

# Transcript — Episode 43: The Most Wonderful Trader Joe's Shopping List

Tara: I think this is my favorite episode of the year.

Matt: The one where you tell me to show up in a swimsuit?

*[Pool splashing.]*

Tara: No, that was good though.

Matt: Oh, the one where you write me in as the award show announcer.

*[Award show orchestra, audience applause.]*

Tara: No.

Matt: Game show guy?

*[Game show buzzer.]*

Tara: No.

*[Light upbeat music.]*

Matt: Casey Kasem. Ed McMahon. Mr. Peabody.

Tara: No, no, no.

*[Music ends.]*

Tara: This is our holiday shopping list episode.

*[Sleigh bells.]*

Matt: Oh Santa!

*[Festive holiday music.]*

Tara: Well, your cheeks are nice and rosy.

Matt: Let's all get comfy cozy and go Inside Trader Joe ho hos.

*[Music ends. Sleigh bells over theme music begins and two bells ring at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]*

Tara: I'm Tara Miller, director of words and phrases and clauses. And I wasn't kidding. I love this episode.

Matt: Me too. And I'm Matt Sloan, the marketing product guy.

Tara: We should start with our annual count of how many products are in your neighborhood Trader Joe's only during the holiday season.

Matt: Let's go to the tote board.

*[Theme music ends. Tympani roll begins.]*

Tara: Oh, so now you're a telethon host.

Matt: I think we should start with how many products are actually left this year in stores and by count, not including all those great pumpkin products,...

*[Tympani roll renews, intensifies.]*

Matt: ...it looks like we'll have about 260 holiday products.

*[Orchestra: Ta-daaa! Small theater applause.]*

Tara: Oh, this is going to be a very long podcast.

Matt: Well, we might not get to all of them, but let's give it a shot.

*[Italian music starts.]*

Tara: We have a lot of holiday products coming to us from Italy this year and some products made with ingredients from Italy.

*~Fusilli Pasta~*

Tara: I want to start with this bag of pasta. It's a bag that when you walk in the store, you won't be able to miss it. It's a black bag with the colors of the Italian flag at the top and it's called quite possibly the world's largest fusilli. We can't guarantee it's the world's largest fusilli. These pieces of pasta are like an inch and a half to two inches long and it is special because it's

just, it's striking visually. And because it's good Italian made pasta, it's a really great tasting product as well.

*~Truffle Picante Pasta Sauce~*

Matt: These will go great with another thing on our list here. This one Italian-inspired, made with an ingredient from Italy, Truffle Picante, it's a spicy pasta sauce. And I love this pasta sauce because I like truffles a lot. Think of it as an arrabiata type of sauce. So spicy, spicier than most spicy pasta sauces we've had previously. It is a little thinner consistency, so it'll work really well with the structure, the shape of those large fusilli.

Tara: This sauce is going to stick really nicely to those noodles. I think that'll make a really nice meal. Let's stay in Italy.

*~Rosemary Sfogliette Crackers~*

Tara: It's not a specific holiday product, but they seem really appropriate for holiday celebrations. Like if you're, if you have a cheese tray or if you're just kind of noshing on things while you're cooking, these are called Rosemary Sfogliette. They're seasoned with rosemary and they're just a really simple flavorful cracker. They're kind of a takeoff on a puff pastry from the Campania region of southern Italy. (bag opening noise) So nice when you open up that bag, it smells so good. (chewing) The seasoning is light enough that you can enjoy them with really any kind of cheese.

Matt: But also just by the handful. These are just great on their own.

Tara: What else do we have from Italy?

*~Truffle Cream Filled Gnocchi~*

Matt: In the frozen section now, Truffle Cream Filled Gnocchi. These are wonderful potato based puffs and they're sort of an outside in. The sauce is really inside. It's a creamy cheese sauce with black truffles. A very concentrated, truffle taste. What I love about these is when you cook them, they hold their shape together. So they don't sort of explode, leak out. A lot of filled pastas will do that. So these don't, I like them actually cooked in a pan, not necessarily boiled. And so you sort of almost give them a little crispy crunch on each side, and I think they're great as they are, maybe with a little bit of olive oil.

Tara: Just kind of drizzled over the top like you might with a very high quality ravioli or something like that?

Matt: Oh absolutely, yeah. yeah.

*~Balsamic Vinegar Aceto Balsamico~*

Tara: Oh, where are we going? Are we still in Italy?

