clearly understand the templates of different recipes, it sounds like as we

went over to some of the different Mexican recipes, they have sort of a formula to them. Once you understand that, you can easily just kind of improv all week long.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Exactly.

Jess Dang:

All right. Yvette, now, we have our rapid fire round that I'd love for you to participate in. Your most important kitchen too?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Blender.

Jess Dang:

Your go-to breakfast?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Oatmeal avena, which is just a Mexican oatmeal.

Jess Dang:

You have 15 minutes to make a meal. What is it?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I've been into shrimp lately. I'm going to say just some kind of grilled shrimp.

Jess Dang:

I love shrimp. It's such a quick cooking protein.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jess Dang:

What's one meal that you never get sick of?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Enchiladas.

Jess Dang:

One ingredient you always have in your pantry? It can be something in addition to what we've already talked about today, since we've covered so many pantry staples.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I'm just going to say rice.

Jess Dang:

Guilty pleasure food or not?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Doritos and hot sauce.

Jess Dang:

I love doritos. Your favorite life optimization or organization app?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I'm so old-school. I'm still pen-and-paper type of person. I used to have a grocery app. I still go old school with my paper and list.

Jess Dang:

I'm with you there.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

I'm not good at that one.

Jess Dang:

Hardest thing you've done?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Recently, I was invited to Oprah Book Club. I was so excited, because it was my dream come true.

Jess Dang:

Wow.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

A 2020 goal is meet Oprah. I was invited to her book club. I was like, "This is my moment. This is my time to raise my hand and say something because it was audience participation." I could not. My arm would not even go up. My heart was beating to death. It was the scariest thing. I've never experienced that, that I was like, "You can do this," and I could not. I could not.

Jess Dang:

Well, Oprah has that effect on a lot of people. You're not alone. Proudest thing you've done?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

This is a pretty exciting moment that I look at it and I just think, "Wow, did I really do that?" I was invited to meet Michelle Obama. I sat next to her. It was a panel of mothers who were just invited to sit and talk as mothers. When I look back at that video, I just think, "Is that me? Was that me sitting next to Michelle Obama?" I just remember it felt so natural and she was so easy to talk to. That was probably one of my proudest moments, of course, besides having my amazing babies. Business-wise, it was exciting.

Jess Dang:

Well, you shared that video with me, I was like, "Oh, my god. That's so amazing." I'm glad I watched that. Last book you loved?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Speaking of Oprah and talking about the book club was the book that's called American Dirt. It's very controversial.

Jess Dang:

Right.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

It's actually a pretty good-written book. There's definitely some things that are a little corny and a little stereotypical. I think the story is a good thriller and a good novel.

Jess Dang:

Last TV show you loved?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Me and my husband watch Outlander. We really like that show, because it's far and few between where we can find a show that we both love. It has adventure, but has that romance.

Jess Dang:

Lovely. My husband and I have the same problem. We just choose not to watch anything together. Yvette, it was so great talking to you. I feel like I learned so much. I think a lot of this interview was very selfish to me, because I'm like, "I have all these. I'm a professional meal planner and someone in food, but I feel like Mexican cooking is still something I'm learning a lot about." I'm really glad I got to pick your brain about it.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Well, thank you for having me. I would love to learn more about your cuisine. I'm excited to check out your blog and hear what your family is all about, and all your traditions.

Jess Dang:

As we sign off today, can you tell everyone where they can find you and where they can find the Muy Bueno Cookbook?

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Yes. My blog is [MuyBuenoCookbook.com](http://MuyBuenoCookbook.com). I have two cookbooks. One's called the Muy Bueno. My other book is called Latin Twist. Latin Twist is all Latin cocktails from Latin America and Spain. You can find me on Instagram, on Facebook. On Instagram, I'm @MuyBuenoCooking.

Jess Dang:

Yes, definitely, on the Instagram, it's so great seeing all your recipes. I love that.

Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack:

Thank you.

Jess Dang:

All right. Well, I hope we're all stuck at home for not too much longer. If people are, this is a great time to try out Mexican cooking.

Jess Dang:

Are you as excited as I am to make a red sauce now? Even though there's a huge catalog of Mexican dishes in the Cook Smart's archives, I learned so many new tips and cannot wait until this quarantine is over, so that I can head to my local Mexican grocery store for a leisurely stroll. I definitely will be taking Yvette's tips about freezing some red sauce and roasted peppers. I love that she and I both don't love cumin. I know many of you disagree, but I'm a chili powder and coriander type of girl when it comes to my Latin spice usage.

Jess Dang:

I'd love to know what Mexican meal you have been inspired to make from this episode. Head over to Yvette's website, [MuyBuenoCookbook.com](http://MuyBuenoCookbook.com) and find a recipe to get you started. Before we say so long today, I've got a favor to ask. Please just share our podcast with just one friend. If we all do that, then we can double our listeners. If you have an Apple product, open the Apple Podcast app and leave us a review. It really helps others to find us.

Jess Dang:

Because I know we have a lot of new listeners and because our podcast just turned one two weeks ago, we are doing a little \$50 Amazon gift card birthday giveaway. Simply snap a screenshot of your Apple Podcast review and text it to 650-386-0290. It has to be a new review dated after April 22. If you've already left a review in the past or you're just an Android person and still want the giveaway, you can leave your review as a voice message at the same number 650-386-0290. Just call it like an old-fashioned phone call, leave a voicemail, then we might just play it on a future episode. I will take all the voicemails and all the screenshots. I will select one winner at random on Friday, May 15th 2020, for the \$50 Amazon gift card. Do not delay. You've got one more week left to tell us why you enjoy our podcast.

Jess Dang:

Speaking of people that enjoy our podcast, here's a review that was left by SRoth76. "I love the Cook Smarts Podcast, and I've used the service for several years. I'm a working mom, and find meal planning a lifesaver. I've started listening to the podcast during my morning walk and it motivates me to keep walking so I can finish each episode. Thanks Cook Smarts for helping me eat better and to exercise." We love that. Then, I hope I get to read or play your review in a future episode.

Jess Dang:

We'll be back with a new episode in two weeks. Until then, please stay safe, stay sane, and stay inside. Thank you for letting us join you in your kitchen or wherever you're listening to this podcast. Until next time, happy cooking, from your kitchen cheerleader.