

## Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Episode 84: Snacky Hacks for Big Games and Awards Consideration

Matt: Hitting record.

Tara: Okay.

*[Beep.]*

Matt: Numbers are going up.

Tara: Are we good to go? We're good to go. Okay, snack hacks.

*[Light upbeat music begins.]*

Matt: It's only appropriate that we record our *Inside Trader Joe's Snack Hacks* episode while we're here inside at the Boston mothership.

Tara: That is one thing about Boston, they love their snacks.

Matt: I was thinking of their hacks, but okay, snacks too.

Tara: Well, they are wicked smaht people here, so it's going to be fun to hear about how they hack their snacks.

Matt: Let's go *Inside Trader Joe's*.

*[Theme music begins accompanied with two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]*

Tara: I'm Tara Miller, director of words and phrases and clauses.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the culture and innovation guy at Trader Joe's.

Tara: Well, this episode is about culture and innovation, because during this time of year our customers often get together in each other's living rooms to experience some fun cultural events together as a group.

Matt: Like awards shows.

Tara: And big sporting events.

Matt: The European Men's Handball finals is January 26.

Tara: Oh, that's good to know.

Matt: All of these shared cultural events...they require snacks. Then again, so does getting up in the morning.

Tara: Trader Joe's snacks are great for a quiet night at home too.

Matt: Do you hacky sack?

Tara: I don't. We are talking about hacky snacks, which are different than hacky sacks. And hacking the snacks, coming up with new ways to mix them up, combine them, add other things to them, well, that's what this episode is all about.

*[Theme music ends.]*

Tara: With us right now, we have a crew member from our Boston office.

*[Upbeat music begins.]*

Christopher: I'm Christopher, I'm the associate category manager for produce. And I'm excited to be here today.

Matt: What's happening in produce? Are we in a period of peak for a certain thing?

Christopher: I think all bag lettuce is kind of a peak. It's really focused around that, healthy eating after the new year, getting back at it after the holidays.

Tara: Are you a snacky guy?

Christopher: I am a snacky guy. Sometimes a little too much.

Tara: I love snacks so, if you're sitting down to watch a game or if you're going to watch an awards show, or if you have people coming over, would you have some go-to's?

Christopher: Quite a few, actually.

Tara: He came with a list, Matt.

Christopher: I tried to prepare.

Matt: That makes one of us, so I appreciate it.

Christopher: Good. One of my top ones is Jalapeño Poppers. What I do for that is take our fresh jalapeños, cut them in half. I take some cream cheese of ours; I prefer the block cream cheese than the whipped cream cheese. And then I just put some cheese on top of it, whether it be the Mexican style cheese, or I recently tried the Unexpected Cheddar shred, and I thought that was phenomenal with it.

Tara: Wait, you just eat them like that?

Christopher: I pop them in the oven.

Matt: But I have questions.

Christopher: Sure.

Matt: First of all, I thought people from New England didn't like spicy food. Are you saying that I'm misinformed?

Christopher: I am not originally from New England.

Matt: Could have fooled me.

Tara: Really?

Christopher: Yeah.

Matt: I'm just saying.

Christopher: No, I was born in Tennessee.

Tara: Well, you got to-

Matt: Your accent is totally from Tennessee.

Christopher: (laughs)

Tara: No, it is not. (laughs)

Christopher: My father was in the military for a while.

Tara: No, how'd your accent happen?

Christopher: It just happened. Nobody else in my family sounds like me. And I think it's a little bit of a Maine twang, as I call it. I spent a lot of time growing up in Maine, and so I think it's a combination of that and maybe with some down south.

Matt: So you like spicy food.

*[Music transition.]*

Christopher: I enjoy spicy food.

Tara: Jalapeños aren't super spicy.

Matt: That depends.

Tara: I guess.

Matt: Some of them can be spicy. Do you remove the seeds?

Christopher: It really depends...

Matt: Is that a myth?

Christopher: ...who you have coming over. It's not a myth, the seeds definitely add some heat level. Really depends who we have coming over and if we know whether they like spice or not.

Matt: Do they fill out a waiver upon in entry, or how do you know this?

