FREE BOOK

ENZO MANCINI

My Mother's Kitchen Drawer

Six old kitchen rules from Bari and a butcher shop



by Enzo Mancini

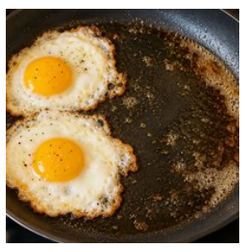
41 years a butcher in Newark, New Jersey

Open the book ›



What is inside

Six old kitchen rules from Bari and a butcher shop



Fry the egg in olive oil

Two tablespoons, one minute, lace

Rule 1 ›



Eggs that peel: hot water, then ice

Week-old eggs, hot start, ice bath

Rule 2 ›



Steak, store to table in 20 minutes

Thick, dry, salted, hot pan

Rule 3 ›



Roast chicken never dry, never at 350

Small bird, salted, 425

Rule 4 ›



Crispy roast potatoes: boil, shake, hot tray

Boil, steam dry, shake

Rule 5 ›



Creamy beans from a $2 bag

Salted soak, never a boil, sage

Rule 6 ›

The numbers card

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Keep it ›

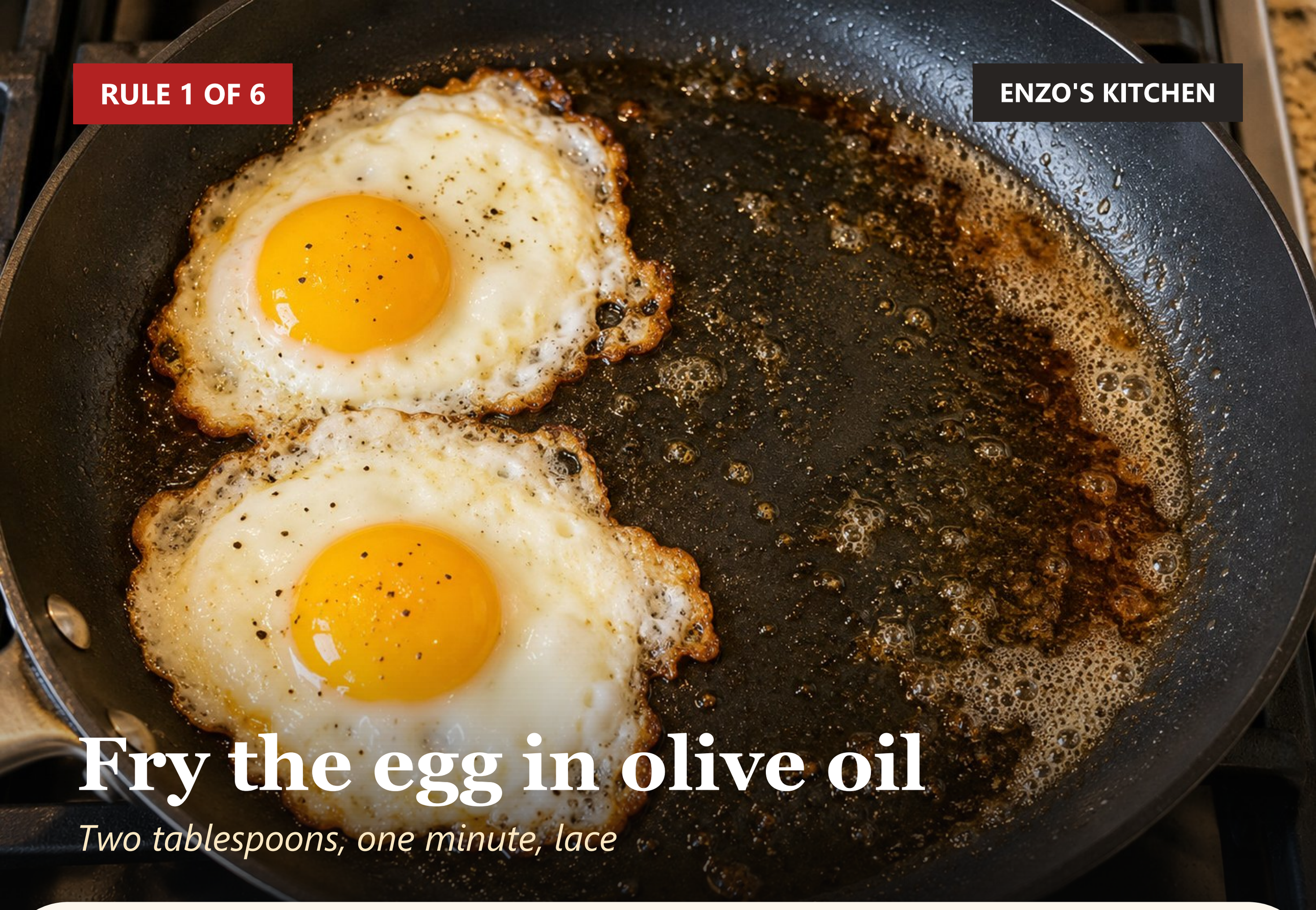


My mother's drawer

Where these rules began

My mother kept her small kitchen tricks in one drawer in Bari. I stood beside her at the stove and watched. This is that drawer, opened for you: six rules, one page each, the ones I would teach you first. Do one this Sunday. Piano, piano.

Do one rule this week. Piano, piano.



Fry the egg in olive oil

Two tablespoons, one minute, lace

THE MISTAKE

A little butter on medium, the egg spreads flat like a puddle. The white goes pale and rubbery, the yolk raw or hard, nothing between. Then you flip it, press the yolk dead, and eat it anyway because it is early.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

Oil at medium-high is far hotter than boiling, so the water in the white steams out fast and blows holes the oil fries into lace. Butter burns black before the edge crisps. Olive oil smokes near 375 F / 190 C; stay under it. My mother did six at once in a dented pan.

DO THIS

1. Crack on the counter into a cup
2. 2 tablespoons olive oil, 8-inch pan, medium-high, until it shimmers
3. Slide the egg in low, spoon oil over the white, out at one minute
4. Salt on the plate, white only

REMEMBER

More oil than you think, and never flip.



Eggs that peel: hot water, then ice

Week-old eggs, hot start, ice bath

THE MISTAKE

You bought the eggs this morning, started them in cold water, and the shell took half the white with it. It comes off in sticky chips and the yolk wears a gray-green ring. Nobody wants that egg in the salad.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

