



kitchendreamteam

Cooking Techniques

A FAST TRACK TO COOKING PERFECTION

By Erik Jorgensen





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Introduction



The importance of understanding cooking techniques should not be understated. Too often I've witnessed family and friends struggle to understand even the most simple of cooking guidelines simply because they concentrate and put their energy into getting one single recipe right, the one that they are cooking at that moment. Now, because they are concentrating so much on the task of cooking that particular recipe, they fail to understand what's most important when learning to cook. The most important factors are things such as the balance of sweet and sour in the dish; what is helping to thicken the sauce in the dish; is it the natural gelatin in the vegetables or is it the fibre, gluten, starch or something else? Why does the recipe ask them to cook tough meats slowly and tender meats quickly? Usually, they don't know – they only know that the recipe said to do it a certain way.

Those who start their studies as professional chefs are first and foremost taught the skills and know-how behind each and every cooking technique. Head chefs don't hand a recipe to their apprentices when they first start work at a restaurant and then tell them to go and cook the recipe without any guidance. The head chef will, for the first couple of months, explain and run through all of the different techniques to ensure the apprentice understands the chemistry involved when cooking and what happens to ingredients when boiled, braised, fried, poached, and so on.

As apprentices' confidence builds with the different techniques, head chefs will start to give apprentices recipes and teach them how to interpret them. Head chefs encourage young apprentices to add their own flare and ideas. This is why I wrote the cooking workbook called 'Cooking Techniques'. The goal is to help the reader to think in a different way, to stop the frustration and inhibition that comes from trying to follow a recipe step-by-step. Some parts may sound a little vague, this isn't to be difficult, it is to force you to think about what you are doing and the task at hand.

I want you to learn how to cook, not just follow instructions.

If you allow yourself to keep an open mind and take that initial step, this manual will help you to be a better cook, a thinking cook.

You may notice the use of certain terms, these are to help train you to think about what you are doing, think about what you want the dish to be, and to think like a chef. Chef apprentices are taught in a straightforward way; that is why I have incorporated these practices. For instance, the term 'liquid' is used instead of 'water' or 'juice'. The aim here is for the novice cook to understand the 'liquid' will turn into flavoursome stock (fish + liquid = fish stock and so on). Then the stock is turned into a thick sauce.



I cannot say this enough: free your mind, determine which technique is most appropriate for which ingredients and then get on with the job. At the same time, experiment and add your own ideas to the dish. This is the way, I believe, we should all cook. This way, the dinner is cooked with far more ease, and the thrill of creating your own dishes as you add your favourite ingredients gives a feeling of excitement and joy, which is a great part of the cooking journey. Remember: this is not an ordinary cookbook. You won't find recipes within these pages telling you that you need a cup of this and a spoonful of that. This book is all about teaching you the essential techniques behind EVERY recipe. Once you have mastered just a few of these basic techniques, you will find a whole new world of cooking will open up to you. You won't be restricted to just one or two "special" dishes that you know how to prepare. You will be able to prepare a whole range of new and different dishes – it's only your imagination that will hold you back!

Good luck, and enjoy the journey.

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A mention on recipes



Chefs mostly use recipes as a basic guide only. The reason for this is that they read recipes from cookbooks and magazines while at home on the sofa or relaxing in their courtyards on a hammock during their days off.

They might see a dish that they like, and write down the ingredients, but as they do this they will probably change some of the ingredients. This might be because of their personal taste, the seasonal availability of the produce used in the dish, but most importantly – because they can; chefs prefer to create their own dishes.

You seldom see chefs on TV cooking whilst having their head buried in a cookbook, or worried about getting the recipe absolutely right. They are not concerned because there is virtually nothing to worry about. The dish will taste the way it does, unless the chef has ruined it with too much of something that has produced a foul taste so it cannot be saved. The chef will use his or her senses to create the dish while cooking, and there is little doubt that it will be a success and that someone will be ready and eager to eat the creation. The chef's eyes, taste, imagination, fingertips, smell, curiosity and gut feeling will determine how the dish will eventually turn out.

Learning basic cooking techniques and understanding what happens to fresh produce and ingredients when they are boiled, fried, oven roasted, braised, steamed, poached and so on is the best way to learn how to cook. Once the novice cook has a firm understanding of the techniques, it will free up his or her creativity and allow experimentation without the need to bury his or her head in a recipe while cooking, and wondering if it is right.

This being said, home and professional cooks love cookbooks because they do put us in the right direction and inspire us to try something new. We love the pictures of wonderful colours and the stories behind the dishes. But we shouldn't feel bound by recipes. I am suggesting that if you want to learn how to cook, instead of spending all your time in always trying to get a specific recipe right as you are cooking it, then try to learn the basic cooking techniques first.