Christopher: We typically err on the side of caution. And if we don't know their preference, we take the seeds out.

Tara: Have you ever tried them in the air fryer?

Christopher: I have tried them in the air fryer. I have a small air fryer at home, and so when I put them in it made a little bit more of a mess than I wanted. I couldn't do that many at a time.

Tara: Okay.

Christopher: Typically, with the oven you put them all on a baking sheet and it's a good way to make a lot of them very quickly.

Matt: Thanks for being on the side of ovens are okay.

Christopher: I am pro oven in my house.

Matt: I'm astounded that someone didn't fall over themselves to praise the air fryer, but thanks for being here, Christopher.

Tara: (laughs) Do we sell Jalapeño Poppers in our freezer?

Matt: Sometimes.

Tara: But they're breaded, right?

Matt: Yeah.

Tara: I like that this is just the straight up jalapeño cheese. Do you season it at all?

Christopher: Sometimes I add a little more spice to it.

Matt: Wow.

Christopher: Again, it depends how spicy you want it. To me, a Jalapeño Popper should have some spice to it.

Tara: Yeah.

Christopher: Every now and then I'll mix in some garlic powder, onion powder. And then, just if you want a little paprika sometimes.

Tara: Okay. All right. What else? I'm digging the Jalapeño Popper idea.

Christopher: My other go-to is really Cauliflower Nachos.

*[Music transition.]*

Christopher: And so, again, I know you're probably thinking I'm all about the health, but we went over to a friend's house, and they had it and we were blown away by it.

Matt: (chuckles)

Christopher: Take some...

Matt: I mean, like the 13-year-old in me just can't help, but please continue.

Christopher: Agreed.

Matt: I'll quietly chuckle to myself over here.

Christopher: It's another one of those...

Matt: ...blow you away.

Tara: But that happens later.

Matt: It's true.

Tara: Sorry (laughs).

Christopher: Take some cauliflower, whether it be the heads that you chop up or just the florets. And I like to cut them in half so they're a little bit smaller and a little bit more bite-size, and then toss on your favorite nacho toppings, whether it be onions, peppers. I prefer ground turkey, you could do ground beef. And then just add a little bit of that taco mix that we have, the seasoning mix. You could toss it in the oven, get the cheese a little melty, and then there you go.

Matt: So you love spicy stuff. Because that taco seasoning, as far as heat levels go, that's incendiary.

*[Music transition.]*

Christopher: Be very careful with it. I've learned my lesson a few times with it. I think some of my guests have learned their lessons a few times with it.

Tara: Do you pre-cook the cauliflower florets?

Christopher: I do not, no.

Tara: You obviously pre-cook the ground meat.

Christopher: Correct.

Tara: Okay. And you just pile everything on top of the cauliflower like they're chips?

Christopher: Like they're chips, exactly.

Tara: And how long do you put them in the oven for?

Christopher: Fifteen minutes just to get a nice little heat, maybe 20. It really depends when everything starts looking like it's crispy. I usually add a little cheese prior and then add a little more cheese, toss it back in, maybe broil it for a couple extra seconds at the end of it.

Matt: Now, if you're using your hands for this, this is for people you really know well. Like you don't have strangers over and you're all digging in the cauliflower.

Tara: Do you have strangers over, ever?

Matt: Sometimes, yes. Where you're like, who is this guy?

Tara: (laughs) Okay.

Matt: When's he going to leave?

Tara: (laughs)

Christopher: Know who you're inviting over. I don't want them making a mess in the house by eating them with their hands.

Matt: That's right.

Christopher: Yes.

Matt: That's right.

Christopher: I will say the difference between these and regular nachos is that they're a little more friendly to eating with a fork than a tortilla chip.

Matt: I thought you were going to say that the difference between these and nachos made with chips was that the ones with chips are so good.

Tara: (laughs)

Matt: But I take it that these are delicious too.

Christopher: I enjoy them quite a bit. A lot of the toppings are the same, so at the end of the day the only difference is the tortilla chips and the cauliflower.

Tara: And for some people, they'd say, "Hmm, that's a big difference." But I like cauliflower now. We have time for one more. Do you have one more?

