



Laurie

Hi, listeners. Welcome back to Heart to Table. The podcast where we approach food and cooking from a different angle. I'm Laurie March, remodeler, on camera host, avid gardener, and now explorer of the culinary arts.

My emotional neurons are firing and I cannot wait for us to dive into connecting with this soulful woman that is Grace Ramirez, who's going to talk to us today about all the many ways that we can travel the world with just our dinner plate. Grace, thanks so much for joining us.

Grace

Thank you guys. This is very exciting. I love the title of this.

Laurie

Oh, thank you.

Grace

Because I'm all about heart and food.

Laurie

That's why we're thrilled to have you. Grace, some people would say that food and the preparation of it, the sharing of food, that it's one of the world's greatest connectors of diverse people and groups. What would you say to that?

Grace

Absolutely. I think that there's something so magical around food, right? I think that, for me, I've experienced it over and over again. But professionally in the kitchen, Latinos, we are very obviously ... Mexicans are not the same as Venezuelans and Puerto Ricans are not the same as Cubans.

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Grace

And sometimes, we are a little bit too divided within our cultures. And it was fun to, when I was working in commercial kitchens here in New York, that food is what brought us together, right?

Grace

It was, "Okay, you make mofongo. I love mofongo. Mofongo is from Puerto Rico and Ropa Vieja. Oh, it's Cuban, but then we have Carne Mechada in Venezuela which is similar to Ropa Vieja." And I think that having that connection and being so mindful of the culture opened a lot of doors for me, because it was very kind of like, oh you get who we are. Oh, ceviche from Peru, but there's also Mexican ceviche.

Grace

And that really opened up the doors to the kitchen. I went to culinary school over a decade ago and it was a different place than it is now. But to have that respect and knowledge of Latin American food in general opened a lot of doors for me and it was such a connector, right?

Grace

And I just saw how, wow, I mean, food is such a powerful thing. Not only can we not live without it literally, which really sank in that concept this past year. But, wow, it brought so many people together and so many cultures. And that people were just thankful to have..

Laurie

Made with love.

Grace

Yeah, made with a lot of love and making them warm and fuzzy.

Laurie

I love that, Grace. Grace, born in Miami, raised in Venezuela, your hands have helped you enjoy and prepare soulful food as you're saying all across the world. What's your earliest food memory?

Grace

You know, I grew up in New York. I've been here 17 years, but like you said, I was born in Miami. But from the time I was a year old to the time I was 10, I was living with my grandparents in Venezuela. And my grandmother and my grandfather and my mom's side of the family, they're all great cooks, except my mom, which is funny because I thought I was for a little bit, I was like, "Maybe I'm doomed. Maybe I am not a great cook because my mom wasn't."

Grace

And my grandmother just went, "Oh no, Grace. You do have the superpowers, the magical superpowers of the kitchen. We just skipped a generation." I always just remember, if I close my eyes, the first thing I think about my childhood is being around a very large table with about 12 people.

Grace

My grandmother will be cooking arepas, which is a Venezuelan like ... Imagine like a tortilla but that you can stuff, so it's like a mixture between like a pita bread and a tortilla. So, it's made of cornmeal and it's very popular in Venezuela and Colombia as well. But I remember just my grandmother making, because everyone will have two or three or four.

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

So, it was like, people can customize their own arepas and add their own toppings. Everyone will be talking on top of each other. Everyone will be passing all the different toppings, and everyone will be eating wrappers as well my grandmother was making like about 150 of these.

Laurie

I love that. So, my next question was going to be, who did the cooking? But it sounds like, maybe, all of you did a little bit here and there.

Grace

Yeah, yeah. And it's really interesting, because my grandfather was in the military, like, he was literally a general pilot from the Venezuelan Air Force. And he was great cook he loves to cook.

Grace

So, it was interesting because I would get up and he would make my little lunchbox to go to school. And there was always on the stove, the pressure cooker was going. So, I would always wake up to the sound of the pressure cooker being ready. And he will start off the meat, so he would shred the beef.