On a weekend get all your cookbooks out and spread them over your coffee table. Make a pot of tea, put your favourite CD in the stereo, plant yourself in the sofa and start reading the chapters that teach you about cooking techniques, science and history. Then start to write down some basic recipes that can evolve into many different dishes.



Let's look at 'how to cook risotto' as an example. If you know how to cook a basic plain risotto then from that basis you'll be able to create hundreds of different flavoured risottos. It's the limitations of imagination that will hinder the possibilities. Try adding mushrooms, asparagus, fennel, spinach, peas, artichokes, pumpkin, roasted sweet potato, ham, chicken, fish or shellfish. You can mix and match using different herbs, spices and stocks. You can make risotto stuffed tomatoes or capsicum. Or add a little extra cheese to bind your risotto and make risotto cakes crumbed in flour, egg and breadcrumbs and pan-fried to create a totally different dish. All that is needed is to know how to cook some different basic recipes and the techniques behind them. Then, when you read cookbooks and magazines in the future, you will be able to take ideas from some of the written recipes and transfer them into some of your basic recipes. It could be a new dressing to add to your standard Asian noodle stir fry. It might be a new sauce for your pasta bake. It could be a new exotic herb or spice to baste your favourite meat dish. The braised, wet dish you normally make could be change by adding some dried fruit and a couple of new spices. Slowly add the chosen ingredients and correct the flavour as you go. If you have a good basic recipe you can't go wrong.

Having said all of this, sometimes we do need to stick to recipes, or the dishes will not turn out correctly. For example, pastry chefs have to stick to their recipes more carefully as things can go wrong if they change the ingredients around too much. The ingredients they use and the way their produce comes together is a far more delicate procedure than what other chefs are used to. For this reason, many chefs do not enjoy spending time in the pastry section as they don't have the patience that is needed to work there. On the other hand, pastry chefs love their job because of the finesse involved; they are usually very patient individuals. Fortunately we have different personalities so there are jobs to suit each type of chef in kitchens all around the world.



The theory behind sauce



The theory behind sauce

It's difficult to know what the most valuable knowledge is that a cook should understand and fully be able to master when cooking. I believe that the journey of learning to cook will never end. This is because cooks should simply move on to the next step of experimentation, combining their knowledge with their curiosity.

'What will happen if I try this, or this...?' And so the journey continues.

There are so many factors and guidelines that, when combined, can create almost any dish. Having said this, I believe that understanding the theory behind thickening liquid/stock, or a sauce, is one of the most important techniques in the skill of cooking.

So many dishes invite us to thicken the stock or juices, which is part of the cooking process, and serve this as part of the meal. Some other dishes ask us to create a stock by adding liquid to the flavours that are present in the cooking equipment we have used.

Flavoursome stock can be made from adding liquid to our roasting tray, frying pan, roasting pot, stir-fry pan (wok) and so on as long as we heat up the liquid whilst still in the pan so as to loosen up all the flavours that have stuck to the sides. A high cooking heat during some cooking techniques combined with fat, natural sugars, and so on, can often make the flavours burn and stick to the equipment.

As said before, the liquid will have been part of the cooking technique that we have used and be ready to remove and thicken. These stocks come from our steam kettle, casserole dish, stewing pot, braising tray, poaching dish, or other. As most cooking liquids usually are full of flavour, and many are full of nutrients, it makes sense to thicken them and serve them as part of the dish.

Sometimes a thickened sauce is served combined with the other ingredients that are part of the dish and sometimes the sauce is served on the side. Either way, if made properly and with the right balance of flavours to compliment the other ingredients, the sauce is often seen as 'what made the dish'.

So all novice cooks should learn the art of thickening a sauce with texture and body, and understand the different guidelines, ingredients and tools that will help them in doing so.





How to thicken liquid/stock into a sauce

Normally when thickening sauces we use a starch to bind the liquid together; the most common starch used to thicken sauces in our part of the world is wheat flour. When we add flour to water it turns into a thick paste. But if we heat this flour paste then the flour granules start to swell and absorb more water – this is the key to thickening sauces. As the granules swell and the liquid evaporates (from simmering), the space in your pot of stock will become increasingly sparse.

But we cannot just add plain flour to our pot of stock; it's not as simple as that. We have to take care that the flour does not turn into small lumps of dough, which will float around in the simmering stock and won't do much good at all. Once the flour turns into lumps, and these lumps have created a gelatinous shell around them, then it will be difficult to break them down and cook them into the sauce. We would end up having to strain the lumps from the sauce, and that isn't what we had set out to do!