Matt: There's a product idea in that though, just a tray of cauliflower nachos.

Tara: Crunchy Cauliflower, oh.

Matt: The Cauliflower Growers of America are going to write in letters of appreciation, "Thanks for the great idea."

Christopher: I do have one more idea, it does have some spice to it.

Tara: (laughs) There's a theme.

Christopher: Taking our Pepper Jelly that I know is a little seasonal...

Tara: Uh-huh.

Christopher: ...and taking our Golden Rounds, I believe they're called, which I'm a huge fan of, and putting a little bit of the Pepper Jelly onto the Golden Rounds and then taking a little bit of cream cheese. Sometimes we've done our Greek yogurt on top as well. And I think it's a nice combination of a little bit of spicy, a little bit of sweetness.

Tara: That reminds me of the classic presentation of a block of cream cheese with either Pepper Jelly or the Thai Sweet Chili Sauce over the top of that, and then you could cut it with a cheese knife or something and spread that on crackers. Kind of the same thing but in a deconstructed way.

Christopher: Exactly. It's the same way, a little less messy we think, because people aren't digging into the block of cheese and getting it everywhere.

*[Music transition.]*

Matt: It sounds like cleanliness is also a theme.

Christopher: I am the dishwasher in the house, and so I try to avoid as many dishes as possible, and as small of a mess as possible to clean up.

Matt: Smart.

Tara: You're a tidy guy.

Matt: What sort of events, do you have like if you're watching an award show for say acting, or other movie making stuff, do you have a spicy thing that you would serve?

Christopher: My ultimate spicy super quick is just the Buffalo Chicken Dip that we have. I do a good spicy chili as well.

Matt: Oh.

Tara: Okay.

Christopher: Again, taco seasoning mix comes into play there for a bit. Award season typically is at the beginning of the year, which is chili season almost at the same time. Here in New England at least.

Matt: I think everywhere.

Tara: Everywhere. Even in Southern California. It gets cold, just not the same kind of cold.

Christopher: Fair enough.

Matt: It's cool, but we say it's cold.

Tara: Oh, it's always cool.

Matt: Well, that totally.

Tara: There's always that. Okay. Christopher, thank you so much for some yummy suggestions.

Christopher: Thank you.

*[Music transition.]*

Matt: We have a very special guest here. Someone you've heard on a previous episode. Tracy, good to see you. Even better to hear you.

Tracy: Thank you so much for having me.

Tara: Snacks, hacks.

Matt: Snacktivities.

Tracy: Snacktivities.

Tara: Snacktivities. Oh, I like that. What's your go-to thing when you want something that's interesting but not right out of the box?

Tracy: Good question. One recent one that we did for NFL Sunday was take the Hash Browns...

Tara: You got me already.

Tracy: ...heat them up in the oven nice and crisp, a little bit of salt when they come out, and then treat them like a baked potato. So the already cooked bacon, stick it in a pan, make it really crunchy. Chop up some green onion, sour cream, and whatever else you want to put on. But that's what I put on mine. No clean up. So easy and delicious.

Tara: My face has incredulity. Because I'm like, this is a genius hack.

Matt: Yes, it's like a gargantuan tater tot that's been flattened.

Tracy: Yes. Well, that's what a hash brown is, basically.

Matt: Sure. I mean, but still.

Tracy: But could also do this with tots.

Tara: But those hash browns, there's something next level. And you could do them in an air fryer, Matt.

Tracy: Yes.

Matt: I was waiting, I was hoping that someone would say, "You know, the air fryer would come in handy here."

Tara: If you had a lot of people coming over, you could do a hash brown baked potato assembly line. A build your own hash brown bar.



Tracy: Yes. Barbecue sauce, baked beans. Everything.

Tara: Oh, okay.

Tracy: Yeah.

Matt: I like the beans on toast version where the toast is replaced with a hash brown.

Tracy: Yes. Everything can be replaced with a hash brown.

Matt: Exactly. Sandwich bread, hash browns.

Tara: (laughs)

Tracy: Well, people do that.

Matt: French toast, hash browns.