Laurie

Yup.

Grace

And my grandmother will finish making the sofrito and finishing it off. Now that I look back, I can really appreciate that it was real teamwork, and then, yeah, my uncle will come in with another side dish, and my aunt will come in with something else. So, yeah, there was always that collaborative effort within the family for sure.

Laurie

Fun. How many different cultures or food did you grow up eating?

Grace

You know, a lot. I was very lucky that in Venezuela when I grew up, it was a very wealthy country back then. And I grew up eating New Zealand lamb and tacos on Tuesday because my grandmother, she loves Mexico.

Grace

And so, it was fascinating, because we were really exposed. Our bakeries were from Portuguese immigrants and we had a lot of Spanish influence as well and Italians. So, I grew up eating Italian food, Spanish food, Israeli food. So, it was such a mix like I never thought of how diverse the kind of cuisine that I was exposed to in a very young age, and they were all great cooks.

Grace

And because my grandfather was a pilot, they used to travel a lot and my grandmother used to cook, so she knew how to cook a lot of different cuisines for sure.

Laurie

So cool.

Grace

Yeah.

Laurie

Do you think that you're growing up like this and these food memories like shaped your taste buds and the way that you thought about food as you got a little bit older?

Grace

I feel very lucky that I grew up like that, but that wasn't the case for a lot ... Now, I can appreciate it. Like, curry in my house, we used to make curry once a week and somebody like, "Curry, what?" I mean, mind you New York is different. I think you get by default, you get exposed to a lot of different cuisines, but there was a lot of kids coming from Maryland, coming in from different parts of the United States, and they had really never tried a lot of these foods, which for me was really shocking.

Laurie

Yeah. That's, by the way, where I grew up. I grew up in Maryland, and I can honestly say, there's a lot I never ate before I moved to Los Angeles. And suddenly, it's part of this journey for me and meeting people like you and hearing about all the incredible things you grew up eating. It's just where you live, and your access to food can be so different based on where you grew up.

Grace

Absolutely. And I think that I've been very privileged to travel across the States. And I know, I know like food deserts is a real thing. And that to me has been shocking, because there's no way you can ... Even if you wanted to make this food, you couldn't, because you don't have access to the ingredients or the spices or ... So, yeah, I feel very, very, very lucky to have been so exposed to it. And it definitely, definitely, shaped my palate because in culinary school, I was very slow. Compared to these kids, they were so fast, or people who had worked in a restaurant, they were so fast, and I was like a little turtle. I was like, "What am I doing here?" I used to cook for fun and take my time.

Grace

But one thing that was always spot on for me was seasoning. Seasoning and flavors was where I got my highest grades. So, I was like, "Okay, I'm doing something right."

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

I'm very slow, but I'm overcompensating it with seasoning.

Laurie

With a perfect palette.

Grace

Yeah. Not perfect but it was pretty, pretty good.

Laurie

What was the spark that made you ... What turned the joy of eating into the joy of cooking?

Grace

You know, it was exactly the moment when I left home, Venezuela, because we went ... We lived in Costa Rica for a while and then I lived in Miami middle school, and then went back to Venezuela. And then when I turned 18, I came back to the States to go to college. And it was like, I no longer had access. I was living in Miami, I no longer had access to a home cooked meal, if I wasn't cooking it, right, because I was alone, all my family was all back home.

Grace

So, food for me became a great vehicle of, first of all, being connected to my culture, right?

Grace

But then, I started cooking little by little, and then I realized that I could just like my grandmother did, and my great grandmother did, I can manipulate people through food because they will come. Cook and people come.

Laurie

That sounds maniacal. Do you mean that in a good and a bad way? Like, are you like evil cooking for the neighbors? Are you like, "I'm going to throw a big party and everyone will answer?"

Grace

Yeah, yeah, that I think there's so much. The thing is, I say this jokingly because I remember the get-togethers in my house, being around 50. We're like 100 cousins. But 50 to 60 will come any given Sunday. And I remember looking around I was like, "Isn't that the ex-husband? Isn't this the ex-boyfriend? Isn't this the ex?" And they would all still be friends and come because my family was cooking, that's how good the food was.