Take a moment and think about this: most pasta is just flour and water combined. When we cook the pasta, the boiling water might go a little cloudy but it does not thicken whatsoever. The pasta has created a protective shell around it. So when we want to thicken sauces with flour we have to learn the different ways to slowly and gradually release the flour granules individually into the stock.



Roux (a butter paste) – pronounced "Roo"

Equal weight of plain flour is added to a pot that contains the same weight of melted butter. These two ingredients are thoroughly mixed together into a paste. This butter-paste is then ready to add to our boiling/simmering stock and will gradually thicken the stock. The reason the paste is so successful is because as the fatty paste slowly melts whilst in the hot liquid it's gradually releasing the tiny granules of flour into the stock and preventing the granules from forming into lumps. The granules then soak in and absorb the stock, and as they swell and become more frequent as the butter-paste is melting, the stock becomes a sauce.

Learning how much butter-paste to add to thicken an amount of stock takes a few tries for the novice cook. But considering flour can handle being boiled and simmered for longer than most other thickening agents, we can add a little paste at a time until we discover how much will do the job. Soon the novice cook will simply look at the amount of simmering stock and know that a couple of spoonfuls of paste will be enough. Should you happen to thicken



the stock too much then simply add more liquid. The problem when doing this can be that we end up with too much sauce and that we have diluted the taste of the sauce. So add a little of the paste at a time when learning to thicken sauces with this butter-paste.

It's important to simmer the now thickened sauce for a little while. The sauce will benefit from this for two reasons, it will cook out the floury flavour that can otherwise remain in the sauce, and the sauce will also get a nice round texture to it when cooking it a little further than just to the point of thickening. Taking care that the movement of the sauce is just simmering, and that we stir the sauce now and then to prevent it from sticking to the bottom of the pot. This is the professional chefs preferred method of thickening sauces and if you have made extra butter-paste you can simply wrap it in cling film (plastic wrap used on sandwiches) and place in the fridge until the next time you need to thicken a sauce. So always make a little extra so you always have some at hand when cooking at home.

Flour and water paste

Mix flour with cold water into a paste. Pour a steady stream of this flour and water paste into the liquid you wish to thicken while stirring continuously. This will thicken your sauce quickly, as there isn't the same slow release of flour granules as when using butter-paste.

The down side of this method is that it does leave a floury colour and taste to the sauce. Also if the movement of the stock is too rapid you can end up with lots of lumps. Simmering the sauce for a while will help a little in rectifying both colour and taste, but this is only a method we should use if we really are in a





hurry to get dinner on the table or don't have butter in the fridge to make butter-paste.

Dusting the ingredients with flour

We can also use the technique of dusting our ingredients (such as meat) in flour before sealing them in fat. This means that you dip the ingredients, or in this instance meat, in flour making sure they are coated on all sides prior to placing them into the hot pan. This gives the meat a good colour and seal; the flour will also absorb both the natural and added fats in the pan whilst we're frying the meat.

So, therefore, as the meat is frying, we are also coating the pieces of meat with a butter paste at the same time. When we then add liquid to the meat dish, the liquid heats up and starts to tenderize the meat, at the same time we'll be thickening and creating the sauce (as a result of the flour coating). Learning to co-ordinate the time it'll take to tenderise the meat while thickening the sauce (the balance of flour and liquid) is part of the learning curve.

Corn flour

Mix corn flour with water and turn into a liquid paste. This paste is then slowly poured into the simmering liquid (meaning the liquid that you want to thicken, it might be a sauce, stew or so on). Once the paste has been added then turn up the heat and bring to the boil. The liquid will rapidly thicken, allow it to cook for a very short time. Corn flour isn't as stable as plain flour when used as a thickening agent; it will eventually lose its absorption meaning the sauce can lose its body if cooked for too long. Still, this is a great ingredient to thicken sauces because it's quick and your dish can be served immediately unlike when cooking with plain flour.

Natural thickening agents

Many ingredients have one or more natural attributes that will help us to thicken our sauce. These may be gelatin, sugar, starch, oils or other fats. Some of these attributes need heat to help the thickening process to occur while others do not. The amount of fibre present in the liquid will also determine how dense the liquid is and will play a part in what the texture will be like.

Your curiosity will be the main factor in how good a 'saucier' (French term for a sauce chef) you'll become. But this is one of the most interesting parts of cooking. When it comes to sauces, the journey definitely never ends.