Tracy: Yeah, totally.

Matt: Hamburger buns.

Tara: Eggs Benedict. Instead of an English muffin, hash brown.

Matt: Sure.

Tara: That's a good one.

Tracy: Yes.

Tara: You have another one?

Tracy: Not really a snack hack, but almost a deal breaker with my...

Matt: I love a deal breaker.

Tracy: ... family. Yes, I am a big Everything Bagel fan. And our New York City stores, we have Artisan Everything Bagel, so when I visit stores down there, I always come back with a four pack. But I can't anymore because nobody else likes the smell, they stink up the refrigerator, they leave little onion chunks and garlic on the counter that you can't really... Anyways, everyone's asked very kindly not to bring back Everything Bagels from New York City. So, I have the Everything But The Bagel Seasoning, so I bring back the Plain Bagels from New York City and then either butter or cream cheese and I just put a ton of the seasoning on there, and that's acceptable.

Tara: Have you tried making your own individual Everything Bagel at home by putting a little butter on the outside of the bagel and putting the seasoning on at home and popping it in the oven for a couple minutes?

Tracy: I have not, but I think I should try that.

Tara: That might work. Because then you get that seasoning in the place where you want it.

Tracy: Yeah.

Tara: Right? As opposed to...

Tracy: I can do top and bottom.

*[Music transition.]*

Tara: Right. So you could double up.

Tracy: That's brilliant. Yes.

Tara: Okay.

Matt: It's impressive that your hack is a workaround that takes into consideration those with whom you live and you're so nice. I would just keep buying the bagels.

Tracy: Yes.

Tara: But I think having that Everything But The Bagel Seasoning in your pantry, that's a hack in and of itself.

Tracy: Love it.

Tara: Those are two really good hacks.

Tracy: Another random hack, my niece has an 18-month-old daughter, and she loves the Bambas, and she sticks that Bambas in everything. Hummus, jelly, peanut butter, it is like a spoon for her.

Tara: Really?

Tracy: And I tried it with jelly, and it's almost like a little peanut butter and jelly quick snack. It was very delicious.

Tara: That was a whirlwind marathon of...

Tracy: Snackivities.

Tara: Is that what you called it?

Matt: Snackivities, yeah. Thanks so much.

Tara: (laughs)

Tracy: You're welcome.

*[Transition to Jamie, music transition.]*

Jamie: Tara, Matt, thanks for having me back. I'm Jamie, I'm the nutrition director. So my team's responsible for ensuring all of our products...(laughs)

Tara: You're responsible, we're certainly not, okay. (laughs)

Jamie: ...for ensuring all of our products meet labeling regulations. So that's US regulatory requirements, as well as meeting our brand requirements. It's not just the product name, it's the product claims, ingredient declarations, how we're speaking to the product, even the story, the copy that's on the label, the marketing.

Tara: Okay.

Jamie: Romance.

Tara: That's what we do, the romance.

Jamie: Yeah.

Tara: Speaking of...

Matt: Snacks.

Tara: When we talk romance, we think snacks. Food is love, and maybe that's dysfunctional, but here we are. We put the fun in dysfunctional. I hope.

Jamie: Simple is the name of the game, Tara.

Tara: You have small children.

Jamie: Yes. I will say that I like to try everything that comes out in our stores. From all of our dips that are easy to serve with sides, as well as items in our frozen section. But when I was thinking about one of my classic favorites of all time is our Cowboy Caviar Salsa, and I just feel like it's so versatile, so I will sometimes just serve it as is. If I have a...

Matt: Like, "Hey, everybody. Salsa?"

Jamie: Yeah. And it looks like...

Tara: And spoons?

Jamie: Yeah, I'm really fancy that way, Matt.

Matt: It's like a side salad salsa.

Jamie: Absolutely. And...

Matt: That's its own show.

Jamie: And sometimes people think I made it on my own, and that's even more perfect, right?

Tara: And you don't tell them. (laughs)

Jamie: If you have an avocado handy and you want to chop that up, put a little lime juice on it, mix that in, it looks like it's even more homemade.

Tara: Really good idea.