Laurie

Food brought together the ex. Wow.

Grace

Yeah, everything. And maybe like a peace zone, right? It was always peaceful. And it was celebratory because it was great food at the table. And everyone was just wanted to enjoy. And I look back and I think, my great grandmother used to manipulate us because no one wanted to miss that Sunday with the family around great food. And because imagine such a large family to come together, you need a great food ...

Laurie

Yes.

Grace

... especially the younger ones, right?

Laurie

Sure.

Grace

So, I realized, "Oh, if I cook, people come, and we can have a nice time." And for example, like, it's been beautiful to see over the years how ... I throw dinner parties that there is a banker with an artist, with another chef, and someone in media, and that would not ... It's food what brings us all together. And I think that people are really appreciative of like, you know what, especially in New Zealand, people tell me, if it wasn't for this dinner party, we would have never met such a bunch of different people.

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

And the food, which is the magnet. So, I became really, really intrigued and obsessed. And I think that that's what I always encourage people. I think that once you master one thing, then you get a little cocky and you want to do something else, and then you wanted to do something else, and you want to do something else. And then, also, like I'm an only child. So, it's like great to have the attention that you're cooking.

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

Some people are loving it.

Laurie

So fun.

Grace

Yeah. And also, it is the way I show my love. I show my love through food, just like my grandmother, my great grandmother, and my grandfather did. It's that, "Are you hungry? Can I make you anything?" "Are you sick? Can I make you chicken soup?"

Grace

So, yeah, food became a real part of it. Until then, I worked for the Food Network, directing shows for them. And until I would go around the country because I used to direct Throwdown! with Bobby Flay. And we would go around the country finding the best of the best. The best pancakes and the best pumpkin pie, and lobster roll, and fish tacos.

Laurie

So, is there a passion in you for following up and sort of ferreting out these practices that people, how are they cooking? Where are they cooking? Is it different tools that they're using in different countries? Does that all sort of land in your brain as you travel to you?

Grace

Absolutely. That's the other part of me. I am such a food geek. Like, I love learning about all these things, because I am very kind of like traditional. I don't like a lot of tools and stuff and gadgets. But I kind of do, like I have this mixture or like ...

Laurie

Wait. Do you, or don't you, Grace?

Grace

I do. I do. But the thing is I make myself things that I don't because I have a space because I live in a New York apartment.

Laurie

That's real.

Grace

But I love to know, I think, that the kitchen is so humbling because you never stop learning, and there's so many ways to do one same thing. And I've become really obsessed with seasonality. And being as mindful of, like, I have a hard time with food waste. And I work with the UN in a campaign called Act Now. That it's all about, zero food waste and being more sustainable.

Grace

So, I think that, back to your point too, for me, for the winter menus, it's all about that. It's all about finding creative ways of preservation and not having, again, no food waste and be more creative and learning from the best, because those guys are such pioneers right now, right?

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

They have Noma and they're the culinary institute itself. They have like so many people, and we have a good friend working for them. And it's just fascinating to go and see what they do. And, yeah, I was very star struck at Noma. I was like a little kid in a museum, in a candy shop, or in a toy store ...

Laurie

A delicious museum.

Grace

Like, yeah. I was like, "Oh my god, is this how they do this? And is this?" And the fermentation room. The fermentation room, I was like, "Oh, my god, they have a fermentation room."

Laurie

So, Grace, did you come home with ... Did you try something new at home specifically because you saw it while you were there? Did you come back and try to repeat something? Or did you bring some of that food travel home with you to your own plate?

Grace

Yeah, like all that pickling and fermentation. I've been playing a lot with that. And it's hard.

Laurie

Yes.

Grace

It's hard. But like I've been trying to make my own kimchi and I'm not great at it. Again, pickling and fermentation are something that are very exciting to me and I've been playing with it. You have to be very patient and it's very time consuming. But I love it.