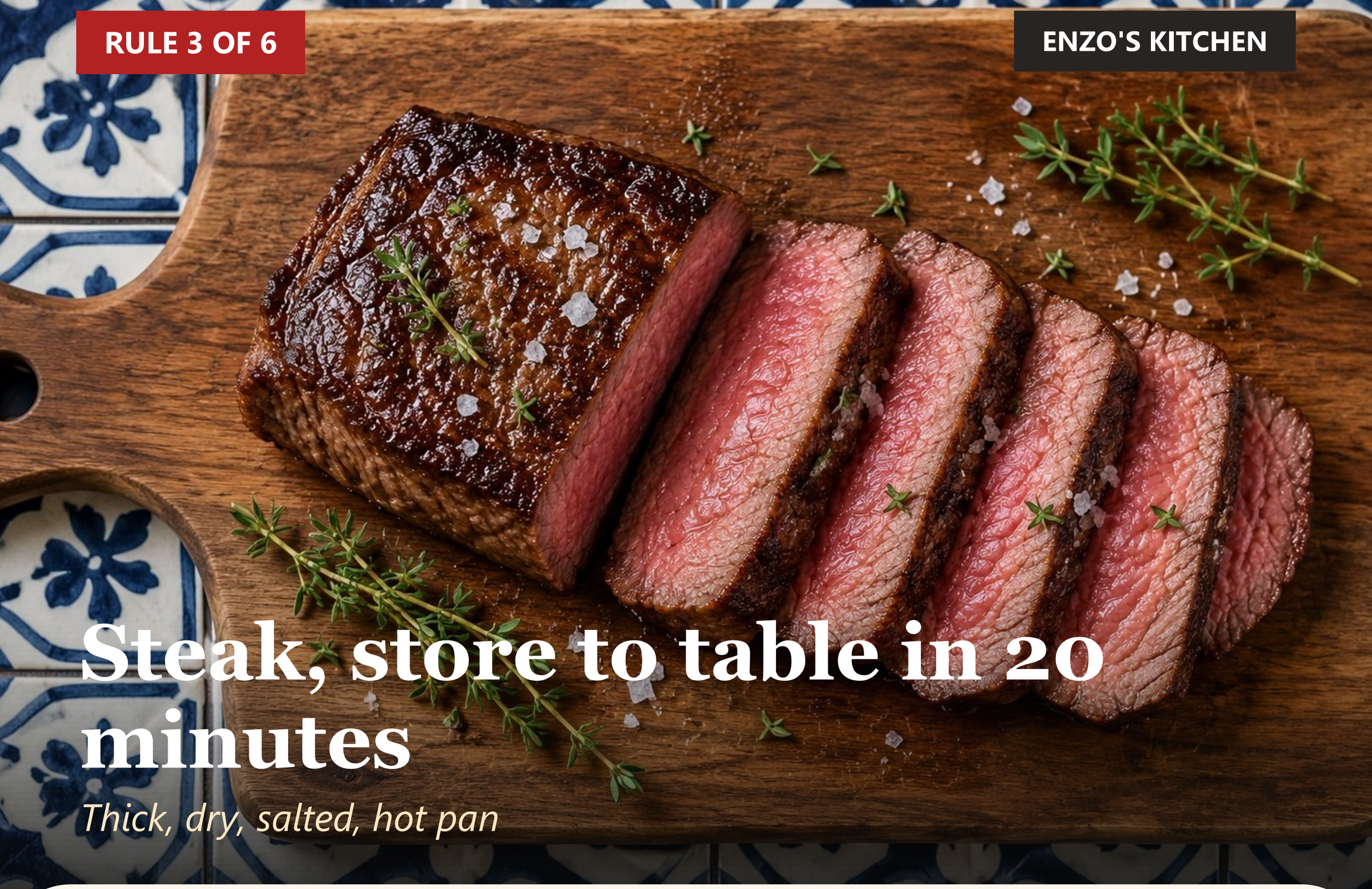
A fresh egg's membrane grips the shell; after a week, air gets in and it lets go. Hot water sets the white fast, so it hugs itself, not the shell. A test kitchen tried five ways: boiling and steaming gave nine smooth eggs in ten, the cold start the worst. Carmela penciled the date on every carton.

DO THIS

1. Buy eggs 7-10 days ahead
2. Spoon into boiling water, 212 F / 100 C, one layer, lid, 12 minutes large
3. Ice water 5 minutes, peel under the cold tap from the fat end

REMEMBER

Old eggs, hot water, ice, peel at once.



Steak, store to table in 20 minutes

Thick, dry, salted, hot pan

THE MISTAKE

You paid $12 a pound and the sizzle died in the first minute. The pan filled with gray water, the knife dragged through the middle, and every bite chewed longer than you wanted. Nobody at the table said a word.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

Nothing browns until the surface passes 300 F / 150 C, and water holds it at 212 F / 100 C. Wet and thin steams gray. Thick, dried, salted 40 minutes ahead, in a heavy pan, it browns before the middle overcooks. I wrapped steaks in paper, never plastic, to come home dry.

DO THIS

1. 1-1.5 inches / 2.5-4 cm thick; chuck eye about $7 a pound
2. Out 30 minutes, dried dull, coarse salt 40 minutes ahead
3. Heavy pan dry 5 minutes, fan on; 3 minutes untouched, flip, 2 more; out at 130 F / 54 C

REMEMBER

Dry the steak and heat a heavy pan.



Roast chicken never dry, never at 350

Small bird, salted, 425

THE MISTAKE

You bought the giant roaster and roasted it at 350 F like every recipe card. By the time the thigh was done the breast was sawdust and the skin pale leather. Then you cut it, and the juice ran out.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

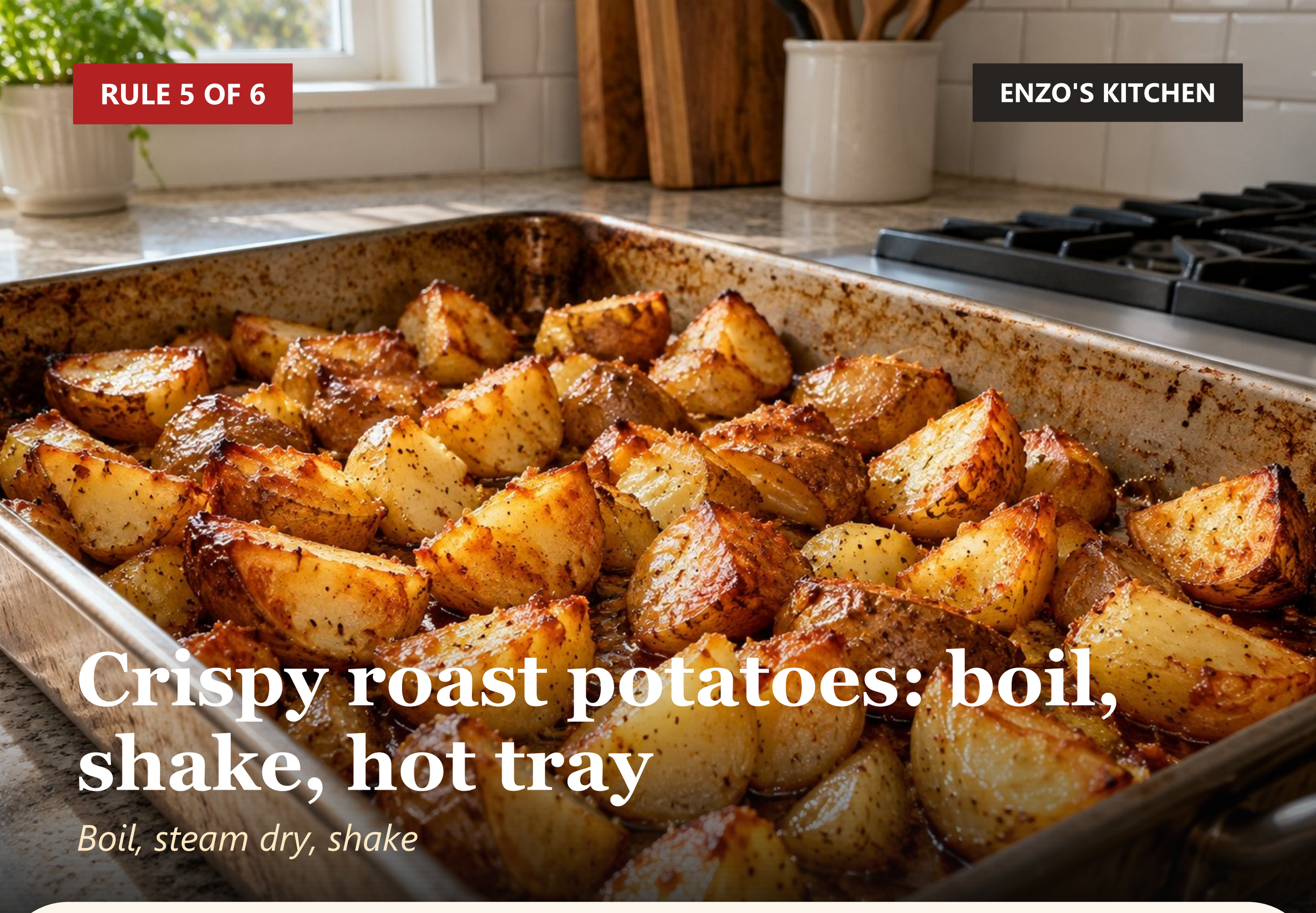
You can't brown what's wet. Overnight salt on a rack dries the skin tight. A side-by-side test found a steady 425 F / 218 C gave the crispest skin and juiciest meat. Whole chicken is about $2.06 a pound; Sunday costs about $8. My hand on the dial felt like a crime.