Braising

(a wet cooking technique)

Braising is where we slowly cook food (meat/vegetables) that are half submerged in liquid. We use an ovenproof dish with a tight-fitting lid and we then simmer our ingredients slowly in the oven.

This slow cooking technique has many benefits. By slowly tenderising the meats/vegetables in the oven we retain the flavours from the food in the braising liquid. This liquid will be the base, once strained, for a sauce to accompany the dish. We can add herbs, spices and so forth to the dish to give our finished sauce its character. Once in the oven the dish will look after itself.

Important to know

- Meats and vegetables can benefit from braising. Fish is never braised, it's poached because of its delicate texture.
- By sealing meat pieces in a frying pan before moving to an ovenproof dish we assure that the juices are kept in the meat. This will give a nice brown colour to our braising liquid also. Remember to deglaze the pan and add this extra colour and flavour to the party.
- The reason we only cover the ingredients halfway with liquid is to maximise the flavours in the braising stock. The lid on the ovenproof dish will prevent the loss of evaporated liquid. The concentrated steam within the oven dish will cook the ingredients that are not covered by liquid and prevent the food from drying out. To help this process it's important to use a suitable sized dish.
- It's important to blanch white meat to draw out and remove blood that may otherwise spoil the flavour of the dish and the colour of the braising liquid (a white sauce is sometimes used when braising white meat). To do this, we bring the meat to the boil on the stovetop (start in cold water) and then rinse the blanched meat in cold water. Once rinsed, the meat and some fresh water can then be added to our oven dish.
- We can marinate meats with wine, spices, herbs and sauces to tenderise and add flavour before we start the cooking process. This can be done a day before.
- Meats that are braised are normally placed on a bed of diced carrot, celery and onion. These give a good flavour to the braising liquid and also elevate the meat so there is little chance of the meat burning to the bottom of the oven dish. The vegetables also add nutrients to the stock.



- Once the meat is tender we can thicken the finished sauce using a roux (butter and flour paste). Sometimes the sauce will be naturally thickened because of the natural gelatine that we find in some vegetables and meats.
- We can use small and large pieces of meat when braising. Check how far the meat is cooked by poking it with a pair of tongs or another utensil, if the meat offers little resistance and/or is falling off the bone then we're in business.

Examples of foods that are suitable for the braising technique

Meats

Beef - Chuck, flank, rump, topside, brisket, knuckle

Lamb -Shoulder, shank, neck, forequarter chop

Pork - Forequarter, bacon collar, rump, topside

Poultry-Maryland thighs, large drumsticks and feathered game*

* The term 'feathered game' is a culinary term meaning wild birds (or game birds). Unlike farmed birds that don't move as much and are not tough in texture, wild birds are ideal for braising.

Vegetables

Leek, cabbage, fennel

Temperatures for when using the braising technique

Meat 170 °C to 200 °C

Vegetables 130 °C to 160 °C

What equipment do we need?

Ovenproof dish/tray with a tight-fitted lid



Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

Watch out when you remove your ovenproof dish from the oven as it will be extremely hot, and is half full of liquid so make sure the lid is firmly in its place, you don't want this liquid to spill onto your hands. Use tea towels or oven gloves. Make sure whenever you use tea towels or oven gloves that they are dry otherwise the heat from the ovenproof dish will create steam in the towels/gloves and can burn your fingers. I speak from experience as this happened many a time during my apprentice days.

When taking the lid off to check on your dish do so by removing it so that the steam is thrown away from your body. Sad as it is, I again speak from experience yet again.

The braising liquid will be reduced and would have thickened due to the natural gelatin that the meat and vegetables have released into the stock. In most instances you will have to thicken this stock slightly. Simply remove the meat from the dish, strain the stock into a saucepan, bring to the boil, and thicken. Serve on the side or return to the pieces of meat that you might have sliced or arranged in the oven dish.

Erik's thoughts on the braising technique

This might not be a technique you want to use when coming home from work because of the long period of cooking time. On weekends where you have invited friends or family over for dinner and you are looking for a hearty dish with little chance of failure then this might be the technique to use. Serve this dish with a simple starch (such as rice, potato, pasta, polenta or so on) and an easy side dish to compliment the flavours. The powerful flavour that comes from keeping the lid on this dish will make this a sure winner. Your meat will be nice and tender, the sauce will be full of flavour, and you can have the dish cooked ready to serve before your guests have even arrived. After you have thickened the sauce and returned the meat component, keep it just simmering in the oven at a low heat until serving time. All you have to think about is the starch and side dish components. Simple!





