

Giant Eagle Online Courses – Alex Guarnaschelli, Quesadillas

Alex Guarnaschelli: 00:09 Hello, Giant Eagle family.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 00:10 I'm Alex Guarnaschelli.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 00:11 I'm here with you today and we're going to make a dish that's near and dear to my heart, super simple. To me, this is the kind of dish that works for lunch, for dinner, for a lunchbox; it even works for breakfast if you want. I'm making chicken and black bean, quesadillas.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 00:26 So, the first step is to cook some chicken, fully, to 165 degrees Fahrenheit and then let it rest. All right, so I've actually got that going. I've got two chicken breasts or skinless chicken breasts. They're about six ounces each and I just cook them, until their firm to the touch. It took about six minutes on each side. These are skinless. As you see, they get nice and golden brown. I just cook them in a little bit of oil.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 00:51 So, we're going to start by taking the hot chicken out of the pan, fully cooked. Look at that nice brown on each side. Just put them on a plate, a tray, whatever, and let them rest.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 01:02 Now here's the deal, I hate doing dishes. I like to do 29 minutes of cooking and one minute of dishes. That's my idea of a true 30-minute meal. And this pan right here where we cook, those two chicken breasts really has a lot of good chicken flavor in with the oil. So, I'm going to use that to build a little black bean spread.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 01:22 Now the black bean spread is the glue of the whole quesadilla. It's going to hold all your layers together and stick everything together. It's kind of like when mom does all the cooking at Thanksgiving, no one really has to worry, cause she's got it covered. So how to build that with a lot of flavor, because this is something you could also make an advance, take out of the fridge and just spread on a tortilla and toast or bake or pan seer and you're good to go.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 01:45 In here I have four cloves of garlic that I just cut into thin rounds and six scallions, both the green and the white parts of the scallions, cut up. And I put that right into the pan where we cooked the chicken. See how we're not making extra dishes. This is still only a one pan meal, and a good one at that.

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- Alex Guarnaschelli: 02:05 Now, I always love to have a little bit of tomato in a quesadilla. You can dunk it in salsa on the side, but I'm going to put a pint of cherry tomatoes, just cut in half, and you can use any cherry tomatoes, regular, grape ones, an heirloom tomato if you like that.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 02:21 Now to that, the black beans themselves. Just a classic can of black beans, which is usually about 15 ounces. I like to pour it out and drain it of the liquid. As much as I love to use everything when I buy ingredients, the liquid inside the can of beans, it has wonderful starch from the beans, but it doesn't always have the best taste, so we're going to separate that liquid out so I just pour it into a strainer to separate that liquid. Don't worry if there's a little extra, not important. We're going to put that whole 15 ounces of black beans right in there.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 03:01 In here we have four cloves of garlic, the six scallions minced, the can of black beans, the pint of cherry tomatoes, and two tablespoons of red wine vinegar. We need a little bit of acidity in this black bean spread and it's just really good with the chicken.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 03:21 Okay, now this, we're just going to put on the stove and let it cook down. I'm gonna let those beans, the starch from the beans kind of meld with the tomatoes, the scallions and the garlic, let all this kind of cook together. Okay? We'll put this on the stove over medium heat.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 03:41 Alright, so the goal of the black bean spread right now while it cooks on the stove, is to get those black beans a little bit more mushy and tender, we're going to mash them down with the back of a spoon. And we're also going to let those tomatoes get nice and soft and tender and let that garlic kind of chill out a little bit. Right?
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 04:02 Now while that's cooking on the stove, and I love a dish where everything is kind of all working for you and then you just eat. Who has time to wait these days? Right? So, let's get everything else we need ready.

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Alex Guarnaschelli: 04:14 Critically important for a good quesadilla, is a tortilla. You can go in two directions, actually three. This is a classic flour tortilla. This is about eight inches in diameter. This is a pretty big one. So, I would say we're making enough mix, between the chicken and the black beans, to make four quesadillas, which serves, well one person if you're hungry, but four if you're having a regular day. Right? So that's one option.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 4:40 The other option is a smaller corn tortilla, if you like that. These are about six inches each. So, you could probably do about six of these smaller ones on a corn tortilla. Or you could literally bag the whole concept of a quesadilla, and simply make the black bean filling, slice the chicken, toss them together, and put them inside these crunchy taco shells. So, you have a lot of options. I'm going to go for a quesadilla made inside these flour tortillas.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 05:10 So, the- and this is already making me hungry. I don't know about you. So, I'll build two, just to show you. I build my quesadillas on a flat surface and usually on something where I can walk over to the stove and just put them in a pan, seer them a little bit, cut and go. Right?

Alex Guarnaschelli: 05:29 So, two, eight-inch flour tortillas here, we need some cheese. So, a couple options, you've got Monterey jack, which I love. You could also use mozzarella. We don't have lots of Monterey jack shredded. We need about one and a half to two cups of shredded cheese. You also have, at the supermarket, a ton of options for those kinds of Mexican blends of shredded cheeses. It says, "Mexican" or "Tortilla" or "Nacho blend" on the bag and they usually look a little bit more like this. So, you could use that, if you like that better. Personally, I love that kind of mellowness of the Monterey jack, that kind of one note like, "Hey, I'm the cheese for you", right?