DO THIS

1. Small bird, 3.5-4 lb / 1.6-1.8 kg, salted overnight on a rack
2. Hot cast iron pan, 425 F / 218 C, breast down 25 minutes, then flip
3. Out at breast 160 F / 71 C, thigh 175 F / 79 C, rest 15 minutes to reach 165

REMEMBER

Oven to 425 and buy a thermometer.



Crispy roast potatoes: boil, shake, hot tray

Boil, steam dry, shake

THE MISTAKE

You cut raw potatoes, poured oil over them and waited 45 minutes. Pale, leathery skin, a soft inside that collapses on the fork, half welded to the pan. Three in the corner were perfect, and everybody at the table watched those three.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

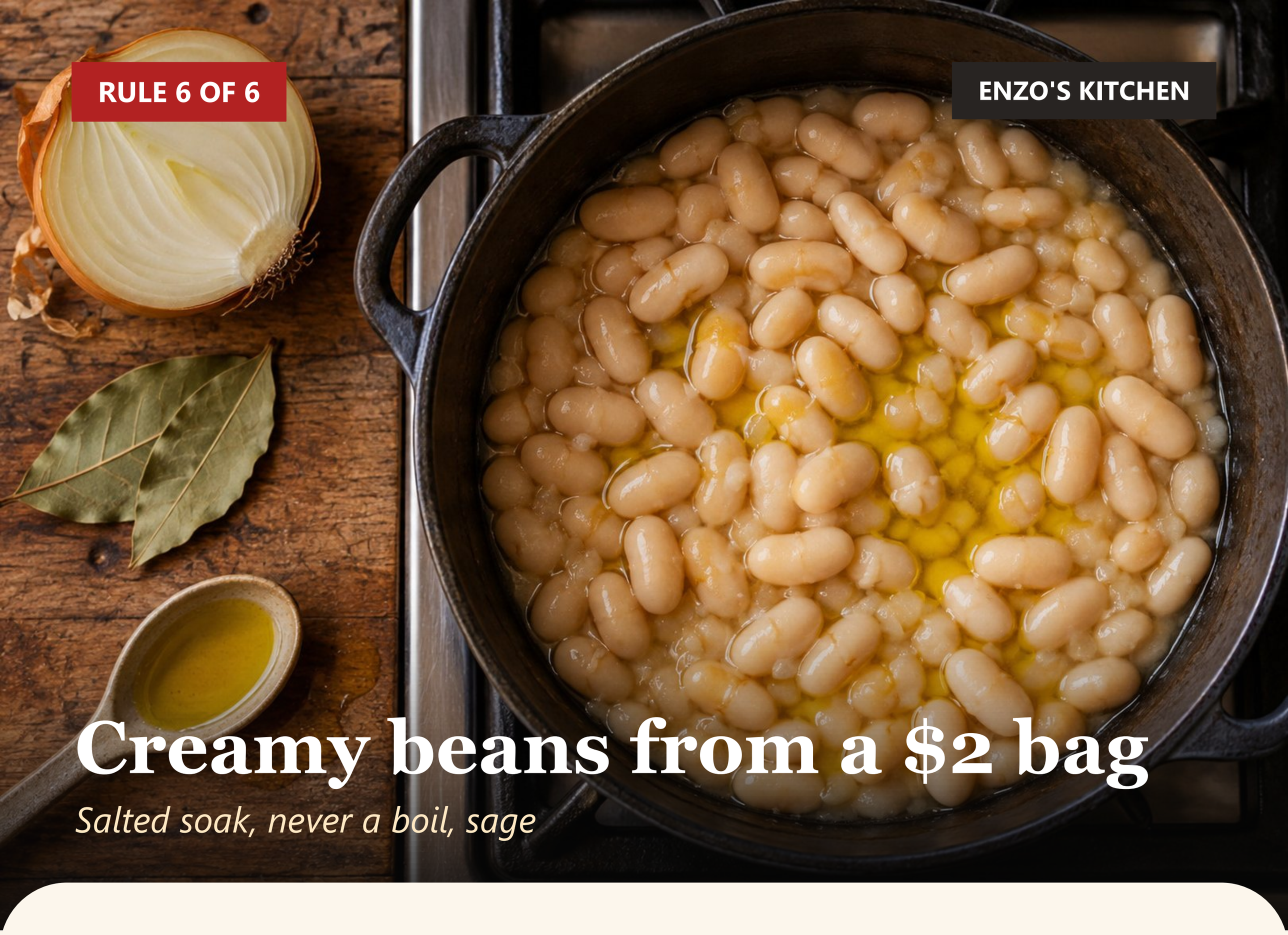
The oven can't cook the inside, dry the outside and brown it at once; the wet inside steams the crust away. Parboil for the inside, steam dry 5 minutes, then a rough shake scuffs a starchy coat that fries into crunchy edges. Turn them with a spoon; the oil is hot.