Stewing

(a wet *cooking technique*)

Stewing is a slow cooking technique where we cook meat and vegetables completely submerged in liquid; simmer the ingredients until they are tender. The liquid will become the stew-sauce. This technique is beneficial for tougher cuts of meat that need more cooking time. The result is a very tender and flavoursome dish. Stews are mostly cooked in a thick-bottomed pot on the stove top. Cooking our ingredients in a casserole dish with a lid gives us the opportunity to stew our dish in the oven.

Important to know

- The stewing liquid can be both made into a brown or white sauce. Brown the meat and vegetables to get a nice brown colour in the stock when you want a brown stock. The stock becomes the sauce.
- For a white sauce, blanch the meat first to draw out and remove blood that may otherwise spoil the flavour of the dish and the colour of the stewing liquid. Bring the meat to the boil (start in cold water) then strain and rinse the blanched meat in cold water. Now the meat is ready to add to fresh water and simmer as a stew. Stews made from white meats such as veal, chicken, or rabbit, are called fricassee.
- Once the meat is tender we can thicken the finished sauce using a roux (butter and flour paste).
- Add cream to white stews at the end of the cooking process and after they have thickened; this adds body and keeps the stew blond/white.
- The flavour of the meat will determine the flavour of the stew as well as which herbs, spices, vegetables and so forth are added. It's up to the cook to create the flavour.
- We can also marinate the meat to tenderise and add flavour before we start the cooking process. This can be done a day before.





Examples of foods that are suitable for the stewing technique

Meats

Beef – Chuck, knuckle, shank, blade

Lamb – Shank, shoulder, neck, leg

Pork – Shoulder, knuckle, topside, leg

Poultry – Boiler hens, *Maryland thighs, large drumsticks

*Maryland is a cut of chicken: the legs and the backbone still together.

Vegetables

Onion, carrot, leek, mushrooms, capsicum and many more. The cooking time is reduced to compliment the delicate structure of the vegetables.

Other

Pulses such as dried peas, lentils, and beans can complement a stew, or can be cooked as a dish alone using the stewing technique.

Temperatures for when using the stewing technique

The temperatures of the liquid for the stewing technique are approximately 95 °C to 98 °C on the stove top. The stew should be simmering. To cook the stew in a casserole dish in the oven, the temperature of the oven should be between 160 °C to 190 °C.

What equipment do we need?

Heavy thick-based pot, flameproof/ovenproof casserole dish with lid. More information on pots and pans in the section covering pan-frying).



Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

An important tip is that you do not want to overcook all of your vegetables and have them go soft whilst simmering and tenderising with your meat. Add half of the vegetables at the beginning of the cooking process and then wait until the stew has thickened, and then add the rest plus any other more delicate vegetables. Then it's a matter of just cooking the stew for a short time over a low flame and the freshly added vegetables will have some crunch to them. Professional chefs often use this trick. Season the stew at the very end of the cooking process, remember the more we simmer and reduce the stock the more it will intensify in flavour.

Erik's thoughts on the stewing technique

A big benefit of the stewing technique is that it's a whole meal in one pot. I love this, once prepared and simmering on the stove top there is little more to do than thicken the sauce and serve with your choice of starch and maybe a side dish. It's also a nutritious way of cooking and a healthy cooking choice as you can add a lot of fibre rich vegetables or pulses to your stew.



Stewing



Boiling / Simmering

The boiling technique is where we cook ingredients in water at 100 °C. We know we've reached boiling point when there is a lot of vigorous movement in the water. Simmering is where we turn down the heat and cook our ingredients just below boiling point with a slight amount of movement to the water in the form of tiny bubbles rising to the surface. Often we start with the boiling technique and finish cooking our produce with the simmering technique. We do this because we do not want to dehydrate and overcook the outer of the produce as we try to cook the inside to perfection.

Important to know

- Usually when we use the boiling technique for cooking meats, they would have been treated with salt. This adds flavour to the meat and also gives it a tender texture. It's a good idea to either rinse or soak the meat in fresh water overnight this will get rid of any excess salt. Remember: we would like to use the boiling stock for a sauce to accompany the dish, if it's too salty we won't be able to use it. Once the stock has come to the boil we must turn down the heat and finish cooking the meat using the simmering technique.
- Boiling starch-rich ingredients such as pasta, noodles and rice in ample water will help seal the outer layer of the food, this will give it a protective shell, and allow water to cook the food evenly whilst making sure it doesn't stick to neighbouring foods.
- We can flavour ingredients by cooking them in flavoured stock instead of water. Adding a spice such as saffron adds flavour and gives colour to our ingredients.
- