

Simple tips to make your food taste better

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Have you ever followed a recipe that others raved about, only to find it tasted bland? It's not that the ingredients lack flavor, it's that the cooking techniques used to create the flavor aren't being used. So if your dish is only getting OK reviews, try these simple tips to take it from OK to OMG every time you cook.

Brown food tastes good

Browning proteins and vegetables until they develop a beautiful caramelized crust adds SO much flavor to food. When you're in a hurry, it can be hard to wait patiently for food to get that rich brown color—but this only adds a few minutes to the cooking time and doesn't require any extra work.

Here's how to do it: When you add a protein or vegetable to a hot pan to cook (or grill), let it sit in the pan for 4-5 minutes without stirring or moving it. This allows the food to get plenty of heat exposure to brown and develop more flavor. After 4-5 minutes, stir or flip the food and don't move it again for another 3-5 minutes so the other side is also browned. Then add the other ingredients and stir or toss to your liking.

If you are cooking food in a slow cooker or pressure cooker, brown the food before adding it to the clay pot for much better flavor.

Don't put too much stuff in the pan.

Overcrowding a pan is where flavor is lost. So whether you're searing pork chops, cooking breakfast sausages, making soup, or stir-frying, whatever you're doing, don't overcrowd your pan. If that means cooking in batches (meat first, then vegetables, then sauce), it's worth the extra time. That's because when you overcrowd a pan, you're steaming the food instead of letting it sear and get the flavorful Maillard reaction.



Deglaze for added flavor

When you brown food in a pot or pan, bits of the browned food stick to the bottom of the pan when you remove other food. That's a ton of flavor left at the bottom of the pan, which should be going into your mouth and reaching your taste buds. Deglazing is a simple trick that captures all that flavor and adds it back to the food where it belongs.

If you're making a soup, stew, or stir-fry and you're ready to add the remaining ingredients, add a liquid ingredient (white wine, stock, water, vinegar, tomatoes in their juices) to the hot pan and use the edge of a wooden spoon to scrape up the browned bits from the bottom of the pan. All that flavor will flow back into your soup, stew, or stir-fry.

If you're frying a protein, such as pork chops, chicken, seafood, or steak, make a pan sauce. Remove the protein from the pan and set it aside on a plate to rest, covered with foil. Deglaze the pan with a little liquid (broth, vinegar, white wine), scrape up any browned bits with the edge of a spoon, add a few spices or herbs (minced shallot, dried thyme, citrus zest, black pepper, etc.), and simmer until the liquid has reduced by about half. Then, whisk in a little butter, and you've got a delicious pan sauce to drizzle over the protein, bringing back all the delicious flavors from the pan to your dish.



Always add salt water to pasta

Many people try to reduce their salt intake by leaving salt in the pasta water. This invariably results in bland and unappetizing pasta. For most dishes that you drain afterwards (e.g. potato water, pasta, etc.), the water should be moderately salty so that the flavor develops quickly. Most of the sodium will drain away when you drain, but a small amount (about 2%) will remain, adding dimension and flavor to the pasta (or whatever else you are boiling) for a more flavorful dish.

Taste and adjust seasoning.

Before you serve your food, always taste it and adjust the salt and pepper. While you should season as you cook, give it a quick taste before turning it off, (and then taste it a second or third time as you adjust) to make sure the seasoning level is just right.

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