Jamie: Yeah, it's delicious and it's hearty. And the caviar itself has a lot of different flavors to it, so...

Matt: It's got corn, black beans.

Jamie: Red bell pepper.

Matt: Red bell peppers. It's an interesting thing that lives somewhere between a salsa and a corn relish.

Jamie: I mean I feel like you could use it in a Turkey Taco Dip. It's a little thicker, so you might want to combine it with other salsa that we sell in the jar and layer that in. You could probably do it without the turkey just because it is so hearty.

Tara: I like that idea of adding some ground meat, so some ground turkey or some ground beef, or whatever it is that makes you happy. And would you put all that together and bake it?

Jamie: A Turkey Taco Dip typically baked. Obviously, you would basically use a ground turkey meat, and you could season that, cook that, layer that as the first layer and then maybe the caviar and some other salsa. And you want to put cream cheese in there and top it off with Mexican cheese, and then you would bake it.

Matt: My takeaway hack is just to use Cowboy Caviar more often.

Jamie: Yeah.

*[Music transition.]*

Tara: Other snacky hacks.

Jamie: Well, one of the other things that's one of our newer products is our Strained Thick and Creamy Greek Yogurt, that's plain. I like to have it at breakfast with a little honey and some fruit and nuts. But we're talking about snack hacks here as well. I tried it with our Ranch Seasoning and blended that together. You think about a vegetable platter, it's 15 grams of protein for three-fourths of a cup. I really didn't miss the sour cream too much. So if you want to balance that in with some of the turkey dip that you just made, it was quite delicious.

Tara: I stopped using sour cream when I made dips a long time ago and started using Greek yogurt because of the protein. And it has a very similar tang as a sour cream, but this thick and creamy yogurt is so protein rich. That Ranch Seasoning, people should not sleep on that product. That is a really cool product and ranch dip, right?

Jamie: A little goes a long way too, so you can season to taste and...

Tara: I'm thinking that dip really good, I bet, with potato chips too.

Jamie: I'm sure.

Tara: Like Ranch Seasoning with potato chips. That's a classic combination. Oh, I love that. So many of our dips, not the hummus dips, but so many of our dips taste really great if you warm them up. They're delicious right out of the fridge, but if you take that extra step of warming them up in the microwave for a little bit, next level. Okay, we might be done.

Jamie: Well, thank you so much for having me on.

Tara: We got a couple of good hacks.

Matt: Thanks for stopping by.

*[Transition to Dan, music transition.]*

Dan: My name's Dan. I am the senior facilities manager with Trader Joe's.

Tara: You have spoken with us on this podcast before, Dan.

Dan: I have.

Matt: Building stores, fixing stores.

Tara: And helping us with snack hacks. Your responsibilities seem to never end. So, you like to cook and your hacks, I'm going to say, could potentially be considered recipes. And then I started thinking, what's the difference between a recipe and a hack? Really, not much. A recipe is a way to use products together, and a hack is a way to use products together or in a way that might be unexpected. So really, a hack is a recipe, and a recipe can be a hack.

Matt: Dan, hack away.

Tara: (laughs)

Dan: Well, one of the things that's really easy to do is bake brie. And we sell a great selection of wheeled bries at Trader Joe's. Bake brie, the way I like to do it is pretty simple. Wheel a baked brie in a baking dish. I like to score it. Then in a bowl I put chopped pistachio nut meat, a little bit of honey or you could put some hot honey in there if you want, give it a little bit of life. A little bit of fresh thyme. And I mix all that together and I spoon it over the baked brie and then put it in an oven until it melts, it starts to get oozy. While that's happening, I just put some sliced baguette with a little bit of olive oil in the toaster oven, give that a little bit of crunch. And when the brie's dripping and melty in the baking dish, I take it out and drizzle a little bit of olive oil on it, maybe throw a sprig of thyme on there to make it look pretty and dip my toast away in the baked brie and pistachio.

Matt: Man, if you're going to tuck into the big game, or anything, that is the way to do it.

Tara: Okay, so this is scoring not like you score in a big game. Scoring meaning just like cutting small slits in the top.