Alex Guarnaschelli: 06:11 So, we have our chicken, we're getting ready with our tortillas, and we have our cheese. We also have a little bit of cilantro, just some picked leaves, that we're going to use at the end.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 06:26 You don't like cilantro? Skip it. No big deal.

- Alex Guarnaschelli: 06:30 So, I also have some questions. Kayleigh from North Olmsted, Ohio wants to know what the best dish I ever ate on Chopped was? Well, that's a really great question. You know, I'd have to say that the best dish I ever ate was in season one, if you could believe it. It was a dessert. It was a shortcake made with capers and pickled grape leaves and pickled ginger. It was a lot of pre-salted, super, super salty, vinegary ingredients. And somehow this chef managed to make a little shortcake and put all those salty ingredients together and twist them or transform them into a really tasty dessert. You know what? I ate the whole thing.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 07:17 Now I also get this question a lot, which is, "Alex, what's the worst dish you've ever had on Chopped?" This is kind of interesting cause you think it would involve some big dramatic ingredients like durian, right? Or the time we had a nine-pound gummy skull in the basket, but in actuality, the worst dish was kind of subtle. It was in a dessert round, so I had the best dish in the dessert round and the worst. Someone cooked hot, no, someone pureed hot dogs in the food processor, without cooking them and then smeared them like a topping on French toast, and that was their dessert. And they could not have been lovelier or nicer or wonderful, I really wanted them to win, but the hotdog puree French toast thing... maybe not.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 08:10 Okay. But a great question. Another question, what do I cook when I want a simple, easy meal? That comes from Sarah in Baden, Pennsylvania. Sarah, this is an example of an easy meal to me because I often have cooked chicken leftover, a simple quesadilla or putting something together like this or nachos, is something I really love. The other classic for me is just tomato sauce with ground beef mixed in, or meatballs and spaghetti. They're classics for a reason. Right?
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 08:41 Alright, so let's have a look after a couple of minutes of cooking over medium heat, at our black bean mix. So, you can see that the beans are starting to get nice and tender, smells good, too. Scallions, the garlic. Just give it a little stir from time to time. And you'll notice the effect of adding the red wine vinegar to that. It just kind of punches up all the flavors in the best way, it amplifies them. I've got another couple of minutes to cook.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 09:16 So, that's cooking. So, those two chicken breasts, which we seared off and fully cooked, I just sliced into thin slices, as you can see. We've got our cheese; we've got our cilantro for after the fact. We have our tortillas and we've got hunger. That's pretty much all we need, right? So, let's see, how might we build these? So, here's two. We'll start by putting a little layer of the Monterey jack cheese in the center of the tortillas and you can leave a little lip around the edge of each tortilla because when we pile everything on, it tends to spread out. You can also completely cook and assemble these quesadillas and then just sear them off and eat them when you're ready or bake them in the oven, which is nice to have a meal that you can just put together last minute. I got to admit, I love that. Maybe a tiny pinch of salt.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 10:12 Now to that black bean mix, I'm also going to add a little bit of heat from chili powder. You don't have to, you don't like it, spice you at all when you're cooking for the kids, no need. I'm going to add one and a half teaspoons of just a, well a Giant Eagle chili powder.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 10:34 Now, if you're cooking this mix with the beans, and the tomatoes, and it looks a little dry, feel free to add a touch of oil. Nothing wrong with that. We're pretty much ready. I'm going to layer some chicken, so if this, these two chicken breasts are going to make four large quesadillas, you want to use about half of a chicken breast with each one and just layer this as if you're building a regular sandwich, right? You make a BLT, you do the bread, mayo, layer the tomato, the lettuce. Same thing with this quesadilla. We're building a sandwich. The only difference is we're going to brown them off and get that cheese all gooey and melty before we eat it.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 11:16 Feel free to press the chicken down in a single layer on top of that cheese. Right? We want to build this building to last. Maybe a pinch more cheese. It's nice when you bite into a quesadilla, and the chicken is bookended by a little bit of cheese. Pinch of salt, right on there. You could even get a little pepper in this situation. Not too much, cause we have heat from the chili powder. Okay?

Alex Guarnaschelli: 11:45 This has gotten, as you can see, pretty sizzly and delicious. I'm going to put that right in the bowl and just mash down a little bit. Can you smell that?