Laurie

That's so fun. I think here in the US sometimes, we don't always have the widest vision of all the other places that we could eat, and all the other types of food, and all the cultures. Sometimes, we get kind of in our lane about food and in a busy world, you go to the grocery store, you get what you know your family will eat. It's easy to sort of put things on repeat, right? And not necessarily branch out.

Grace

Absolutely. I think you have, to have, to have to force yourself to do that. And I think that, make it into a project. Nowadays, there are so many like cookbook clubs and blogs about it. But even if you don't want to get into the technology part of the like, "Oh, I don't know what blog to get myself into or what club, or whatever," just make it a family or deal, right? Like, get the family involved. And if you don't have a family, get your friends.

Grace

I love that my friends during quarantining, they were like, "Teach us something, teach us something once a month." And I was like, "Okay, I can do that." And we have these kind of like dinner parties, and then we have to take turns because it was a lot. But it was like, between us, better chefs or better cooks we would teach the other. So, we would send the recipe in advance, right, so they can get the ingredients and we would literally make it.

Laurie

How fun.

Grace

Don't be overly ambitious at first, because I think that you are setting up yourself for failure ...

Laurie

Smart.

Grace

... and that's not okay. So, make something simple, right? Grab a recipe that you fully kind of understand it in your mind and make it a family ordeal and make that recipe. And maybe, you don't nail it the first time, but you're like, "Oh, wait, okay, this has potential," make it again. Maybe, I can tweak some things or maybe, I can find, I don't know, let's say you're making whatever it is, Tres Leches cake.

Grace

Let's say you're making a Tres Leches cake. Okay, I didn't love this. This is so overly sweet. Let me see if I can find another recipe that makes it easier for me. And really kind of like nailed one recipe, and then move on to the next one. But make it something fun, make it something either, yeah, sign up for like a cooking class, virtual cooking class. Now, there's all sorts of them. I think those are really fun.

Laurie

Yep.

Grace

Nowadays, there's no excuse. You can go on YouTube and find your favorite recipe being made or you can sign up for a virtual class, or you can watch a master class. Or you can just literally, gather a bunch of friends or family members over Zoom and make an ordeal. But please experiment with food, because it will be so rewarding. You would feel so accomplished. And it's going to make you want to try something else. And I think that ...

Laurie

I love that.

Grace

So, I highly, highly encourage everyone to don't make it too overcomplicated, little by little, step by step, but very lovingly ...

Laurie

Look for a good early win, right? Like a little early win.

Grace

Yeah.

Laurie

I like that.

Grace

Yeah, exactly.

Laurie

I recently cooked on a wok for the first time. I have had it in the cabinet for three months, I was like, "I have no idea." I looked up a recipe, made some mushrooms in it. I'm not actually a mushroom fan. My husband loves them. But it tasted so different and so good. And I ended up really enjoying eating it. It took me a second to figure out how clean it, but ...

Grace

Yeah. I have the same question. Every one of my friends, because I did the electric pressure cooker cookbook, The 5-Ingredient Electric Pressure Cooker Cookbook is one of my cookbooks. And again, it's very simple. I made that one after Latina because I wanted people just to cook, right?

Laurie

Yeah. So, how many different cultures do you feel comfortable cooking in? I was just thinking my way through this conversation. You sound like you could cook many different cultures foods. Can you rattle me off a list?

Grace

Yeah. Well, my specialty has become Latin food in general, right. Like that's been part of this La Latina brand, La Latina, meaning, the Latin girl, which was basically came off from being in New Zealand and being a judge for this TV show. That was, at that time and that show, it was like the Master Chef, right?

Grace

So, it was a primetime show where I was one of the judges for it. And people would see me, "Oh, that's the Latin girl." And so, I did a cookbook in homage to that. And I love cooking Latin food because I love introducing people to flavors that they're never thought that that was Latin, right? Like, for example, last night, I went to a Japanese-Peruvian restaurant.

Grace

And my friend asked me, "I never knew there was such a Japanese/Asian influence in Peru." It is, it's massive. And I said, "Oh, yeah, it's very common." And so, I love like showing people that the variation and the variety of Latin American food in general because Mexico is so different from Brazil. It's so different from Argentina, and it's so different from Chile and from Peru.