Dan: Yeah, taking a paring knife and just running it, running lines across the top of the brie. And then maybe turn the brie 45 degrees and then do the exact same over again, and that's your cross-thatch.

*[Music transition.]*

Tara: Letting the toppings that you've put on soak into the brie, and letting the steam in the brie come out.

Dan: Correct.

Tara: Okay, and that sounds and looks really fancy. And what you just described is so easy.

Dan: It really is. And Trader Joe's sells pistachio nut meat, both salted and unsalted.

Tara: You don't love pistachios, or you could do almonds, you could do walnuts.

Dan: You could do pecans.

Tara: You could do pecans, or pecans.

Dan: Or macadamia nuts. Whatever you want to do.

Tara: Huh. Oh, macadamia nuts. Oh, they're as buttery as the brie, that might be a little too buttery.

Dan: It might be too buttery.

Tara: Said no one ever. That's a keeper. What else do you have for us?

Dan: I have scratch popcorn. I don't like to make popcorn out of a bag in a microwave, I like making popcorn on my stove top, old school. It's fun because you can make any flavor profile you want with popcorn on a stove top. It's pretty simple to do. You need a heavy bottom pot because you're going to use some high heat. And the popcorn kernels are really sitting close to the bottom of the pot, so it's really easy to burn popcorn. So a heavy bottom pot is really key. I coat the bottom of the pot with olive oil, and I put an even layer of Trader Joe's Popcorn Kernels on the bottom of the pot, and I add three to five leaves of sage, fresh sage. I also like some thyme in there. Sometimes if I'm feeling really fancy I like to add red pepper flakes. You can pretty much use anything you want when it comes to seasoning the popcorn. Then you turn the heat on as high as possible and you cover it. And then when you first hear the first kernels starting to pop, you turn the heat down to medium to medium high. They'll start gaining some momentum, and then I drop it to more of a medium low. You've got to pay attention; you got to be right there. You can't walk away because you can pretty easily burn the oil. And if you burn your oil, you're going to have burned popcorn, and that's because you haven't managed your heat correctly.

Tara: I grew up eating popcorn done exactly this way, in a heavy bottom pan on the stove. But my mom would shake it as it was cooking. Do you shake it as it's cooking?

Dan: You can. If you're managing the heat really correctly, you don't have to do a lot of shaking.

Tara: Got it.

Dan: You shouldn't have to do that, but you can if you want. If want to get pop holders on your hands and hold onto the side of the pot.

Matt: A little shaky breaky.

Dan: Shaky, yeah.

Tara: Whenever I've tried to do this with popcorn, I've just shaken onto it after it was popped and always been a little bit frustrated that the flavor doesn't stick.

Dan: Correct.

Tara: But you've put fresh herbs right inside the pot with the popcorn kernels. It cooks the flavors into the popcorn. That's a little bit of genius there.

Dan: Oh, thanks.

Tara: You could do garlic popcorn.

Dan: Garlic does...

Tara: It burns.

Dan: ...burns pretty quick. Some things you have to do by trial and error and sometimes you have to add some of that stuff towards the end.

Tara: I think the hack here really is add fresh herbs to your popcorn while you're popping it.

Dan: Yeah. Rosemary on the sprig is good too.

Matt: You're dropping these larger pieces, whole leaves, whole sprigs?

Tara: And then you just take them out when you're done.

Dan: Or you can leave them. Toasted sage leaves are pretty yummy. Once everything's popped, I dump it into a bowl. And then all the goodness that's left in the pot, I put a big old pad of butter in there. Because you already have a hot pot, so you put the butter in there, you melt that butter down, swish it through, pour it onto the popcorn and toss it and salt it and you're good to go.

Tara: Yum.

Dan: I leave all the stuff in there because it's great aroma.

Tara: Okay, one more.

Dan: One more?

Tara: One more.

Dan: Jeez, I don't know.

Matt: Spin the wheel.

Dan: Okay. I like Tomato Cheddar Bites, they're super simple. We take a baguette, and we cut it lengthwise from one end to the other, the long way.

Tara: Stem to stern.

