

SALSA & SPICE

PATRICIA GARCIA MAKES FLAVORFUL SALSAS AND SAUCES

BY AMY SCHNEIDER

Stroll through the Lane County Farmers Market on a Saturday morning and you're bound to see Patricia Garcia's cheerful face at her colorful salsa stand. That same cheerful face is on all of her products, inviting salsa lovers to give Salsa Garcia a try.

"I believe that sauce really makes the meal, no matter what kind of food you're having," Garcia says. "If you have a good sauce, then your meal is right-on most of the time."

An accomplished chef, Garcia is most well known for her salsas, but she also makes tamales and enchilada sauce. She started out working at television and radio stations in California, Nevada and Colorado, cooking for friends and bringing her salsas to parties, but she didn't start selling her sauces at Saturday Market until 2013. After that, she switched to the Lane County Farmers Market, where she now sells her tamales and salsas every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Garcia's salsas pop in bright colors of red and green, zingy and flavorful. Her signature "original salsa" is velvety smooth and has a spicy kick that doesn't overpower the other flavors. Garcia's "salsa verde" is thicker in texture, more mild in taste with an appealing lime-green color.

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— PATRICIA GARCIA, SALSA GARCIA

Her third offering, "Chicano chile sauce," dances on the tongue with a bright dazzle of flavor, and the orangey red color looks beautiful on display.

The key to Garcia's salsas, she says, is the balance of spiciness against the flavors in the mix. "My products are all about the flavor," she says. "You can taste garlic, the jalapeños, the scallions — and I don't use onions, because onions tend to overpower everything."

Garcia grew up in Calexico, California, immediately across the border from Mexicali in Mexico. She says her family has long served as inspiration for her products — some of Garcia's recipes come from her mother, and her sister has helped Garcia develop the flavor profile she sought in her salsas.

During a typical week, Garcia makes 5 gallons of salsa at a time, a process that takes around two hours. She rents a kitchen from FOOD for Lane County — "they've been a godsend," she says — and uses in-season ingredients from local Crossroads Farm. She roasts the jalapeños, then blends all the ingredients together to make about 42 16-ounce containers in one batch.

The enchilada sauce, Garcia says, is a lengthier endeavor, happening over the course of three days and producing about 12 gallons of sauce. She also puts in 13-hour days on Sundays to make tamales — she sells 20 to 30 dozen a week, along with 40 gallons of salsa and 15 gallons of enchilada sauce.

This is in addition to the hours of work she puts in at the Lane County Farmers Market throughout the week.

What makes all the hours worth it, Garcia says, is spending time at the market and watching her customers light up as they get a mouthful of one of her sauces. "It makes me feel good that people get such a joy from my salsa and my tamales," she says.

Garcia adds that she also enjoys the atmosphere of the market and trading her salsas with farmers for local produce like goat cheese and lettuce. "Everybody there works so hard," she says. "It's amazing."

In the future, Garcia says she hopes to see her salsas in local restaurants. Her products are already available at Market of Choice, Capella Market, Haggen (soon to revert to Albertsons) and, when it opens in the fall, Whole Foods.

She credits her son and husband for their support — a marketing and business major, Garcia's son helped her develop the brightly colored packaging that makes her salsas instantly recognizable.

"We like a lot of color," she laughs. "We're very flashy." ■

Find Garcia's products at the Lane County Farmers Market near 8th and Oak or visit salsagarcia.com.



GARCIA SAYS HER ENCHILADA SAUCE IS GLUTEN FREE



A COLLECTION OF GARCIA'S RECIPES CAN BE FOUND AT SALSAGARCIA.COM