Grace

So, that's my specialty. But again, I thank the universe and God that I've been able to travel a lot, like, for example, I went to Thailand, and I spent quite a bit of time there. And I took a lot of cooking classes. I'm not a Thai food expert, but I can cook the basic stuff.

Laurie

Yeah. Cool.

Grace

And then, I went to a French culinary institute, so I'm comfortable with making a lot of French dishes. And I worked for a while in an Italian restaurant here in the city. And again, I think the good thing about going to culinary school is that you learn to follow recipes.

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

So, it's nice to, for example, I'm a big fan of Ottolenghi and he has beautiful cookbooks, one of them called Jerusalem. And I think I've cooked my way through that whole cookbook, because the flavors are just so beautiful and simple. And it's Israeli food and he celebrates Jerusalem in the cookbook. So, again, I feel super comfortable making ... Again, the only culture that I am fascinated by or intimidated by is Japanese food.

Laurie

Right.

Grace

I mean, yeah, like, and I've been working with Japanese seafood, but trying to make it more accessible for people not to be so intimidated by it.

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

And it's been great, because it's been a journey for me also, because I feel so honored to have this fish.

Laurie

Yeah. So, hearing that list, if I've never eaten Argentinian food or Thai food, or maybe, could you describe to somebody who's hearing this list of amazing cultures and places you can cook from, can you tell me maybe like a couple of things like what is Thai food? What is Argentinian food?

Grace

You know, I think that if there's one, if I can encourage people to be more curious about a certain cuisine, I would highly, highly, highly recommend being curious about Peruvian food. I think that Peru

for me, it's one of the most exciting culinary places in the world. And my stepfather is from there and I've traveled around, and I'm not even close to ... Because they have really, according to the Guinness World of Records, the most amount of traditional dishes within a country.

Grace

So the north, it's very different from the south, it's very different from the coast. And for example, the concept of ceviche came ... So ceviche is as fish basically cooked in lime juice, and with cilantro, and that's the most basic form of ceviche. So cilantro, red onion, a bit of chili, and lime juice.

Grace

And I think that ceviche, in general, has become ... it's no longer a dish, it's a movement, right? Now you can find so many different types of ceviche. Now, you are seeing even fruit ceviches, cauliflower ceviche, duck Ceviche. But I think it is a fascinating place that ... What I like the most about Peruvian food and Thai food it's the balance of flavors, layers of flavors and texture, that are always present in a dish that you're always guessing, right? I love that.

Grace

So when you have a bite, you're like, oh, okay, there's sweet. There's savory. There is acid. And there's a balance of everything. The salt, the sugar, the acid, and that buttery flavors are somehow present, right? Not necessarily butter, but you know those balances, right, are there.

Grace

Argentinean food, it tends to be very simple, actually. I think what's happening in Latin America, which is very exciting, it was that for the first time I think these new generations of cooks are very proud to be Latin. And they've gone off to get trained in here or in Europe or in Canada. But there has been a breaking point for them when their friend asks them can you make me an empanada? Can you make me a chimichurri. And they're like, "Oh, I don't know how to make my own food. I know how to make more whatever it is from that country than I know how to make my own food."

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

So, for example, in Argentina, the chimichurri is huge. The empanadas are big. Because of this massive amount of immigration, they make amazing pastas and pizzas. It is part of the culture like Argentinean pizza.

Laurie

Fun.

Grace

But now, again, there's a lot more young chefs and the Argentinean barbecues are to die for like it's such a ritual around the art of grilling. And ...

Laurie

Tell me a little bit more about that. I'm about to install my own first grill for myself and the art of grilling just sounds so neat.

Grace

let's say you go to an Argentina household you literally see, all you see is ... So, you see the grill, right, which is basically built in the house. It's not like a grill that you buy. And then, you see the wood, right? So then you start your fire with the wood and then you let it kind of like yeah, get burned and ashy. And then you cook with that.