DO THIS

1. Russets in cold salted water with half a teaspoon baking soda, simmer 10-12 minutes
2. Drain, steam dry 5 minutes, shake hard in the lidded pot
3. Hot oiled tray, 450 F / 230 C, one layer; 20 minutes, turn, 20 more, salt

REMEMBER

Steam dry, shake rough, hot oil.



Creamy beans from a $2 bag

Salted soak, never a boil, sage

THE MISTAKE

The doctor said beans. You heated a can, no salt, no fat, and ate gray mush that tasted of the tin. Later came the thing nobody talks about. You decided beans are for cowboys and went back to the chicken.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

A bean needs what the can lacks: fat, an herb and time. Salt in the soak softens the skin, whatever grandmother said. A hard boil bursts skins before the heart softens; acid too, so tomato goes in last. The old men at my counter made beans when meat money ran out.

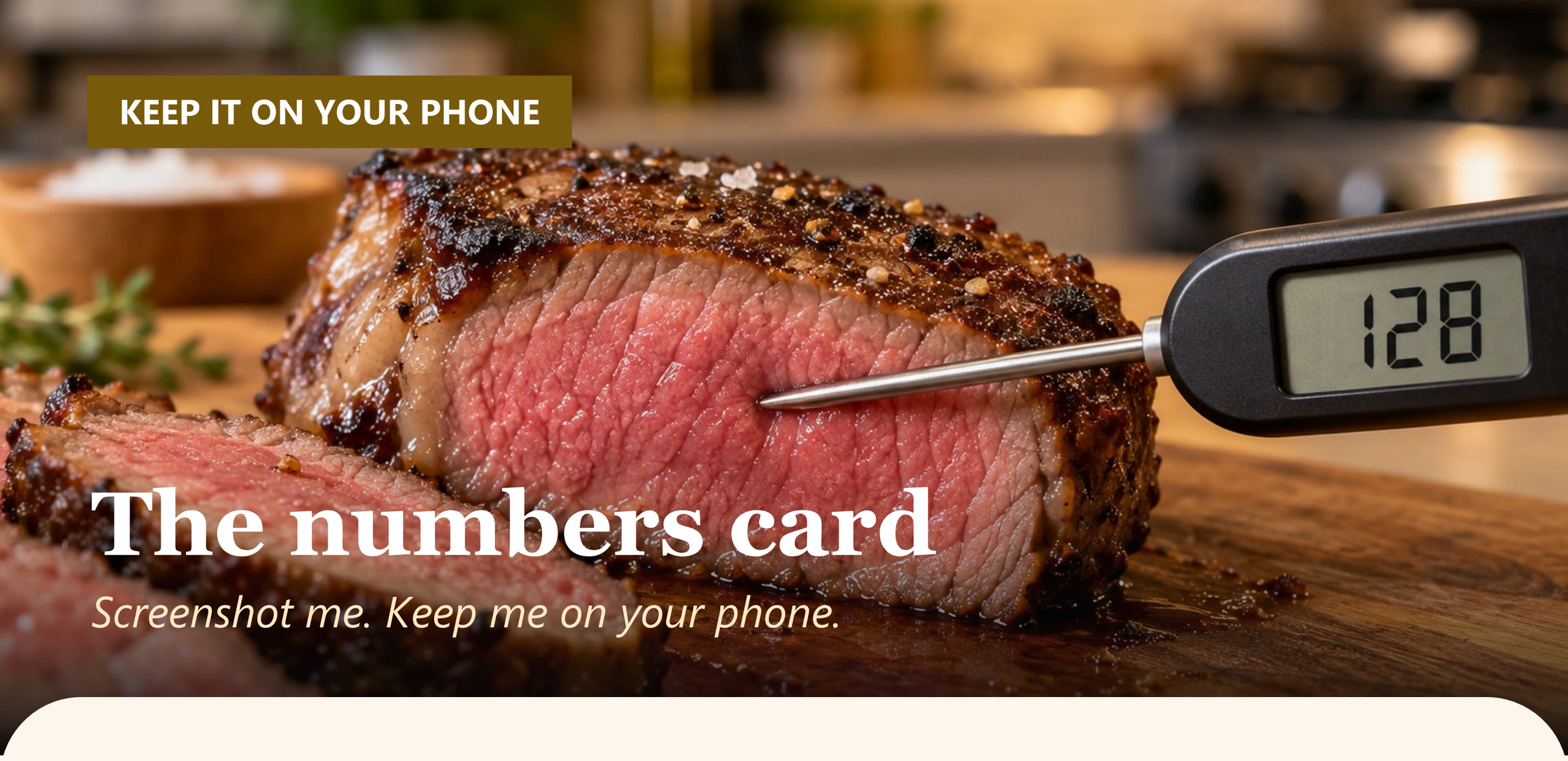
DO THIS

1. Soak 1 lb overnight with 1 tablespoon salt; pour that water away
2. Lidded pot, water 2 inches over, olive oil, sage, garlic, 1 teaspoon salt
3. Oven 250 F / 120 C, lid on, 3 hours; mash a third; never drain

REMEMBER

Fat, sage, time, a bubble you can count.

KEEP IT ON YOUR PHONE



The numbers card

Screenshot me. Keep me on your phone.

- Steak, chops, roasts: 145 F / 63 C, then rest 3 minutes
- Ground meat, meatballs, meatloaf, burgers: 160 F / 71 C
- Chicken and turkey, the government number: 165 F / 74 C
- Chicken thighs, silky: 175-185 F / 80-85 C
- Fridge at or under 40 F / 4 C
- Freezer at 0 F / minus 18 C
- Two hours from stove to fridge, one hour above 90 F
- Oil is ready when it shimmers and runs like water, not syrup
- Salt meat 40 minutes ahead or overnight; burgers outside only
- Thermometer in from the side, away from the bone

REMEMBER

Two minutes is a guess. The number is a fact.

BEFORE YOU GO

Notes and picture credits

I am Enzo, a retired butcher from Newark, New Jersey. I am not a chef and not a doctor. These are the habits of my family, general guidance only. Prices are about prices from U.S. stores seen in October 2026 and change from store to store. For your health, ask your doctor. Gas, electrical or structural trouble: call a professional.

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The whole notebook

Everything my family and I know

If these six pages helped in your kitchen, my friend, there is a bigger book.

It is called Enzo's Notebook. It holds everything my family and I know, in one place: the kitchen, the ledger, the toolbox and Carmela's own pages, one rule on each page, with the numbers we really use. I wrote it slowly and carefully, from 41 years behind the counter. If you would like it, scan the code or visit enzosbook.com. If not, keep this little book and do one rule this week. Thank you for reading, my friend.

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See the full notebook ›