



# The *story* behind the recipe

Food bloggers spill the secrets behind their most memorable meals

By **Jake Lemkowicz** for USA TODAY



**Sara Forte**  
[SPROUTEDKITCHEN.COM](http://SPROUTEDKITCHEN.COM)

**SARA FORTE IS THE FIRST TO ADMIT THAT SHE ISN'T VERY GOOD AT FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS**, rules, or recipes. Her philosophy is that trial and error is the best teacher. "I've burned a lot of food," she says, "but that's how I learn."

This might come as a surprise to readers of Sprouted Kitchen. Sara's blog has the glossy sheen of a world where there's always some extra lemongrass in the fridge,



## GRILLED SWEET POTATO COINS WITH AVOCADO HERB DIPPING SAUCE

### SWEET POTATO COINS

- 3 lbs. sweet potatoes or yams
- 3 T extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 T smoked paprika
- 2 tsp. smoked sea salt, plus more for finishing
- 3 T finely chopped fresh rosemary
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley for garnish

### DIPPING SAUCE

- 2 cloves garlic
  - Zest and juice of 1 lemon
  - 3 T chopped fresh chives
  - 3 T chopped fresh basil
  - $\frac{1}{2}$  cup buttermilk
  - $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. sea salt
  - 1 tsp. freshly ground pepper
  - 2 ripe avocados
- optional: buttermilk or more lemon juice*

1. Scrub the potatoes clean and slice into  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick coins. Spread the coins on a rimmed baking sheet.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, smoked paprika, and salt. Drizzle over the potatoes and rub the oil mixture onto both sides of the potatoes with your hands. Sprinkle on the rosemary and give the potatoes a toss.
3. To make the dipping sauce, pulse all ingredients in a food processor. The sauce should be a bit chunky. Thin as desired with additional lemon juice or buttermilk.
4. Heat the grill to medium-high heat. Grill the potatoes in a single layer with the lid closed. Grill three to four minutes on each side, until the potatoes are cooked through.
5. Before serving, finish with a sprinkle of salt and parsley. Serve with dipping sauce on the side.

it's a perpetually sunny afternoon in Southern California, and burning dinner just doesn't happen. The imagery is courtesy of Hugh, Sara's photographer husband, and it's tempered by her easygoing writing style.

Sprouted Kitchen was created as an after-work escape from a boring 9-to-5 job. So when the opportunity came along to turn the blog into a cookbook, Sara seized the moment, whether she was prepared or not for what lay ahead. "I decided to leave a salary and a full-time

job to try to do what I love," she says.

Her dream had become a reality, but she wasn't quite sure what she had gotten herself into. Sara had to create 94 new recipes in one year. "This is the most gigantic learning curve I've ever experienced," she says. "I didn't know what I was doing, Hugh didn't know what he was doing, and there wasn't a whole lot of direction. There were a lot of tears and confusion."

But 11 months later, the manuscript was finished. Exhausted but triumphant,



*The Sprouted Kitchen* cookbook is due out this fall

> Sara and Hugh Forte

the couple decided to celebrate with a backyard dinner party for 12 of their best friends. For Sara, it was a natural choice. "Feeding people seems like the most earnest way that I can give and share with people that I love," she says. And the party could double as a photo shoot for the book.

The party started with a trio of appetizers. There was lemony hummus, mango guacamole, and baked feta topped with tomatoes, onions, and olives. The main course featured handcrafted turkey burgers that Sara developed for the cookbook. The turkey burger was accented with shredded apples and chipotle powder, which gave the patty itself a sweet and spicy taste. Grilled sweet potato coins were paired with an avocado herb dipping sauce. For dessert, Sara served up a flourless chocolate banana cake with cinnamon whipped cream on top.

The party was a success in every way except one. Sara and Hugh's friends were making too many goofy faces to use their photos in the cookbook. But Sara didn't seem to mind. "I would take them over models I didn't know, even if they looked perfect," she says. "The fact that they were my real friends, and this was my real life, and we were having a real dinner, and laughing; That's why it was special to me."



 **Gabrielle Arnold**  
HONESTFARE.COM

#### DIVING FOR SCALLOPS IN THE WARM

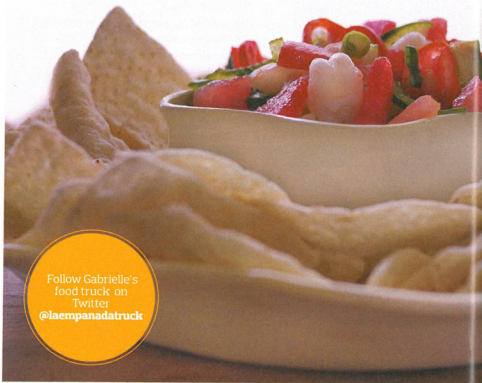
**WATERS** of Florida's Homosassa Bay, the first thing that Gabrielle Arnold saw was the incandescent blue eyes. There were hundreds of them, glowing on the ends of small tentacles, peering back at her. She reached for a scallop. It snapped at her fingers and tried to scurry away. She grabbed the shell, pushed off the bay's grassy bottom, and headed to the surface.

While taking a break on the deck of the boat, Gabrielle munched on fruit, enjoyed the sunshine, and started wondering what she was going to do with all those buckets of shellfish. Then she tasted a scallop raw. "They were so fresh, I almost felt bad cooking them," she says. "We were eating all this watermelon, and my wheels were turning. I thought, 'What about a watermelon ceviche?'"

This sort of free association is a hallmark of Honest Fare, the blog that Gabrielle started as an outlet for sharing her love of culinary experimentation. Since Honest Fare's inception in 2009, Gabrielle has turned her cooking hobby into a new career as the co-owner of La Epanada food truck in Orlando.

After getting back to the docks, Gabrielle cleaned out her bounty of scallops. All told, there was almost too much of a good thing. A party was in order.

The ceviche she created combined the crunch of watermelon with the tenderness of the shellfish and a bright citrus bite. It's a good thing, because more than a year later, there are still scallops left over in Gabrielle's freezer. And she's still dreaming up new ways to use them.



Follow Gabrielle's food truck on Twitter @laempanadatruck

## WATERMELON AND SCALLOP CEVICHE

- 1 ¼ cups watermelon sliced in ¼-inch-thick pieces close to rind
- 2 green cubanelle peppers or 1 green bell pepper, seeded and sliced paper-thin
- 1 ½ cups grape or cherry tomatoes, sliced paper-thin
- Diced jalapeño to taste
- 1 shallot, finely diced
- ¾ cup diced scallions
- ¼ cup roughly chopped cilantro
- 8 oz. shrimp
- 8 oz. bay scallops
- 5 limes
- 1 lemon
- 3 T rice vinegar
- 1 T sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. garlic powder
- ¾ tsp. black pepper

1. Cut out 1-inch-thick strips from the light pink and transparent white portion of the watermelon slice, just above the green rind. Chop into ¼-inch-thick pieces.
2. In a large bowl, combine cubanelle or green peppers, tomatoes, jalapeño, shallots, scallions, cilantro, and ½ cup light pink watermelon. Set aside.
3. Steam shrimp until just pink. Run under cold water. Chop into bite-sized pieces and set aside. Rinse scallops and set aside.
4. Juice limes and lemon into a bowl. Add rice vinegar, sugar, and salt. Stir to dissolve. Toss in scallions and shrimp and add to vegetable bowl. Toss well. Then add garlic powder and black pepper and toss again.
5. Making sure all scallops and shrimp are submerged in juices, cover and allow to marinate in fridge for at least two hours, tossing every 45 minutes or so.