

New Speaker:	00:00	Music
Jess Dang:	00:06	Hi there. You're listening to episode number 14 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. Friends, muchachos y muchachas, that has been one of the best parts about starting Cook Smarts. All of the friends we've made and the community we've built all around home cooking and today I've invited one of our most enthusiastic community members to the podcast. Ruth Garrett works full time and is also the Guardian to two grandkids, so instead of just enjoying the luxury of an empty nest a few years ago, Ruth found herself basically doing the parent thing all over again in her late fifties shuttling kids to and from activities after work and of course all of the food stuff. It's pretty hard to go from eating whatever you want to then having to consider the needs of two picky kids and that's definitely why meal planning and cooking is a huge source of stress for so many parents.
Jess Dang:	00:58	I'm really glad that our meal plans service has been able to ease some of that for Ruth. I have such admiration for this incredibly curious and capable woman and I know you will feel the same way after listening to our conversation, just make sure to listen to the very end of the episode because we have a very special gift for one lucky member of our community. So without further ado, meet Ruth.
Jess Dang:	01:19	Ruth, I'm so happy that I get to chat with you today and share your cooking story with our wonderful community. You know, when I first started Cook Smarts in 2012, I had no idea that I'd be able to get to know our members so well through our Facebook group and it's honestly been one of the best parts of my journey as a founder. And you have been such an active and helpful member in our Facebook group, which is why I invited you on the podcast today.
Ruth Garrett:	01:42	Well, thank you. I appreciate it.
Jess Dang:	01:44	Well, before we dive into all of the questions I have, I'd love for you to just introduce yourself. Tell everyone where you live, who you cook for, what do you do?
Ruth Garrett:	01:52	My name is Ruth Garrett and I live in Richmond, Virginia. And I am the controller for Virginia Repertory Theater, which I'm happy to mention to give us a plug. And in my household I've got two grandchildren. Tyler is eight and Kaylee is 12. Because they are my captive audience for dinner every night.

Jess Dang: [02:16](#) Nice. So they're, they're old enough to help around a little bit.

Ruth Garrett: [02:19](#) Yeah. Yeah.

Jess Dang: [02:20](#) Great. So I love seeing the post of your meals and hearing what your grands did or did not eat on Facebook. And I can tell from your posts that you're a pretty experienced cook and someone who's pretty comfortable substituting on the fly. So tell us how you learned to cook and how you developed your confidence in the kitchen.

Ruth Garrett: [02:38](#) Okay, well, Gosh, through a lot of mistakes, I would have to say my parents were both really good cooks. My Dad fancied himself sort of an amateur gourmet, and he loved to order exotic meat for New Year's and invite a bunch of friends over and impress everybody with cooking. My mother had this saying, which I always thought was cute. She said, if you can read, you can cook. The implication being of course, that you'd follow a recipe in a cookbook.

Jess Dang: [03:10](#) Right.

Ruth Garrett: [03:10](#) I never saw her use a recipe or a cookbook and all my life, so, wow. Yeah, she would say that, but that's not how she actually lived. So I watched them. I learned a lot from them.

Jess Dang: [03:24](#) Were you cooking dinner with them on a, on a regular basis or really you just kind of seeing what they were doing on the side?

Ruth Garrett: [03:32](#) yeah, I was mostly just watching what they would do. I was the youngest of five and one of my sisters and one of my brothers both, had a big interest in the kitchen, so they kind of monopolized it, so I just would watch and learn. Then once I was cooking for myself, I made a lot of mistakes, so I would try to figure out how not to do that again, you know, and I have friends that are interested in cooking and if you've got people talking about food and cooking and stuff, it sort of rubs off on you, I guess.

Jess Dang: [04:08](#) Yeah. And I imagine you learned to cook probably before we had the, you know, the Internet where you could just so easily Google like what did I do wrong or why is the chicken dry? So how did you kind of troubleshoot things?

Ruth Garrett: [04:19](#) Gosh, that's a really good question. And I, I'm not sure I would have an answer. One of the early wedding gifts I got from

anyone was "The Joy of Cooking". And one of the things I like about the joy of cooking is there's a whole lot of narrative in it that doesn't have any recipes. It's just how this works. And so I could look up, the biscuits didn't rise or you know, the chicken's dry, the meat was burned, whatever. And there was usually some good information in there. And I guess I learned from that. I learned a lot just by doing this worked, that didn't, I think it helps to like to eat.

Jess Dang: [05:01](#)

Yes.

Ruth Garrett: [05:03](#)

So then you're like, what was that tasty? No, not really. Don't do that anymore.

Jess Dang: [05:10](#)

And so it sounds like because you like to eat that your mistakes did not discourage you from continuing on and soldiering on in the kitchen.

Ruth Garrett: [05:17](#)

That's right. Yeah. In fact, one of my most notorious failures early, early in my marriage was I took a recipe out of a magazine called Tofu Lentil Pie. And I thought, you know, vegetarianism was trendy and eating non-meat food at that time was very trendy so I thought well, let's try this, it'll be good for us. It was so awful. It was disgusting. I threw it away.

Jess Dang: [05:43](#)

What was so awful about it? Do you remember?

Ruth Garrett: [05:46](#)

It, had no flavor it at all. It just tasted like eating, you know, wallpaper paste it. It just, it was horrible. But I have since learned to love both Tofu and lentils. So obviously it wasn't a, a major never doing that again thing, although I've never made that particular recipe again.

Jess Dang: [06:10](#)

Yeah, I would actually love to see the rest because you know, I think for me, design out cooks, you know, well I now, not only am I the recipe developer, but someone who cooks a lot. I can pretty much like look at a recipe and say like if it's going to do well or not just based off like the ingredient list. Cause I think that's so telling of you know how something is going to taste. And if you are someone who's cooked a lot like you have, it seems like you're able to, you're not probably at this point like not, you know, follow a recipe but also be able to add on to it so that something tastes good at the end of, you know, after you've made all that effort.

Ruth Garrett: [06:43](#)

Yeah. Or I know if I add this it's not going to ruin it. You know like when I made one of the recipes yesterday, Summer Veggie

Soup with Tortellini and I had a bunch of vegetables in my fridge that the recipe did not call for, but I knew I could throw them in there and it would just add something and it wouldn't hurt it. So I did.

Jess Dang: [07:09](#)

Yes. And I think so much of this comes from its, you know, experience but also just like a willingness to be a little bit, you know, to go off roading. And I know a lot of people get really stuck on, they just want to follow the recipe to a "T" and have it just be the way it is. And sometimes you just have to add a little bit more. So it seems like you, you know, from very early on had the personality of someone that wasn't afraid to kind of go off script.

Ruth Garrett: [07:33](#)

Yes, that's right. And in fact I actually have more trouble staying on script than I do venturing off. Years and years and years ago, probably in the early eighties there was a radio show that I enjoyed listening to on a public radio station and I couldn't tell you the name of it, but it was about cooking. And at the end of the episode, every week their tagline was recipes are like roadmaps, how you go and where you end up depends on you.

Jess Dang: [08:05](#)

I love that quote and I remember you posted it to Facebook. Yeah, I remember you posted the Facebook and be like, I have to remember this one for the future because it's so something I want everyone to kind of adopt as just, you know, it, I think it really helps you in the kitchen to not feel like you're beholden to your recipe. That like you can, you know, inject your own personality into it or what you have in the kitchen and not feel like you have to have everything exactly as the recipe states.

Ruth Garrett: [08:30](#)

That's right. Yeah. And I took that to heart and I was very young at the time. So you know, things you learn when you're young I think influence you for a longer time. You know what I mean? So yes. You know, my sister actually teases me that I never actually follow a recipe and she said, how can you possibly rate a recipe when you never actually follow it?

Jess Dang: [08:54](#)

That is true. It's like the inspiration, the recipes, is the inspiration. So you know, it provides the foundation.

Ruth Garrett: [09:00](#)

Exactly.

Jess Dang: [09:00](#)

So, but if you don't have a good foundation like in a house. If you don't have a good foundation then it's really, it's, you know, it's really hard to build a solid, solid house. I think the same thing for a recipe. So you still need a good foundation. So I know

your grandkids or your grands as you call them, have lived with you for a couple of years and you've shared that they, they can be picky eaters. So can you tell us a little about how old are they and how do you balance, you know, their needs with what you want to eat and cook?

Ruth Garrett: [09:28](#) Well, they're eight and 12 which is, they've been with me for four years. So over four years we've made a little bit of progress. At first I was trying really hard to make things that they would eat and then I got really bored making dinner.

Jess Dang: [09:47](#) What were some of the dinners in the heavy rotation then?

Ruth Garrett: [09:51](#) You know, chicken nuggets and French fries and fish sticks. You know, kid food and I can remember thinking to myself, well, if I'm making them fish sticks but I make fish tacos out of it, then I'm not really eating the kid food. Right, right. Yeah. But that didn't last. I couldn't stand it anymore. Plus I didn't think it was very good for them.

Jess Dang: [10:12](#) Yeah. And they were, these were things they were willing to eat?

Ruth Garrett: [10:15](#) They were willing to eat.

Jess Dang: [10:16](#) Got it.

Ruth Garrett: [10:17](#) Yeah. Spaghetti and that was okay because you know, that's not quite as well, at least it wasn't fried, but I got bored. So my first reaction to that was I set myself up with one of the food subscription kind of meal plans. You know, where they bring the food to you every week and you follow the recipe.

Jess Dang: [10:41](#) Got it, a meal kit company? So they send you the groceries?

Ruth Garrett: [10:43](#) Yeah. Right. Yes. And that was a really expensive and there were a couple of times, Richmond, gets very, very hot in the summer. And there were a couple of times, even when they were surrounded with ice packs at the food, I just didn't trust it to eat it when we would get home and it had been sitting on my porch all day. So I quickly bagged that. And it probably was around that time that I found you guys. But I honestly don't remember and I thought, oh this is perfect. Cause what I don't like about cooking is figuring out what to cook.

Jess Dang: [11:19](#) Right.

- Ruth Garrett: [11:19](#) So here was somebody telling me what to cook. And my original approach was I made the two serving recipe version. I would eat one, save one for lunch for the next day and I would continue to cook, you know, kid food for them.
- Ruth Garrett: [11:38](#) And then I just sorta kind of began to put it in front of them. I tend to serve everything that's possible to do deconstructed. That's how I serve it, you know, so that you can pick and choose what you want to eat. I find giving them a little bit of autonomy pays off. So for instance, next up on the menu for us is the Pork Mojo Bowls. So I will just put out the pork, the rice, the tomatoes, the avocados, and let them pick what to put on their plate and what to eat. And that's helped a little bit. But I even have to, for instance, this recipe has salsa in it. I won't even compile this salsa it'll be tomatoes, onions, and cilantro.
- Jess Dang: [12:32](#) Oh, okay. So you split it all out. Interesting.
- Ruth Garrett: [12:35](#) Yeah, yeah, yeah. Especially with Tyler, my grandson, what he chooses to eat is very important to him. You know, the fact that he gets to choose is even more important than what the food is. So if I just were to hand him a plate, put together, he wouldn't want it because it was what I thought, not what he thought he should eat.
- Jess Dang: [13:00](#) Yes. I think that's such a big part of like childhood development. You know? I think kids, it's just part of how they grow up. It's like they want to be able to define what they eat, what they're gonna wear. And I, you know, I have a two year old and a four year old and I'm already seeing that. Right. I've put together a plate for them. Even if it's of things they I know they like, they are like, no I want to do this myself. It's all about doing it myself. Yeah,
- Ruth Garrett: [13:22](#) It's all about control. And if you can give them a lot of control then you know, because what I put on the table is all good healthy food.
- Jess Dang: [13:33](#) Ummhmm (agreement)
- Ruth Garrett: [13:33](#) So then that's the end of my responsibility and the beginning of theirs what are you going to take out of this good healthy food and eat? But I have to confess there have been more than a handful of times that one or the other of them has gone without dinner cause they didn't, they couldn't bring themselves to eat it. And I only cook once. Once I've made

dinner, then I'm done for the day and you can eat it or not and they're not wasting away. So they still look healthy.

Jess Dang: [14:07](#) Yes. Well you just left this quote on the Facebook group that I also love. I think you are like the queen of good quotes is that picky kids aren't hungry and hungry kids aren't picky. And I totally believe that. And I think for me this has been a huge challenge is to relax around that a bit. As you know, as a mom and also a founder of a healthy eating focused company, like I've really had to work at adopting Ellyn Satter's division of responsibility at the table where you know you are the one responsible for cooking the food and providing the food at regular times. And then your children are the ones that are responsible for choosing what they want to eat and how much they want to eat and when they're done. And yes, yes. And I'm definitely getting better about the cajoling and coaxing at the dinner table. Like there's a lot less negotiation, you know, I serve things family style often deconstructed and they make their own plates and I try my best not to involve myself beyond beyond that. And they're younger.

Ruth Garrett: [15:03](#) But it is hard,

Jess Dang: [15:04](#) It is, it is really hard because you feel like as a nurturer, like that is one of your roles is to feed children and you know, it's hard to be like less intrusive about it. But I've gotten better over the last couple of years.

Ruth Garrett: [15:18](#) Yeah. It'll continue to be hard and give yourself a break cause it's never going to get any better. Really.

Jess Dang: [15:24](#) Thank you.

Ruth Garrett: [15:28](#) My grandson in particular is small for his age. So on top of being a picky eater, I have to try worry that, you know, if he's not gaining, if he's not growing that that's my fault. Right. So it's hard. It's just hard.

Jess Dang: [15:48](#) Yeah. No, I think, well he's, he said he's the eight year old, right?

Ruth Garrett: [15:53](#) Yeah.

Jess Dang: [15:53](#) Yeah. I think he'll get to a point where like, he's just going to need the calories. As he hits puberty. He'll just, he'll just need the calories and there'll be a different story then hopefully.

Ruth Garrett: [16:03](#) Yeah, he'll hit a growth spurt and then he'll, I won't be able to stop him from eating, you know?

Jess Dang: [16:11](#) So, you know, you've had the, your grandkids for four years and I know it sounds like it's been a huge challenge, but have you had some victories over the last couple of years as well?

Ruth Garrett: [16:19](#) One of the most recent, this was so great. I was, the pork for the pork mole bowl was in the Crockpot and Tyler goes up to it and was very intrigued and he said, that smells really good. I want to try it. Yeah. And I thought, Oh, oh this is a new thing. This is great. So I, it wasn't of course ready yet, it was um, not cooked yet, but I said, well, as soon as it's ready you can try it and that is going to be one of those moments. It'll stick with me because that has not happened before.

Jess Dang: [16:59](#) Wow, just that curiosity. That's so great.

Ruth Garrett: [16:59](#) Yes, yes. Because always, before this, new food he had not seen before was suspect and he'd be very wary of it. So I just feel like, you know, Hallelujah!. So that was fun. And what I used to do with him was everything was chicken. Didn't matter what it really was, it was all chicken. And he would say, is this the chicken I like? Yes, that's the chicken you like. Well it might be pork tenderloin for all he knew. And um, so another victory is that we can call everything what it is.

Jess Dang: [17:38](#) Oh, that's great. Cause I do think you know, I understand the need sometimes to like cloak things in different names or hide vegetables. I know a lot of parents puree vegetables into things, but I think, you know, once you can get past that, that's like a huge victory.

Ruth Garrett: [17:54](#) Yeah. Yeah. And he'll eat cooked carrots now instead of just raw. And I mean, you know, it's little things and I have to grab on to the little things and pat myself on the back for them rather than waiting for the big, I want to have Shrimp Scampi for dinner tonight, you know, cause that's not going to happen.

Jess Dang: [18:15](#) No, I mean I'm sure it will eventually just because you're sticking to this plan and you're not, you know, varying from going back to the kids food. And I think the fact that they are exposed to such a wide variety of things every single night, you know, it is all about baby steps. And I'm sure at some point there'll be just like a huge change. But I think it is all about just counting those small victories in the meantime.

- Ruth Garrett: [18:38](#) Exactly. Exactly.
- Jess Dang: [18:40](#) So do you think, you know, it sounds like you cooked a lot while your kids were growing up. And you know, had to do some meal planning. So do you think your cooking approach has changed from when you were raising kids to now with your grandkids?
- Ruth Garrett: [18:52](#) Oh yeah. My kids, I had three and I was still married at the time, so there were five of us in the house. So one of the biggest differences then versus now is if I made a meal and somebody wasn't in the mood to eat it, it still wasn't wasted effort because there were four other people in the family that were going to eat it. And now it's just me and the kids. And so if I make something that's a little too exotic for them to want to try it, then I feel like I've wasted my time, you know, because nobody's eating it. So honestly, that's made me a little more cautious. Even though I think because of Cooks Smarts, I cook a lot bigger variety than I ever have in my life. I still approach it as with the feeling of if I put time and energy into this is it gonna pay off, will I be the only one sitting there eating it or you know, is there something here that they're going to want to eat?
- Ruth Garrett: [20:02](#) My three weren't as picky. I did have one kid who had a dairy allergy and to this day he can't eat dairy products at all. So I had to do a lot of adaptation for him, but he was eager to eat, you know, he did. He didn't resist, if that makes any sense. And the other two were perfectly happy to eat whatever was in front of them. So, I didn't have quite the same kind of challenges. A lot of the recipes that were go to standbys for the family, these two don't, have no interest in eating them at all. So basically the menu is entirely different now compared to then.
- Jess Dang: [20:49](#) So it's, you know, let's say it's Thursday and our new menu is live. That's when our menus typically go live. And so how do you go about choosing your meals? And you know, what does the cooking process look like for your week? So how do you kind of take into account of what is on their, you know, willing to eat list and all of that?
- Ruth Garrett: [21:08](#) The first thing I do, I have to confess, when I look at the menu on Thursday, my very first reaction is nearly always, oh, I can't make any of that.
- Jess Dang: [21:19](#) Even though you've been making our meals for three years. You still feel that way? .

Ruth Garrett: [21:25](#) Yeah, yeah. I go, I can't do that. Then I, I get past that hurdle and I think, okay, now get real. And I look more closely. The first thought I have is do I have anything on hand at home? And if so, then that's gonna go on the, I'm gonna make this just automatically, you know, if the protein or whatever is already in my freezer, then we're gonna make that. And I do immediately look to see how easy will it be to serve this meal deconstructed in components instead of all put together. That's a driving force for, you know, pick this or not that.

Jess Dang: [22:09](#) Got It. So like a meal that's like a casserole. Sort of like a baked type of thing. You don't, you know, we don't have a lot of those anyways, but like that would be an automatic let's not do this.

Ruth Garrett: [22:18](#) Yeah, that would pretty much be a nope, we're not doing that one. Which is why the archives are so nice. Because if there's something that I really can't make it work that day, I can go searching for something else. You know? And so I really appreciate that. And then because I work full time and we get home late, I look for the fewest ingredients and the fewest steps and something that's easy. I look for quick and easy in the verbiage

Ruth Garrett: [22:53](#) and those are the things that make the cut, you know? And, and so that's what we choose, you know? That's what I fix.

Jess Dang: [23:01](#) I mean, I think your process is probably really similar to most busy parents. In this case. You're a busy grandparent. But you know, for most people, it's about 60% of our members are families

Jess Dang: [23:11](#) with younger kids. So, you know, they all have, everyone's under the same constraint. You know, some people might have more, you know, more curious eaters. But I think for, you know, for the most part people are looking for a lot of deconstructed meals that things can be put together quite quickly. And I don't think we intended this in any way of like from a picky eater standpoint of, but a lot of our meals are very easy to serve deconstructed just because the nature of casseroles and like anything that's you know, mixed together or like you have to bake is something that usually takes quite long on a weeknight.

Ruth Garrett: [23:46](#) Right.

Jess Dang: [23:46](#) Cause you have to put it all together and then there's another probably like, you know, 25 to 40 minutes of baking or something. So you'll never, you won't see a lot of that. And also

those tend to be much higher in calories just because of, you know, most of the time, in casseroles or bakes are a lot of them are filled with dairy or some sort of cheese product. So, yeah, most of our meals, basically that constraint for us was really the time and health constraint, just end up being that they're pretty easy to take apart and serve, you know, at a cart and then the way that you do every night.

Ruth Garrett: [24:25](#) Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah. So and yeah, casseroles, there is one casserole recipe that I have that they like and it's not super healthy as you say. And that's kind of a fallback sometimes when I've just got nothing else that I can possibly cook for them. But I don't like to do it very often cause it's, you know, based on a cream of anything soup. So it's going to have way too much sodium in it and way too many calories and most of them empty. Plus I'm finding the more I use Cook Smarts, the more I think processed food tastes like plastic.

Jess Dang: [25:03](#) I think that I haven't had like a canned soup in a long time, but I'm sure if I had it now I'd be like, wow, that just kind of leaves a weird aftertaste in your mouth. I would think.

Ruth Garrett: [25:13](#) It does! That's exactly what it does and it feels, it doesn't feel like food. It feels like an artificial substance. And why did I just eat that?

Jess Dang: [25:22](#) Yeah. Well I'm glad we've been helping you kind of cut down on that. But you mentioned the soup that you chose, the summer tortellini soup. I think it was on the menu last week. It's, you know, it's on one of our summer menus because this will be, people will be hearing this a couple months later after taping. But how do you serve that deconstructed or how do you serve that?

Ruth Garrett: [25:41](#) Well, the soup part of it, I did put all together into a soup because that's something that I can take to work, you know, for lunch for a week if I have to. But I didn't put the Tortellini in it. I kept that out separate and then I could serve, you know, just Tortellini. Basically with just some melted butter and Parmesan cheese on it. If I'm going really super simple or pour, a little bit of the broth of the soup without picking up any of the veggies and then actually served, you know, carrots on the side. And so Tyler loves Tortellini, he, he loves it. So it's of any way I want to serve Tortellini, he's gonna eat it, but he's not going to eat the soup part of it so I pour the broth over it.

Jess Dang: [26:36](#) Yeah. But he'll see you eating the soup and maybe at some point just like with the pork and be like, hey,

Ruth Garrett: [26:41](#) Hey, that smells good!

Jess Dang: [26:44](#) What's in there? So, yeah, I think a lot of it is just exposure. I just am like, well, there's things that I definitely know my kids are going to be less excited about, but I will just eat it and maybe they'll be interested in seeing me eat it or maybe not. Yeah. You just never know.

Ruth Garrett: [26:58](#) Exactly. And that one doesn't have anything really scary in it other than the beans. You wouldn't want that. But he likes carrots. He likes onions, you know, so, you know, it's not, that one's not hopeless.

Jess Dang: [27:09](#) That's good. So, you know, we all have days and nights that are really hectic and you know, you're really tired and you know, you work full time and you have young kids that you're coming home to and you just probably sometimes just don't feel like cooking. So what do you do on those days? Do you try to motivate yourself or you just kind of let yourself be like, you know, this is just a day, that's just not gonna happen?

Ruth Garrett: [27:27](#) Sure. We all have those days and you know, sometimes we do just pick up the phone and call for pizza, but my kind of go-to for a fast, you know, we just got home and we have to turn around and leave because somebody's got a practice or a game or whatever is, I serve Deli Turkey sandwiches on slider rolls with a side of apple slices and carrots and dip. This time of year we'll add either watermelon or sliced tomatoes. And that's incredibly fast, easy, and I think pretty healthy. Sometimes Tyler doesn't want Turkey, he just wants a cheese sandwich. I'm fine with that. Yeah. Yeah. And I can get, you know, from walking in the door til they're sitting down eating. I can do that in about 10 or 15 minutes.

Jess Dang: [28:14](#) That's a great go to that actually is often the lunch that I will pack my daughter. So yeah, that's a Turkey sandwich with a fruit on the side. Maybe a string cheese. Yeah, maybe some carrots. Exactly. That's a really easy meal that, you know, if you have those things on hand then it just can come together and yeah, like you said, five to 10 minutes.

Ruth Garrett: [28:35](#) Exactly.

- Jess Dang: [28:36](#) So what is your main motivation for home cooking these days? Is it saving money, health, enjoyment, getting the grandkids exposed to more things?
- Ruth Garrett: [28:45](#) I think my main reason for doing this is the food is more interesting and it's just a more enjoyable experience and it is healthier. So that's not nothing. It is more economical and that's not nothing either. But mostly it's just that cooking is more fun and so is eating more fun.
- Jess Dang: [29:10](#) And I mean like, do you think it's more fun now because there is, you know, I guess I wouldn't say less pressure cause you're still, you're still managing the challenges of picky eaters, but is it that there's just more available? I think that's kind of what I find these days are so much more available to us.
- Ruth Garrett: [29:29](#) Yes. Yeah. Oh yeah. I've got some great stores near me. There's an Asian market, there's a Mediterranean market, some great big ginormous grocery stores that have pretty much everything. So yeah, I have pretty much everything available to me if I want to go on a hunt for it. But you know, there's stuff that shows up on ingredient lists for Cook Smarts that I have never even heard of. And so I'm broadening my own horizons. You know, I'm learning about foods I've never heard of before and I cook with them and think why this is really good. So that's probably the single biggest thing about it that I like.
- Jess Dang: [30:12](#) Oh, that's great to hear that it's something that like just still feels enjoyable and like not like such a chore. So what would you tell? So we have, you know, we get members who start with us who look at a list and might feel really intimidated by some of the things that they haven't heard of or maybe do have access to different, you know, different grocery stores, maybe even ethnic stores but are just like afraid of going in so how, like what are your, what are some of your tips to help others kind of meet this kind of meet the, this goal that you've had of just like broadening your horizons and making cooking such an enjoyable, thing to do at the end of the day.
- Ruth Garrett: [30:47](#) Well, join the Facebook group, number one because we learn a lot from each other. If somebody has done something and tried it and they come up with a helpful hint and you can use it. I think the biggest thing I would say to anybody is it's a lot easier than you think. You know, it can look a little bit intimidating. Even the recipes that have a long, long list of steps that you have to do when you break it down and look at it. Some of those steps are not hard. So it's chop an onion, you know, that's

not hard. So I would say not to be intimidated at all and just keep at it, you know, just keep doing it. And if you can't make it work one night, like you use a bottle dressing on the salad instead of the main recipe, well don't give up, just try again tomorrow.

Jess Dang: [31:46](#) Yeah, I really think that, you know, I think some people just feel like it's like all or nothing. And I think with, you know, the way that we really want to position our meal plans and the recipes is like these are just, it's again, like what we talked about earlier is like everything's just a guide, right? Like you can make this, you can make this Vinaigrette from scratch, but if you have something bottled that you really like and you just don't want to pull out, you know, the bottle of vinegar. And your oil or whatever, then go for it. And you know, no one, we're not here to judge and we just want to make, we just want to provide that inspiration and just like that ease to be like not have to think about the recipe part for people.

Ruth Garrett: [32:19](#) Exactly. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Which is, you know, that's my favorite thing about it is I didn't have to figure out what to make for dinner tonight, you know?

Jess Dang: [32:25](#) Yeah. No. And how did you do that decades ago when it was just you and the kids?

Ruth Garrett: [32:30](#) Well, it was boring. I had some tried and true things that I would just repeat over and over again. Almost never branched out in, anything, intriguing or interesting.

Jess Dang: [32:43](#) But it sounds like you were an early adopter of Tofu and lentil, so I would, I, you know, do not sell yourself short, Ruth, because I don't think a lot of people, you know, I don't know, 30 years ago we're doing a lot of Tofu and lentils.

Ruth Garrett: [32:55](#) No, probably not. But I will say this, one of my go-to's when my kids were young was an, I don't know if you'll believe this or not, but it really, really is true was Tofu and rice or Tofu and veggies over rice. That was one of our go-to's and my kids to this day love it

Jess Dang: [33:15](#) Well there. Then you were blessed with some really good eaters. That's great.

Ruth Garrett: [33:19](#) Yeah, but I've learned some tricks with Tofu. One of which is, I always freeze it first before I use it. That changes the texture and makes it more, I think appealing to an American palate.

Jess Dang: [33:32](#) So when you freeze it, do you, how do you, do you cut it up and then freeze it or how do you, I know lots of people do the freezing trick. I do not. So can you walk me through it?

Ruth Garrett: [33:42](#) Well, I've always just taken the block and thrown it in the freezer as is. I don't even open the package. But the problem with that is when it's in a block, it takes longer to thaw. So you have to remember to get it out the day before. Although I've learned some tricks there too that if you put the package into a big vat of hot water, it'll thaw pretty quick and then I could start cutting it before it was fully thawed and I would always marinate it in something, usually a mix of rice vinegar, soy sauce and water. So I would use hot water for the marinade and that would thaw it the rest of the way.

Jess Dang: [34:26](#) That's genius. Oh, I never thought about that.

Ruth Garrett: [34:29](#) Yeah. Yeah. So that was one of my favorite tricks and the kids love it. They just love it. Then I probably, because of the mixture of the rice vinegar and the, soy sauce,

Jess Dang: [34:41](#) We're going to have to highlight that tip, I think for everybody to use know to use a warm, warm up your marinade if you're dealing with a frozen protein. I think you can even do this outside of Tofu.

Ruth Garrett: [34:51](#) Oh, I'm sure you could. Yeah.

Jess Dang: [34:52](#) Yeah, yeah. That's great. Well, Ruth, okay, we've come to the, I've come to the end of my questions, but we have a couple of things for our rapid fire round, so you ready for that?

Ruth Garrett: [35:02](#) I am.

Jess Dang: [35:02](#) Okay. Just whatever the first thing that pops into your mind as I, as I read these things off. Okay. Okay. All right. Your most important kitchen tool.

Ruth Garrett: [35:11](#) A good chef's knife.

Jess Dang: [35:13](#) Yes. Your go-to breakfast.

Ruth Garrett: [35:16](#) Oh quiche that I made on the weekend and then I just heat up a slice in the morning.

Jess Dang: [35:20](#) Oh, that sounds so delicious. Oh, okay. You have 15 minutes to make a meal. What is it?

Ruth Garrett: [35:25](#) Okay. This is my favorite. I use frozen noodles and I make chicken noodle soup with um, canned chicken and chicken broth already made and throw in some carrots and maybe some frozen corn. 15 minutes later you have chicken noodle soup.

Jess Dang: [35:43](#) Oh my gosh. That's, I feel like we need to put that on our on our menu.

Ruth Garrett: [35:49](#) And you know what, if my grands will eat it, anybody will eat it.

Jess Dang: [35:54](#) Oh, so they will eat that one. That's great.

Ruth Garrett: [35:56](#) They will eat that one all put together even.

Jess Dang: [35:59](#) Oh Wow. So your frozen noodles that you buy, just like fresh noodles and you put, you leave those in the freezer? Just to have that handy?

Ruth Garrett: [36:04](#) There's one brand that I've been able to find, I used to live in Ohio and it was very common. They're harder to find in Virginia, but it's called Mrs Raemes and it's just frozen noodles out of the freezer section at the grocery.

Jess Dang: [36:20](#) Oh. I've not seen this.

Ruth Garrett: [36:21](#) Usually in the same section as like where the pie shells are and the phyllo dough and all that.

Jess Dang: [36:28](#) All right, well I always, I always have noodles frozen in my freezer as well. But they're you, I think, you know, they're not like ready, ready to cook type of thing, situation,

Ruth Garrett: [36:37](#) Right. No, no, they're, you know, they make them and then they freeze them and they have not been precooked they're way better than, dried or boxed noodles, you know.

Jess Dang: [36:48](#) I agree. And they cook a lot faster. Even frozen they cook a lot faster.

Ruth Garrett: [36:51](#) Yeah. Yeah.

Jess Dang: [36:53](#) Okay. Your favorite Cook Smarts meal?

Ruth Garrett:	36:57	Tofu Kimchi Fried Rice. The grands do not eat it, but I do and I love it. And just about anything with Miso Lime Butter.
Jess Dang:	37:07	Oh yeah.
Ruth Garrett:	37:08	Plain rice with Miso Lime butter!
Jess Dang:	37:12	very popular. Yes. A little bit of fat. And sodium is all you need in the world. What ingredient you always have in your pantry?
Ruth Garrett:	37:22	Probably fresh garlic.
Jess Dang:	37:24	Okay. Guilty pleasure, food or not?
Ruth Garrett:	37:27	Tonic water. I just drink it plain sometimes with a lime.
Jess Dang:	37:34	Your favorite life optimization or organization app?
Ruth Garrett:	37:39	Oh, I have one called Any list. That's probably my favorite because it can be what you have to pack for vacation or what you need to buy at the grocery store. And I have one for Target and one for the grocery and one for, you know, Costco. When we're getting ready for school, I put the school supplies we have to buy on there.
Jess Dang:	38:09	Yes. Everyone. Everyone needs a good list app.
Ruth Garrett:	38:12	Exactly. Yes. Yes.
Jess Dang:	38:15	Hardest thing you've done.
Ruth Garrett:	38:18	Oh, that's gotta be raising the kids.
Jess Dang:	38:20	Yeah.
Ruth Garrett:	38:21	Oh, the grands. It's hard. Yeah.
Jess Dang:	38:22	Well, you're doing a great job. I'm just, you're my hero. It's so amazing that you're doing this, it's great for your grandkids.
Ruth Garrett:	38:32	Well, they're adorable, you know, so that helps.
Jess Dang:	38:36	Proudest thing you've done

Ruth Garrett: [38:38](#) That might be the same. Although I'm also awfully proud of in 2015 I moved from Ohio to Virginia for a job all by myself. It was scary. Yes.

Jess Dang: [38:53](#) That is amazing. Late in life, I feel like, you know, people even young in life have a hard time making a move by themselves. So that is really commendable. Last book that you loved.

Ruth Garrett: [39:05](#) Station 11.

Jess Dang: [39:07](#) Oh, I haven't heard of that one. Okay.

Ruth Garrett: [39:09](#) Oh, it's great. You'll love it. Yeah, it's a post apocalyptic, but it focuses on a theater troupe, so of course I love it.

Jess Dang: [39:16](#) Oh, okay. Okay. I'll have to check that one out. Last TV show that you loved. I don't even know if you have time to watch TV, but if you do,

Ruth Garrett: [39:25](#) Probably Victoria.

Jess Dang: [39:27](#) Okay. I haven't heard of that one either. Okay, great.

Ruth Garrett: [39:30](#) It's about Queen Victoria. And it was on public broadcasting. Okay. It was really good. Yeah,

Jess Dang: [39:38](#) I'll have to look that one up. Well, Ruth it is such a delight to get to talk to you and get to know you more. And just to share this beautiful story you've had. I know you've had a lot of changes in your life in the last couple years, but it seems like you've just like with the recipes, just always just rolling with it and so.

Ruth Garrett: [39:54](#) One foot in front of the other.

Jess Dang: [39:55](#) I so admire that. Ruth, thank you so much for sharing your story today. I have such admiration for all that you do for your grandkids and just rolling with this huge life change you've had to make and I'm so glad Cook Smarts has gotten to play a part in your life these last few years. I hope you enjoyed meeting Ruth. It is really important to me that we highlight our community's stories and I love that we have the podcast

Jess Dang: [40:18](#) to be able to do it in audio form. Our community is the reason Cook Smarts exist and you are what makes Cook Smarts a really special company. We are not just a meal planning service or a cooking website. We're all connected through a really simple

app to creating a home cooked meal that I know doesn't always feel simple and easy in today's hectic world, and I hope through our Facebook group that it feels like we're all sharing these meals together at the same table and supporting each other's efforts. While we have lots of parents in our community and also members of an empty nesting age, we've never had a grandparent who plays the part of a parent in their grandkids lives, so I really wanted to share Ruth's story with you all today. She's a very special lady and definitely a VIP in our Facebook group. To see photos of her head to the show notes at Cook Smarts dot com slash podcast slash 14 Before we wrap up, thank you to Pie-lattes for this great review on Apple podcasts.

Jess Dang: [41:08](#)

I've loved being part of this community for the last three plus years. The resources are always excellent and helpful to the home cook. If you want to nourish yourself and the ones you love, this is the podcast for you." Pie-lattes thank you so much for the great review. Please reach out to us at hello at Cook Smarts dot com to claim your colorful Cook Smarts tote bag. If you like Pie-lattes want to be a supporter of the show and spread the home cooking smarts head to apple podcast and leave us a review if we share it on a future episode. You too will get a beautiful and functional Cook Smarts tote bag to take with you to the grocery store. And if you're not a member of our meal plan service, but feel inspired by Ruth's story, head to Cooks Smarts dot com and grab your free 30 day trial. We'd love to support you in the kitchen and maybe even tell your cooking success story one day on this podcast. If you are a member with a story you'd like to share on the podcast. Just message us on Instagram at @CookSmarts, or @JessDangCS, which is my personal account. With that, thank you for letting us join you in your kitchen or wherever you're listening to this podcast. And until next time, happy cooking from your kitchen cheerleader.