

Why We Cook

The COVID-19 pandemic has given Americans an unexpected amount of unstructured, home-based leisure time. Prohibited from attending our favorite sporting events, concerts, fireworks shows, and even traditional school, the need for *something* to fill that time grows as the days stretch into weeks and months.

New hobbies are proliferating as people find new ways to connect and amuse themselves and their loved ones. The one I find most satisfying is home cooking. Sharing these newfound culinary gifts with those you love and watching looks of delight spread across their faces as they dig into your hard work is a huge draw for those who love to cook, but there are several other reasons why good old fashioned home cooking is a value-added hobby.

1. Showing Love

Homemade food is, in my opinion, one of the best ways you can show someone that you love them. It's an act of service resulting in a delicious gift tailored to friend or relative's tastes. Spending an hour or two (or three or four or more depending on what you're making) can really blow someone away, especially if they aren't used to home cooking.

My wife describes herself as feeling "so pampered" when I start cooking after work. She gets the chance to unwind and tend to things she'd rather be doing, while I get the deep satisfaction of seeing her enjoy a fresh handmade meal. Her standard comfort food is mac and cheese, and she fell in love with it even more when she got the homemade variety.

2. Family Affair

My parents do tons of home cooking, and my mom is now on a huge kick of rediscovering old favorites, trying out new recipes, and experimenting over and over again to perfect certain dishes. This shared love of cooking spawns a lot of fun conversations between the two of us.

More than that, though, the beloved recipes from my childhood are now mainstays in my own expanding cookbook. Just as my parents brought their favorite recipes into their home – Applesauce Jello, a Thanksgiving staple, is one such recipe that my mom fondly remembers from her grandparents – I am doing the same, creating and maintaining a family heritage.

3. Food *Makes* an Event

At a Milwaukee Brewers baseball game, I discovered a sensational new food: *bratchos*. These are nachos (with all the fixings) with bratwurst meat taking the place of the traditional seasoned ground beef.

Soon after my discovery, bratchos made their debut at the Koskinen Family Packer Game Day Smorgasbord. Yup, each game day at my parents' house is a veritable buffet of ballpark foods, and at reasonable prices!

For the non-sports fans, every birthday must be accompanied by cake! (Or pie, if you share my mom's preference.) [This chocolate cake](#) was a hit with my in-laws, and I now simply refer to it as the Dorin Family Birthday Cake. After all, as Julia Child [said](#), "A party without cake is just a meeting."

4. Ethnic Connections

Food is one of the easiest ways to connect with any culture, and for me it's an especially important way to relate to my

own heritage. My family delights in putting German and Finnish dishes on the table and connecting over their origins and traditions that brought them from Europe to America. *Sauerbraten*, *rieska*, and *pannukakku* are some favorite examples of this.

5. Working With Your Hands

For most men, there is a deep satisfaction in manual labor. I'm slowly getting better at being a handyman with tools and wood and car repairs, but manual labor definitely includes the workout of kneading bread dough.

My go to for this arm workout is *pulla*, a Finnish sweet bread made with cardamom. While my KitchenAid stands in for elbow grease sometimes, there's a wonderful feeling of making something to eat by burning off the calories you'll consume later. I use the recipe in Beatrice Ojakangas' [*The Great Scandinavian Baking Book*](#) to make this brunch must-have.

Even as COVID-19 has isolated us from friends and family outside the house, those blessed with family under one roof have surely grown closer. Home cooked meals around a shared dinner time are one blessing of this pandemic, and we need to count all of those we possibly can.

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