

# Cooking - Salt - Acid - Fat - Personality

## Train Yourself to be a Better Cook

It's obvious when a dish is missing something—the question is how to figure out what that something is. These exercises will help sharpen your tasting skills and become a more confident, intuitive cook.

### Salt

Salt is the most essential seasoning—without it, everything you cook will taste flat. Even if we eliminate all other seasonings, it's possible to make a delicious meal seasoning with salt alone.

A dish that tastes perfectly seasoned today will often taste under-seasoned tomorrow. This is because foods absorb salt as they sit, so taste and adjust as necessary.

### Acid

How do you brighten flavor?

If a dish has enough salt and still tastes flat, it's often because it needs a mouthwatering burst of acidity—think of a squeeze of lemon on a piece of fish, or vinegary pickles on a sandwich. If a dish is too acidic, the way to achieve balance is to add fat or sugar to mute the sourness.

#### Two ways to add acid to food:

Add lemon or lime juice. It will add a clean, fresh flavor; citrus is especially good with other fruits, fish and raw or cooked vegetables.

Add vinegar. There are so many different options, and each has its own character, from the sweet-sour taste of balsamic to the crisp, fruity taste of white wine vinegar and the aged, oaky notes of red wine vinegar.

Many savory foods benefit from the bright touch of acid: Try adding a little red wine vinegar to a beef stew, lemon juice to mayonnaise and minced pickled onions to a bean salad.

Sweets can also taste better with a little bit of acid: Squeeze lemon juice into a fruit puree or fruit salad to make its flavor pop, or fold a tangy bit of sour cream into whipped cream as a topping for chocolate cake.

Sugar can also soften acidic flavors, as in a sweet-and-sour sauce. To see how, make an overly sour vinaigrette, then whisk in sugar a pinch at a time until the vinaigrette tastes less harsh, but not sweet.

## Personality

How do you make food more interesting?

Once a dish is seasoned with salt and has just the right acidity level, the next step is to give it some character, such as a fresh accent from herbs or the warmth of spices.

## 15 Ways to Add a Tasty Spin to Your Food

Warm Spices:	cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, cardamom
Hot Spices:	cayenne pepper, red pepper flakes, black pepper
Smoky Flavors:	pimentón, diced bacon, smoked salt, chipotles
Pickled Flavors:	minced cornichons, diced pickled onions, kimchi
Briny Flavors:	capers, bottarga, olives
Sweet Flavors:	molasses, maple syrup, honey
Floral Flavors:	rose water, lavender, saffron
Fresh Green Flavors:	parsley, tarragon, mint, basil
Woody Green Flavors:	sage, rosemary, thyme
Pungent Flavors:	garlic, scallion, horseradish, mustard
Spicy Flavors:	fresh chiles, Sriracha, Tabasco
Savory Flavors:	grated cheeses, nutritional yeast, soy sauce
Zesty Flavors:	citrus zest, ginger, yuzu kosho
Nutty Flavors:	pecans, pistachios, walnuts, sesame
Funky Flavors:	anchovies, fish sauce, blue cheese, miso

## Acid and Fat: The Yin and Yang of Cooking

Understanding how acids and fats affect the flavor and texture of our food can be an ace card in your cooking game.

Here are a few fundamental approaches to using acids and fats properly. For starters, what is considered an acid in cooking? Here are some common cooking acids:

- Fruit Juices like lemon, lime, grapefruit, pineapple, apple
- Vinegars
- Wine and alcohol
- Tomatoes and their juice
- Buttermilk (the lactic acid help tenderize)

Acids can work as tenderizers by breaking down fibers in foods that are cooked or marinated in it. As it tenderizes, it also penetrates and flavors the food. When planning your dish, choose an acid which flavor will compliment the rest of the meal.

Acids are also detected strongly on our pallets. Their presence is usually easy to notice and impart good flavor, but can be a little overpowering at times. That's when we need to balance that mouth-puckering acidity with a fat. The use of fats also enhances flavor and texture.

Here are some common fats used in cooking:

- Cooking oils like canola, olive and sesame
- Other oils like avocado, hazelnut, pistachio
- Butter and shortening
- Animal fats like beef tallow or duck fat or bacon fat

By adding one of these fats to your dish, the creaminess tends to "mellow out" the tart mouth sensation of the acid and adds its own flavor to the dish. The right balance leads to fantastic results. Fats can add a lot of flavor.

So how do you use acids and fats in cooking? There are many ways to incorporate the two.

Salad dressings: use a 2:1 ratio of fat to acid - if the fat you want to use is solid (like bacon fat) melt it in a pan first then incorporate it into the acid.

Marinades: I use a 1:1 ratio for marinades - let food marinate a minimum of 2 hours, ideally 12.

While simmering, braising or stewing using an acid like wine or tomatoes, swirl in some butter at the end to add some creaminess or add some heavy cream or creme fraiche.

Here is a basic Asian-style marinades that goes great with just about anything:

- 1/4 cup fresh lime juice
- 1/4 cup fresh orange juice
- 2 Tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- 2 Tablespoons soy or tamari sauce
- 2 Tablespoons Veri Terriyaki sauce
- 1 Tablespoons sambal
- 1 Tablespoons fresh grated ginger
- 2 scallions, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced

Combine all ingredients and pour over pork chops, chicken, shrimp, portabella mushrooms, flank steak etc. Let marinade 4-12 hours and then cook.