Dan: Stem to stern. And then we cut individual slices off of that because we like to do small pieces of sharp cheddar cheese, small pieces of sliced tomato. I like Roma and Campari tomatoes. And then a small slice of sweet onion. And then we just put a little sprinkle of the Trader Joe's Aglio Olio Seasoning on top of that. And these are just individual little bite-sized pieces. I know it doesn't sound great, but all of those things together are pretty yummy. They have been an appetizer in our family for a long time, and everybody seems to enjoy them.

Matt: Sandwiches are so fantastic, and I think possibly underappreciated. And little tiny sandwiches.

Dan: It's what they are.

Tara: It's like a little open face sandwich.

Dan: It's a little open face sandwich. Yeah.

Tara: Do you heat it or is it just cold?

Dan: No, it's cold. Yeah, it's just bread, cheddar cheese, tomato, onion, and then your Trader Joe's seasoning of your choice. You could use the Citrus Garlic.

Tara: You could use Everything But The Bagel.

Dan: Everything But The Bagel. Yeah, you could use all kinds.

Matt: What's your go-to choice of cheddar?

Dan: I like any of the sharp cheddar cheeses.

Tara: Aglio Olio Seasoning, I think that's my favorite new product of the year.

Dan: It's a big fan of my daughter's.

Tara: Yeah.

Dan: Yeah.

Tara: We got a lot of stuff.

Dan: Good stuff.

Tara: We got a lot of stuff.

Dan: Good stuff to work with.



Tara: Dan, thank you so much for joining us.

Dan: Yeah, I love to do snack hacks.

Matt: A lot of spice going on in your house.

*[Transition to Devin, music transition.]*

Devin: Hi, my name is Devin.

Tara: What do you do here at Trader Joe's?

Devin: I am a packaging designer.

Tara: Oh, that's cool. All those super cool packages, really interesting designs that you see on the shelves at Trader Joe's.

Matt: Actual Trader Joe's crew members doing actual Trader Joe product designs.

Devin: We do. It's very fun.

Matt: Maybe we need to dig into that on a different episode. And yet, there are snacks that need hacking.

Tara: There are. And Devin, we're hoping that you have some fun hacks for us.

Devin: I think I do. One of my first ones is something that looks kind of fancy. It's going to impress your guests, but it's really easy. And it's called a Salmon Crostini.

Tara: All right. It already sounds fancy.

Devin: Right?

Matt: It's like one of those tuxedo T-shirts. It looks fancy and it's easy.

Devin: (laughs) And it's easy. Exactly.

Matt: Okay, perfect. I love it.

Devin: You start by roasting some of our really nice fresh salmon. This is something you need to do the day before, because you're going to want it chilled the next day. So you roast some salmon with a little bit of salt, a little bit of pepper, spray of olive oil, refrigerate it overnight. And then, the day of your party you're going to flake the salmon.

Tara: Okay.

Devin: So it's all nice and flaky and broken up. And then you're going to mix it with a little bit of mayo, a little bit of toasted sesame oil. Then you're going to spread it onto our little Trader Joe's Brioche Toasts.

Tara: Oh.

Devin: Yes.

Tara: Okay.

Devin: And then you top it off with a little bit of chive. It's quite delicious.

Matt: I'm thinking that the addition of that sesame oil brings almost like a sushi bar aspect to this, but then it's with a very French substrate or cracker or brioche toast. I like the combo here.

Devin: And everything's good with brioche.

Tara: Well, that's its own show too.

Devin: It's going to impress your guests.

Tara: And if you had sesame seeds at your house, you could sprinkle a little sesame seed on there. You could sprinkle some Everything But The Bagel Seasoning on top of that. I bet that would be good. Do you think that would be good?

Matt: I do, I think it would be great. I think it depends how seasoned the salmon is to begin with. How flaky is flaky? Asks the guy often described as a flake. How flaky is flaky? Are we making a salmon salad or are there larger pieces?

Devin: It's a party food, it's a finger food. So you want it to be small enough pieces where they're bite size easily on the piece of toast. I like to make them pretty small.