Laurie

Wow.

Grace

It's supposed to like when I was grilling in my home in Venezuela, you basically do the charcoal. Once it's hot, piping hot, then you grill. No. There you have to wait. You have to start the fire and it's a whole thing. It's an art to grill, but it's also about the pre-grilling, it's a thing because you have to start the fire and have to get it ready. So then that's when you have like your cheeses and your salamis and all that and your olives. You're having beautiful Malbec wine and then you grill. So, it's like a lunch that turns into a dinner that turns into a party.

Laurie

You never leave. I love this. This sounds like fun.

Grace

Yeah, it is very fun. And Argentinean barbecues, asados, they're called asados, they're very fun.

Laurie

So would you say, I mean, I'm staggered by the places that you've been and cooked and experienced and eaten and processed. Would you say that part of this process of falling in love with other culture's food is just finding where to get some of the ingredients and thinking about what you might want to make?

Grace

Yeah, that's the hard part, right. But I think that the great thing is that nowadays, you just need a little bit of planning, right. Because you can find all this stuff online and you can get it shipped to you.

Grace

So, don't let that turn you off. I think it is a very exciting time for cooking because you can Google ingredients. You're like, "Oh, okay, wait." Maybe it's asking you for rice vinegar and you're like, "Oh, what is rice vinegar?" Well, it's literally rice vinegar, but maybe you, you know, just okay. And then you can Google it and it'll say, okay, it's like vinegar, but it's made of rice. It's a bit sweeter, less harsh. Maybe regular vinegar and a little bit of sugar.

Grace

So, I think, that these days, you can Google and really find alternatives. And if you really want to get a hold of that ingredient, if you want to see how it tastes, that I also encourage that. You can order online and it will come to you. It would just require a little bit of planning.

Laurie

I love that.

Grace

And it is something that opens your palate. And it is exciting when you try something new that you've never tried.

Laurie

Maybe I would love some suggestions for this because now I'm hungry. First of all, I should have eaten before we had this conversation. I'm starving now.

Laurie

If you were going to leave us with three foods from any of the cultures, any of the places, three things that somebody could dip a toe into the water, whether it's a seasoning or a sauce or a side dish or just anything. Three things that somebody who is kind of curious could learn how to make.

Grace

Yeah. So first, want to share. I don't know if I can share it with you guys later and then they can look up the recipe online but ...

Laurie

Sure.

Grace

But again, that chimichurri recipe which can turn into a wasakaka, which means remember, like the CHIMICHURRI was the garlic, olive oil, parsley, and acid. If you fold an avocado in there, right, and you mash it, that turns into a beautiful sauce called wasakaka it's from Venezuela. But you can put on top of everything again, right.

Grace

I'm guaranteeing you guys that it's going to change your life. And then, another thing that you have to do that's going to change your life because everyone loves guacamole. Most people put tomatoes in their guacamole.

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

Not put tomatoes in guacamole and let's put pomegranate seeds. Pomegranate seeds and black sesame seeds and finish it off with that flaky sea salt, like I'm recommending. That's going to be another game changer.

Laurie

What? Okay, wait a minute. Wait a minute. Okay, so you had me a chimichurri. By the way, Grace, we'll grab that recipe from you. We'll add it to the Heart To Table page so people can look it up.

Laurie

Talk to me about why there are no tomatoes invited to your guacamole.

Grace

They are not invited. I think many of us are obsessed with guacamole, right? It's such an easy thing to do and it's so beautiful and simple. But like I started realizing I was like, "Okay, first of all, you need to really deseed that tomato in order for it not to be watery and in there because if not then you're guacamole is watery." And the thing is the more you evolve as a cook you realize that less is more and you need to let the ingredients shine. And so I think that if you go through the trouble of finding that perfectly ripe avocado, right, and remember avocado by itself tastes beautiful, right?

Laurie

Yep.

