

## Q & A with Heather Walker of Food Network's "Spring Baking Championship"

Written by Ashlee Best

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Scottsdale chef, Heather Walker, is busy prepping for the Food Network's "Spring Baking Championship" on March 12. Walker began her career as a successful cook, when she began competing in food competitions winning over \$100,000 in cash and prizes. She has also launched her own Web site, [Phoenix Family Foodie](#), where she blogs about different recipes, standout brands and restaurants. Since competing and launching her site, Walker's career has taken her across the world and she makes frequent appearances on 3TV's "Good Morning Arizona". AZFoothills.com interviewed Walker about her successful cooking career.

AFM: What inspired you to begin a career in cooking?

HW: I've always been a big foodie and loved to cook. I heard about cooking contests that people were doing for money. I've always been competitive by nature and I started doing the cooking contests and I started winning.

AFM: Did you start taking cooking classes when you decided you wanted to be a professional cook?

HW: No, I am completely self-taught.

AFM: How do you come up with ideas for what to cook?

HW: I like to look at pictures, magazines and online. I try not to look at the ingredients of what is actually in the picture. I am a very visual person, so if I see a photo that I like I will try to recreate a dish that looks similar with the ingredients and the flavors that I like to use.

AFM: Do you have recipes for beginners?

HW: Yes, I try to make all of the recipes that I publish on my blog or any other site. If I do a recipe for a brand, I try to make them as easy as possible so that anybody can be creative. The dishes that I use for competitions I know are going to be judged by professionals, so those are the dishes and recipes where I will use more complicated techniques, flavor pairings and cooking methods.

AFM: How do you decide which food brands to promote on Phoenix Family Foodie?

HW: If there is a brand that I really love and there is something that I know that I can't live without then there is probably somebody out there who is launching something very similar so a lot of the times I will be the one who tends to reach out to the brand if it is a product and the Food Network. The brands they use on Food Network are the same ones that I will use because they are the authority.

AFM: Which local restaurants do you like to eat at?

HW: I have a 7-year-old so anything that is kid friendly. Children usually tend to pick the cheese pizza and chicken fingers. That probably has to be on the menu but I'm a sucker for a good taco. Phoenix has lots of great tacos. We find ourselves at Sandbar. All of those great taco bars and Mexican food places around town are where you will find me.

AFM: Have you been able to try cultural foods while you were traveling through Ireland and Italy?

HW: Yes, I would probably move to Ireland if had to in a heartbeat. In Italy, they were so wonderful to us there if I requested a glass of wine they brought me two, or if I wanted to try a type of pasta they would bring me three. We literally ate our way through Italy.

AFM: Are there any places you would like to travel to in the future to try other cultural foods?

HW: Yes, Greece is definitely on my bucket list. I love Mediterranean food and I also really love the ethnic flavors of Persian food. I would like to travel to the Middle East and try some flavors over there.

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AFM: How do you prepare for cooking competitions?

HW: The biggest thing I do to prepare for cooking competitions is practice. At this Food Network Show Spring Baking Championship a lot of times you have to work under the gun. The one big tool I have is practice. When you are doing a spontaneous food show like this you don't always get that. This is me being my very raw self and riding the biggest rollercoaster of my life.



### Fast Favorites

Favorite food to cook?

Tacos!

Favorite spread?

Thanksgiving, I love all of the fall flavors and colors.

Favorite comfort food?

Dessert, of course!

Favorite spice?

Probably cinnamon, my little boy just loves cinnamon on toast with just sugar and butter and cinnamon on it. I love that you can put it in savory dishes, and I love that you can put it in sweet dishes.

Favorite cooking utensil?

A good solid spatula I love to break up meat with the spatula and I love to whip things like quesadillas.