Tara: Yeah, this is a little higher brow, but it's not challenging. You got to think about tomorrow, today. Or today, tomorrow. No, tomorrow, today. Yeah. Okay. That's a good one. You've got more?

Devin: I do.

Tara: Okay.

*[Music transition.]*

Devin: We've seen this a lot, common flavors. A really good easy one to throw together are little Antipasto Skewers. You take an Italian meat you like, maybe salami or prosciutto, put it on a skewer with San Marzano tomato or a cherry tomato, a green olive, a little mozzarella ball, maybe some basil. You can even do a little drizzle of balsamic or oil on it. Those are always a hit.

Matt: Could you use a toothpick instead of a skewer?

Devin: Yes.

Matt: Because I want...

Tara: You need a big toothpick.

Matt: I know so...

Tara: You need a small skewer.

Devin: Small skewer.

Tara: Or a big toothpick. So like a toothpick for a shark instead of for...(laughs)

Devin: They do make small skewers. Believe it or not.

Tara: Who's they?

Matt: Skewers.org.

Devin: (laughs)

Tara: You're making them a non-profit, skewers.org?

Matt: Well, they're here to help.

Tara: (laughs) Okay, moving on. Because I see you have more.

*[Music transition.]*

Devin: We were talking about planning ahead. If you don't have time to plan ahead, my all-time favorite Trader Joe's treat are the Fried Olive Bites. They're unique.

Matt: Do you have to explain them when you serve them, or you just sit back and let the surprise happen?

Devin: I know, you can't tell what they are.

Matt: They're just like, "Cool, fried stuff."

Devin: Right. And they expect there to be... Well, there is cheese, but they expect it to be...

Matt: Cheesier.

Devin: ... cheesy and indulgent

Matt: And it's a little astringent...

Devin: It's bright.

Matt: ...and briny and yeah.

Devin: Yeah.

Tara: Fried Olive Bites are seasonal.

Matt: Okay. They are frozen. You can hang onto them.

Tara: You can hang onto them for a while.

Matt: That's what that freezer is for, not ice cubes.

Tara: I remember when we first tasted that product, I thought this was going to be an olive. It's ground up olives with cheese and breadings, all the different flavors. And, yeah, the cheesiness and the brininess and the crunchiness, it all really does come together nicely.

Matt: It's like it's from the most sophisticated country fair ever.

Tara: Did you have more?

Devin: People discuss cheeseboards, obviously.

Tara: No one has discussed a cheeseboard.

Devin: Because I was going to go there. You don't have to plan as hard.

Matt: Just random cheese drawer. You're like, man...

Devin: Every time you go to the store, we have great cheeses.

Matt: And then you have the odds and ends where you're like, "Ah..." And then, thank God people are coming over, just put it out on the board.

Tara: Yeah. I can put together a cheese board with what's in my fridge and my pantry in five minutes. Some crackers, a little cheese, maybe some fresh fruit, maybe some jam and a little ramekin or some honey.

Devin: Our dried fruits are great, nuts.

Matt: Couple sticks of gum, the last bit of granola that you're wondering what to do. If you board it, it's now on purpose.

Tara: Yeah. The last of that bag.

Matt: Like that one olive.

Tara: (laughs)

Matt: There's always that jar, and I always plead with folks, I'm like, "Can someone put this olive out of its misery?"

Tara: So you could make it really fancy. Take that one olive, put it on a toothpick.

Matt: A little sword. Those little sword toothpicks.

Tara: Just one.

Matt: You'd be excited, you put them in your pocket to have a sword fight later. We have really big toothpicks, smaller skewers, and now small swords. Tiny swords.

Devin: (laughs)

Tara: Devin, thank you for the joy. We appreciate you joining us. (laughs)

Devin: Thank you so much.

*[Music ends. Transition to closing.]*

Tara: This was such a fun episode. So many great snack ideas to try.

*[Closing music begins.]*

Matt: Well, I'm so inspired I just might even start watching football.

Tara: Wow. We have many more episodes of *Inside Trader Joe's* planned for 2025. Hit that free subscribe or follow button.

Matt: It *is* free, and worth every penny.

Tara: Until next time, from Boston, thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.