Matt: We are, actually. We sell a lot of balsamic vinegar. Aceto Balsamico, we sell a lot of it. We have a very special version for the holiday season. It's under our platinum label, is incredibly viscous, thick, rich. It is invecchiato, that means it's aged in barrels at least three years, probably longer. I think it would be fantastic, a few drops on a piece of aged Parmesan or a few drops with some fruit. But using this as you might use honey on a cheese platter can transform all of those cheeses and the flavor interplays, just really wild and fun. But I would probably start with just tasting this on its own.

*~Brussels Stocks~*

Tara: This balsamic vinegar would be phenomenal drizzled over roasted Brussels sprouts. And we have the Brussels sprouts stocks that generally come back into our stores in the fall and they're back. And they're in stores. We just sell truckloads upon truckloads, upon truckloads of stocks of Brussels sprouts and who knew they would be so popular.

Matt: They are as much a centerpiece as they are a center of the plate kind of thing. We've been selling this for what? Twelve-ish years or something like that?

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: And when we first tried it, it did feel crazy. It felt sort of like a, if you can't fix it, feature it, moment. Well, we got all these stocks and it turns out they're just striking and they're fun. I mean, this is a giant stock.

Tara: Just put the whole thing in your oven. You know, don't even take them off the stock, just season them the way you want, put it right in your oven and maybe drizzle it with some of that really excellent balsamic vinegar.

Matt: Sure, sure.

*~Truffled Pecorino Cheese~*

Tara: We have a pretty special cheese coming out of Italy this year, too, don't we?

Matt: We do, a Truffled Pecorino Cheese from Italy. We actually introduced this a few years back, I think in 2017. It's making its way back to the states for this holiday season. Again, that sheep's milk pecorino with the briny sharp tangy flavors, balanced by earthy truffles. This would be amazing shaved on top of roasted Brussels sprouts or just part of a cheeseboard and maybe with a little drip or two of that balsamic.

Tara: Whew!

*[Music ends.]*

Tara: So many holiday products to talk about this year.

Matt: There really are and maybe this would go faster if we fit some of them into a song. *(pause...in a loud echo voice)* I said... maybe this would go a little faster if...

*[Door opens quickly.]*

Tara: Right on cue, it's David!

*[Light upbeat holiday music.]*

David: Hey, happy holidays, Tara and Matt. Thanks for having me.

Matt: I can't believe that we've been doing this long enough to have a holiday podcast tradition, but that's, that's exactly what I'd say this is!

Tara: And it's nice to have traditions. David, do you think you could regale us in holiday song, Trader Joe's style?

David: Yeah, I think I could.

*[Music ends.]*

Tara: Awesome.

David: *(clears throat, pats throat, sings to God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen tune)* ☐☐  
The holidays at Trader Joe's are well along their way. With Spicy Truffle Pasta Sauce to help you go gourmet. Our new Diamond Reserve has got a world-class Cabernet. Oh, there's so many treats you can enjoy, truly enjoy. Lots of truffle flavored stuff, set to deploy. This beauty advent calendars' a lovely gift, I think. And cocoa ornaments that come in blue, green, gold, and pink. To Raleigh snacks to munch and Pomegranate Punch to drink. Yes, we're all ready for the holidays here at TJ's. Lots of gifts and goodies certain to amaze. ☐☐

Matt: Wow!

Room: *(applause)*

Tara: David, no matter what my expectations may be, you always surpass them.

David: Aw, thank you. That means a lot.

Matt: Thank YOU.

Tara: I'm so grateful. Thank you so much. Happy holidays to you.

David: Happy holidays to you and to all our listeners.

*~Trader Joe's Cocoa and Sea Salt Instant Oatmeal~*

Matt: And next up on the list...

Tara: Okay, so let's talk about oatmeal.

*[Upbeat holiday music begins.]*

Tara: What's holiday about oatmeal? It could be something that you include, like in a brunch, in a casual brunch, and it is Trader Joe's Cocoa and Sea Salt Instant Oatmeal. It's kind of dessert-y. It's kind of savory. It is sweet, it's not, like, loaded with sugar. It's eight grams of sugar. It's not health food, but for a sweet comfort food kind of treat, I think that's a great way to go.

*~Hot Cocoa Ornaments~*

Tara: What else is on our brunch menu?

Matt: Well, you're going to need something to entertain people. We, of course, have had our melting snowman, now we have Hot Cocoa Ornaments and these look like sparkly, shiny, almost metallic ornaments that you'd hang on a tree and they're sort of like a hot cocoa kit in and of itself.

Tara: You could try to put them on the tree. I'm not sure that would work.

Matt: You just add this to a mug, admittedly, a large mug, maybe like that French bowl that you use for hot chocolate, if you're a French kid. So add some milk or the beverage, the dairy alternative of your choice, hot beverage, plus this thing. Slightly minty.