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- Alex Guarnaschelli: 12:06 Press down on the tomatoes and the black beans and after you cook this for a few minutes, you can really smell the chili powder and look, those black beans, they just mash right down.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 12:21 Alright, little spoonful of this cooked black bean mix, and as soon as you start to put this down on top, you can see how this is the glue that's holding all the layers of this quesadilla together. The scallions, the garlic, the tomatoes, there's nothing particularly unusual in here. It's just good.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 12:43 Again, if you're cooking with your kids and they don't like the spiciness, just simply remove the chili powder from the recipe. And this has zero spice at all. My daughter actually likes food spicier than I do, so sometimes I add more spice for her and take it out for me. You can see those tomatoes. They got nice and tender and so did the beans.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 13:05 So, you can just really use the back of your spoon here to press that black bean filling right on top of the chicken. Don't be shy. It's really about the black beans and the chicken. I mean obviously, the tomatoes and other things help. Tiny bit more cheese in there cause we can never have enough, but not too much. You don't want to completely cover those black beans. You just want balance. So, cheese, chicken, black bean, cheese, with more cheese. And you'll see if your black bean mix is warm when you press it down, it'll all start to kind of melt together.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 13:44 Another tortilla right on top and press and you'll see now that black bean mix is going to be that glue that holds the two sides of this down. And as you press, you'll see the filling starts to move all the way to the outside. Ooolala.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 14:02 We have another question. "Is there really an expiration date for things in the freezer?" This comes from Mike in Washington, Pennsylvania. Mike, if things are frozen, do they have an expiration date? No. It's not like a quart of milk in your fridge that has a date like a sell by or a used by date. But what happens when you leave things in the freezer for a really long time, is they just don't taste as good. You know, particularly things like dairy. Like if you put a pound of butter in the freezer, that dairy and that fat acts like a sponge and absorbs all the other aromas in your freezer.

It doesn't want to hang out for long at the ranch, so you can freeze things that prolong the shelf life, but the longer you leave stuff in the freezer, the less good it kind of is. So, you know, try making some black bean and chicken quesadilla's, Mike. That'll be good.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 14:52 So, let's go over to the stove, and cook these down. You can see you should be able to pick it up and see the edges. That's a really good sign that you've got your filling and don't worry about it if you're searing them off and a little bit of the filling falls out. You can also lift it up. Look at that. You see how that all kind of melted together. That's how you know that black bean mix is acting like glue with that chicken. Ooolala. Okay.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 15:21 Pan, little bit of just a neutral oil in there. I'd say per quesadilla, that you brown, you need two teaspoons, or a tablespoon of the oil and you just want to, I use a nonstick pan, cause I don't want to have any issues. Right? With it sticking, and you just want to heat the pan over pretty high heat. You'll see it start to shimmer and move to the sides and make waves. That's how you know it's getting good, hot, good, and hot. Resist the temptation to drop the tortilla in here when it's not hot enough. You see how it's doing that little wavy thing and shimmer. Give that quesadilla one last press to let it know, you know like when you put your kids on the bus for school in the morning and you want to let them know you care about them, give them that last little hug. Lift it up with your hand. You can also, if you're less comfortable, just grab a spatula of any kind and just balance this on a spatula or use a spatula and your hand.

Alex Guarnaschelli: 16:24 Ooolala, and drop it in the skillet with the oil. These are really, really hard to resist. So, I have some of that leftover black bean mix we've put inside. You can also put some of that as garnish on top of the bits of quesadilla. You could put sour cream. I like to put a little bit of cilantro. That's just my personal favorite. You can also drop a little bit of extra cheese on top if you want to. But you see how that filling is starting to come out and the cheese is starting to brown and that's you can even see on the edge. People ask me, how do I know if things are cooked? I just look for those kinds of golden-brown edges.

- Alex Guarnaschelli: 17:11 I'm going to grab a big spatula. Get underneath that quesadilla and flip it. You can also flip it into a second pan if you don't feel like being an acrobat. Salt the top. We salted all the filling inside, but remember when you bite down on this quesadilla, the first thing that's going to touch your mouth is actually the outside of the tortilla. So, that's important to make sure that's seasoned.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 17:36 And now it's almost finished. You really don't want to cook this very long, so I'm going to drop a little bit of cilantro on there. And again, if you don't like it, feel free not to use it. Tiny bit. Just a little bit of cheese to give it some panache. You can also cook these in the oven super easily. You'll see we're pretty much done. A couple minutes on each side, cause everything was hot and cooked already.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 18:04 So, get under there with a spatula. This is where the chef says to you, wait a minute, let it rest, let it rest. Let it mellow out. Do you really want to let this sit here and hang out? This piping hot quesadilla? I don't think that's realistic. Quesadilla to me is traditionally cut up into about six pieces. You can see how beautiful, you can hear that crust right as I cut into it, cause we pressed that tortilla but because the chicken was fully cooked, and the black bean mix was hot, pretty much good to go. And again, cook the chicken in advance, make the black bean mix in advance and build your quesadillas and you can just cook them when you want them.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 18:59 I like to cut them up and arrange them. Especially, you know, for kids and stuff, when you're cooking and you're making a home cooked meal and you're trying to sell it to them, like it's a restaurant type of thing. And you can kind of layer these bits on, like that.
- Alex Guarnaschelli: 19:29 Now, the moment of truth, let's taste. Wow, that little bit of chili powder mixed in the black beans with the tomatoes and scallions and the garlic, that's such a great spread. Melted cheese, chicken breasts, kind of lean next to the cheese, really good. You know what? You should try this for yourself. I think you should shop around the store and get these ingredients and make this, cause breakfast, lunch or dinner, this is a great dish. Thanks for having me, Giant Eagle.