Grace

So I was like, wait a minute. First of all, you need to add garlic to your guacamole just beautiful avocado, enough lime, cilantro, red onion, and that flaky salt and a little bit of a jalapeno or a serrano I personally love serranos better. I think if you have not tried serrano chilies, I think you should. They're more fun than a jalapeno.

Laurie

Okay.

Grace

And the kick is, I think, it's more subtle but it's a little bit more delicate.

Laurie

Got it.

Grace

So I highly encourage you too. That's one little thing that you can change. Change your jalapenos for your serrano chilies and that's a really nice shift. But then I was like, okay, it really doesn't need a tomato, right? It really doesn't. Most people, they don't deseed the tomato properly. So, then it's like your guacamole is watery you're taking from the star of dish, which is your avocado.

Laurie

Yes.

Grace

And then, I was like, but people enjoy the crunch and they think, oh, let's just add one more vegetable in there. But like you don't need it. And if you put a pomegranate seed on top, it's going to be a game changer. Not only does it look beautiful, because of the contrast of that beautiful pomegranate color against the green and then you add black sesame seeds because it just looks very dramatic and very sexy and very impressive. But also, it's like another layer of flavor that little explosion in your mouth of flavor without taking from the avocado, it's just like a good add-on. But also it's not going to water down and it's a showstopper. Like people will look at that guacamole.

Laurie

Yeah. Sounds like they're going to eat it too.

Grace

And they're going to be like, oh, it's just guacamole and I'll be like oh, okay, I want to try this.

Laurie

So tomatoes out, pomegranate seeds in?

Grace

In. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. That's going to be something that people should absolutely try. And it's a must. And then what else? It was three things, right?

Laurie

Yeah. I mean, those two sound amazing.

Grace

So I think that definitely, that's a very kind of adventurous thing to do.

Laurie

Yeah.

Grace

But I highly encourage you to make more of tostadas, right? Like a fish tostadas. And I think that you don't need much. You can grill the fish but again, just put enough salt and pepper in it and grill it. Put it on a very high heat pan and then just put beautiful grill marks or you can roast it in the oven. And again, add on top, I make this, I think this is going to change your life too. It's chipotle mayo. Get that ahead, a best product. And what I do is, so I grab your favorite kind of mayo and fold in some of that chipotle and adobo and grate some zest, lime zest, or lemon zest in there. A little bit of that flaky sea salt. And you could do that as fish tacos or fish tostadas and make like a slaw.

Grace

So it's either you put the mayonnaise on top of the fish or you put the mayo on the slaw, that Chipotle mayo, and some cilantro, a little bit more of lime or lemon juice. And there you have it something so simple. That is so flavorful, just by adding that mayo and the crunchiness of the slaw and that cilantro. That's another game changer for sure.

Laurie

I love it. So chimichurri, we're updating our guacamole and we're aiming for tostadas.

Grace

Tostados or fish tacos taken to the next level.

Laurie

Oh my gosh.

Grace

I think people need to eat more fish. Yeah.

Laurie

Okay.

Grace

I love making fish.

Laurie

It sounds like, I mean, I feel like when you explore this, we're also absorbing food traditions from other places. All of these things are things that have been around. They're passing down through people's lineage. I mean, can we keep food stories and traditions alive by learning about how to make them in our own homes?

Grace

Absolutely. And I want to add two things that I think that it should be on everyone's pantry and it is a good balsamic reduction. I think that a lot of people have balsamic vinegar, but a balsamic reduction will be like a syrupy kind of balsamic.

Grace

And again, any salad or any like you do any roasted vegetables and say you're roasting cauliflower or you're roasting butternut squash and add that balsamic reduction on top and salt and it changes everything. So it's great for salads. It's great for roasted vegetables. It's even great for like fish. You have a piece of fish you put salt and pepper and that balsamic reduction on top. So, I think that I highly recommend, again, the flaky sea salt for sure, balsamic reduction, and a good Dijon mustard.

Laurie

Oh yeah.

Grace

Dijon mustard goes such a long way. You can make beautiful dressings with it. Nice Dijon mustard would be if it's very balanced and it adds a lot of flavor to anything. And then yeah, that chipotle mayo. And I always have salsa verde and salsa roja from Herdez. And everyone should have that Herdez, the Guacamole Salsa.