Tara: It has little marshmallows inside, right?

Matt: Yes.

*[Shaking and making rattling noises.]*

Tara: You can hear them.

Matt: Or mar bits.

Tara: Mar bits. Can you hear them? (shakes) It's fun and also yummy.

Tara: Oh gosh, look at the time! I got to go up to the Napa Valley for this next interview.

*[Music ends.]*

Matt: It's a short flight from here to Napa. I'll stall while you get there.

*[Little feet running. Car door opens and closes. Car motors.]*

Matt: What would the holidays be without a special beverage or two?

*[Screeching stop.]*

Matt: I mean, maybe a very special wine that our own Pat picked out just for you.

*[Jet takes off.]*

Matt: It's not a holiday gift per se, because we're selling it.

*[Jet lands. Little feet running. Car motors. Screeching stop.]*

Matt: But we are practically giving it away. I mean, it's that much of a value. Tara, are you there yet?

*[Car door opens and closes. Little feet running. Birds chirping in the background.]*

Tara: Yeah I'm here. I'm ready.

Matt: Oh, well where are you?

Tara: I'm reporting today from a mystery location, somewhere in the Napa Valley of California. A part of the country that my colleague Pat here knows all too well.

*[Light upbeat music begins.]*

Tara: You've been here with us before Pat and well, for those who don't remember your title is wine developer.

Pat: That's correct.

Tara: What does that mean?

Pat: Well, that means I get to drink a lot of wine.

Tara: So everybody wants your job now.

Pat: Well, they do. They can't have it, cause I'm enjoying it too much.

Tara: So I also understand that you have a friend here that I think our audience would like to meet. Can you introduce him?

Pat: No, I can't.

Tara: Why not?

Pat: We want to protect their identity.

Tara: So we keep their identity secret, they can offer us a better price and we can then offer our customers a better price.

Pat: We pass right onto our customers. There are many wines that we could sell for much more money, but that's not our philosophy.

Tara: I guess you could say that your friend is in the Trader Joe's wine-ness protection program.

*[Rim shot.]*

Tara: So hello, mystery guest.

MG (Mystery Guest): Hello, Tara. Welcome to Napa.

Tara: Pat, you have something special for our Trader Joe's customers during the holidays, right?

Pat: That's correct. In the history of Trader Joe's, we have been able to source through our mystery guest, an exceptionally great bottle of Cabernet from the Stag's Leap district. It is from one of their great cult wineries. The wine would sell for hundreds of dollars and we're selling it with a phenomenal retail of \$19.99.

Tara: Okay, wait, wait, wait. How did you happen upon this wine and find yourself in a position to make a deal with Trader Joe's on this particular wine?



MG: Well, at the end of the vintage in 2020, all of the wineries were deciding they were going to drop their fruit. You can't let it hang on the vine because it causes issues. You will actually pay a picking crew to go through and pick the fruit and drop it on the ground. And during that time, the labs were so overwhelmed with people testing their fruit to try to determine if it had smoked taint or not. It was taking three weeks to get an analysis back, and in harvest mode you don't have three weeks to make a decision. And so a lot of the hiring wineries just decided it wasn't worth the risk. And they were just going to throw it on the ground. And luckily I was at the right place at the right time and I purchased the entire vineyard for them right on the spot.

Tara: And you did that without knowing if there was going to be any issue with smoke taint.

MG: I, yeah, I took a flyer...it's basically, you know, roll the dice.

Tara: Wow, it worked out.

MG: It worked out, yes. The wine came out terrific.

Pat: The wine came to our attention. We tried it and we thought it was one of the best wines we've ever tasted. This is one of my favorite wines that we ever had an opportunity to market under our label.

Tara: Yeah, we had the opportunity to taste this wine and there was silence in the room.

Pat: There was. As we all...

Tara: Yeah.

Pat: ...shook our heads and it's a real tooth stainer.

Tara: Yes.

Pat: You have to floss afterwards. It's just big wine.

Tara: This is a 2020 Stag's Leap District Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

Pat: From a great name winery.

Tara: Who we can't reveal. What is it that makes wine from this particular part of the Napa Valley so good?

MG: So Stag's Leap is the only district that the ABA is established based on the soil type. Its volcanic rocky soil so it has much better drainage, much more concentration in its fruit, you know, much more richer, you know, high volume wines.

Tara: Every single wine you might find from the Stag's Leap district is delicious. Our customers know that our offerings will change constantly. And they're always looking for that next interesting and really value centered thing. And they know that we'll find it. I think most people who buy wine at Trader Joe's understand that if you see it, you may not see it again.

MG: Yeah, you will not see this again.

Tara: Right. (chuckles)

Pat: Are you sure? (chuckles)

Tara: Pat, we miss you down in the office in Monrovia, but we totally understand that you have to spend a lot of time up here in Napa.

Pat: Oh darn, yes.

Tara: And to our mystery guest, thank you.

MG: Happy holidays!

*[Music ends. Airplane interior noise.]*

Tara: Okay, Matt I'm in seat 14C headed back your way. Once again, here's how to recognize the label for this wine that is such an incredible value. Look for Trader Joe's 2020 Diamond Reserve Stag's Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon.

*[Upbeat music begins.]*

Matt: All right, we're back at the mothership and this holiday list is still here. We've got to get on it. I have before me here, a Sparkling Pomegranate Punch. Now think of punch in the classic holiday gathering punch bowls sense. It's mostly pomegranate juice with a little bit of pineapple and orange juice in it.

*[Two cans opening.]*

Matt: It's not as sweet as one might expect with that punch word in its name. Bubbly, bright, wonderful. This is great as a sipper right out of the can. This would be really nice dressed up with some garnishes, some fresh winter citrus. I even think like a little fresh mint or even a basil leaf might be interesting with this just to kind of dress it up and make it fancy if you want to go that route.

Tara: (gulps) Oh, that's good. And I think it's just a little tiny bit of ginger that adds a little complexity to the juice and keeps it from being too sweet.

Matt: That is really fun. It'll look great in an ice bucket.

Tara: That'd be a good stocking stuffer.

*~Sugar Plum Sparkling Beverage~*

Tara: We have another sparkling beverage if you're looking for something that is the thing you'd put on the table or you'd have on the bar, maybe a champagne flute for a toast. We call it Sugar Plum Sparkling Beverage. It's 50% juice, it's 50% sparkling water. It's a really nice, smooth, bubbly, pretty beverage.

Matt: I'd like to go on record saying that plums are undervalued in our food world. We need more plums, not just fresh plums but plum juice, plum as a cooking ingredient. Sure you could go the route of prunes, prunes are in fact plums, but I think plums get a really bad rap. Maybe it's prunes, it's all prunes fault.

Tara: This we brought in last holiday season and we're excited to have it back.

Matt: And it came back because customers wanted it back. So that's exciting news.

Tara: Very, very cool. Okay, what else is on our list?

*~Pound Plus Chocolate Bar~*

Matt: Under the heading of giftable gifting gifts for your gift giving needs.

Tara: You could just, you know, put them on people's desks around your office.

Matt: If it's the mail carrier, if it's that nosy neighbor who's always watching to see what's going on. You know, you know, people love getting this as a present. So what is it?

Tara: A Pound Plus Milk Chocolate Bar with Caramel Pretzel Bits and Sea Salt. So it's a fun new take on our classic Pound Plus Bar. If you're not familiar with the Pound Plus Bar, it is a big bar of chocolate that comes in at just over a pound, 17.6 ounces. It's Belgian chocolate.

Matt: This milk chocolate choice was deliberate. Dark chocolate sells really well but when we were tasting different versions with these inclusions, those caramel bits, those pretzels, the milk chocolate just kept winning. That plate was always emptied first. Milk chocolate's the way to go with this one.

Tara: It's not gooey. It's not messy. It's just really good.

Matt: Now we've been selling Pound Plus Chocolate Bars for years, decades, and I think they are among the best examples of what we mean when we talk about value. It's very efficient on the production side and that saves us cost. And that saves us money in the retail price. These are such a phenomenal deal. I mean, these beg to be shared with other people as treats, as presents.

Tara: Someone gave me that as a gift, I would know that that person really appreciated me.

Matt: Hint taken, duly noted.

*[News bulletin music begins.]*

Tara: This just in.

Matt: No, maybe we should say, "This just out."

*[Music ends.]*

Tara: Yeah.

*[Light upbeat music begins.]*

Tara: Since we recorded this episode, some of our favorite holiday products have already sold out...or they will any minute.

Matt: Which ones?

Tara: Well, we edited them out of the podcast so nobody hears the podcast and gets disappointed when they get to the store looking. Although to be honest, some of the ones we've left in may sell out soon as well. So if you heard about something you want, do not pass go, do not collect \$200, go straight to your neighborhood Trader Joe's.

Matt: And just for good measure, here are a few more holiday products.

Tara: You know Matt, I can't think of a better person than you to talk about this first product.

Matt: I feel pretty.

Tara: Oh, so pretty.

Matt: Thank you. And I think that could very well be because of this Pink Peppermint Face and Body Mask. Now this is in our HABA section, the health and beauty section, that part of the store where you'll find lotions and creams and things like that. This is a clay based, a kale and clay based mask. And that means you sort of massage it in, let it sit for maybe five-ish minutes and then rinse it off. And because of the peppermint, I mean, it's so invigorating. I mean, seriously, like my head and face is feeling kind of brighter, lighter and probably shinier. But...

Tara: It kind of sounded like you said, kale and clay and there's, to be clear, there's no kale in this product.

Matt: No kale was harmed in the use of this face and body mask or its making. They are little tiny jojoba beads. So they're little encapsulated bits of jojoba oil. They are not microplastics. But those little jojoba beads perform two functions. They are a gentle, very gentle exfoliator, but they're also introducing some of that jojoba oil for some moisture. And it's kind of a fun feeling.

Tara: Also on the invigorating end of things, among my favorite products that we carry all the time at Trader Joe's are our candles in tins. We have a trio of smaller candle tins that are in a single box together. One is cranberry pine, one is fresh currant, and one is nutmeg. They just leave a room smelling subtly fresher with that scent.

Matt: If you're not interested in all three yourself, you can always gift one or two of those to someone else.

Tara: I've given these sets as teacher gifts and for, you know, neighbors and things like that. Or if I'm making a gift basket, this makes a great inclusion in something like that as well. What else is left on the list, Matt?

Matt: Well, it's the time of year for cold things, hopefully outside. But I'm going to go down the frozen aisle and I'm thinking of something sweet but I'm thinking of something basic. We have this amazing Chocolate Bundt Cake. The bundt cake pan was supposedly a mid-century invention circa 1950 and we've given this kind of a mid-century feel. It looks kind of like a classic American cookbook recipe photo shoot, but that bundt cake is beautiful. Classic chocolate bundt cake, chocolate chips with a buttercream frosting. This is a really exceptional thing.

Tara: It is not frosted when you get the cake.

Matt: Good point.

Tara: So the frosting is in a separate little cup inside the package and you take that frosting and you can put it in the microwave a little bit and sort of pour drizzle the frosting over the cake.

Matt: I'm not advocating dishonesty, truly. Were you to present this and not necessarily say it was bought at your favorite grocery store, none the wiser.

Tara: It is a limited availability product. Put it on your list for now, not for another time. I'm just hoping we can stay in stock for a little while on all the things we've talked about here.

Matt: Fingers crossed.

Tara: Fingers crossed.

Matt: Of course we put things into stores for you to sell and we do run out.

Tara: And of course...

*[Music ends.]*

Tara: ...we never run out of podcasts.

*[Closing theme music begins.]*

Tara: We'll just make more. So hit that free subscribe button.

Matt: It *is* free and worth every penny.

Tara: As we head into the holidays, we'd like to let some of our crew members pass along their holiday greetings.

*[Closing theme music ends. Holiday music begins.]*

Matt: All right, Rosalio get us started.

*~Crew Greetings~*

*[Holiday music up.]*

Rosalio: Happy Holidays to everyone listening to Inside Trader Joe's, from the crew at the original Trader Joe's on Arroyo Parkway in Pasadena, California.

Female Crew: And from the crew in all 528 stores in 528 neighborhoods and counting.

Female Crew: Thanks for shopping at Trader Joe's.

Kelly: My name's Kelly. I'm from Santa Barbara, California. Happy holidays from Trader Joe's.

Male Crew: Happy holidays everyone!

Dionne: Happy holidays from everybody in Chicago.

David: And happy holidays to all our customers!

Male Crew: From everyone at your neighborhood Trader Joe's in Leawood, Kansas.

Paul: Yes, we hope you have a great holiday.

Irene: This is Irene from Trader Joe's in Sammamish, Washington saying, "Happy Holidays from everyone at your neighborhood Trader Joe's!"

John: Happy New Year from John at Brookline, Mass, the Mighty 501.

Male Crew: Happy New Year from Littleton, Colorado.

Male Crew: It's been another interesting and wonderful year.

Male Crew: Hope you have a great season and we're looking forward to a great year.

Kris: Happy holidays from Tucson, Arizona. Enjoy ringing in the New Year and try something new because that's what Trader Joe's is all about.

Male Crew: Thank you for listening and peace and comfort in your life.

Kathryn: Happy Holidays!

Female Crew: Hey, thanks everyone!

Tara: Happy Holidays!

Matt: Same to you but more of it.

Tara: (laughs)

Matt: I just had to say that.

Tara & Matt: (laughs)

*[Music ends.]*