Grace

If you feel lazy and you just want to put like a piece of chicken on the grill or a piece of fish or a piece of steak and you put that on top, you're set.

Laurie

That's my husband's favorite.

Grace

Yeah. Really good.

Laurie

I bought it one time. And then from then on, he was like where did it go?

Grace

Exactly. The eggs with that and everything. Yeah.

Laurie

Well, you've officially made me hungry, chef. Thanks a lot.

Grace

I'm hungry too.

Laurie

But it sounds like you've given us so many good ideas for what we can add to the pantry. I personally get a little intimidated trying to explore other dishes and other cultures. And you did really make everything sound simple, easy. Sounds like using good ingredients and respecting the ingredients and treating them well and sort of trying to keep it simple.

Grace

The other thing that is a game changer is fresh pepper guys.

Grace

When I'm saying season with salt and pepper, you have to invest in good ... It's two types of salt, one that is finer. And again buy that grinder. Buy the little grinder, it's in the supermarket of salt and pepper and that itself will change everything. I don't understand when I see like table salt, and the other granulated I'm like, "Guys, what are you doing? Of course, nothing tastes like nothing, and of course, you're bored, because if you're starting off with this salt and this pepper, nothing is going to taste like anything."

Grace

And always have limes and lemons. Zesting is very important. Zesting is something that, again, it adds so much freshness to a dish and it's just about zesting. And fresh herbs are great if you're intimidated by them because you feel they like, again, they go bad. Just like I said sauté them with olive oil, and then keep them in the fridge and they will last a very long time, chop them and sauté them with olive oil and salt. So, yeah, those things are my go-to. That's what I cook with every day.

Laurie

And that's what makes the neighbors come over.

Grace

Yeah.

Laurie

Well, you've given us a ton of ideas for how to travel the world with our plate. I know, for myself, I plan on never putting a tomato in guacamole again, while I explore the pomegranate seeds. It sounds really fun. It seems like a simple addition that I could check out myself and upgrade my taco night you know.

Grace

Yes. I love that. Upgrade your taco night. I love it.

Laurie

Grace, if there is one thing you could say to somebody who is listening who is possibly a little intimidated about bringing something new into their house and trying something new. Is there anything you would say to encourage them?

Grace

Yes, find support. Like I said, gather your family. Do Zoom calls. Just have support, but do it. Make it fun. Make it fun. It's like, you know what, it's like, okay, it's like trying a new kickboxing or Pilates or yoga class. It's the same thing. We're so shy at first and we feel, am I going to be good? But it doesn't matter. Just find support. Go online if you need. There's all kinds of support groups and helps and blogs and YouTube videos. And do it with a friend or do it with a family member and say, you know what, let's hold each other accountable and really do this even if we're scared.

Grace

Because we must do one thing that scares us and walk towards our fears because you only grow from that. And it sounds simple, but we need to let go of that fear of, oh, no, cooking is not for me. Cooking is for everyone. And if you learn to master that one dish, you would then enjoy it and want to try something else.

Laurie

I love it. Chef Grace, you have given us a lot to chew on today. Thank you so much for being with us. I know I am so inspired and intrigued and curious and I'm sure our listeners are too. Thank you so much, chef.

Grace

Thank you, guys. Thank you [foreign language 01:20:10]. Enjoy your meal. Well, I'm @ChefGraceRamirez in Instagram. I literally check all the messages. So, if you have any questions or any more inspiration on anything, I will probably answer you like around 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. That's when I'm answering messages. But yeah, enjoy. Enjoy and have fun.

Laurie

Thanks, chef.

And I also want to say a huge thank you to all our listeners, I'm so happy that so many NEW friends are joining us!

If you enjoyed listening to this, please, please share us with a friend. And subscribe to Heart to Table! For more information on everything you've heard here, plus recipes, head to [HormelFoods.com/HeartToTable](https://www.hormelfoods.com/HeartToTable)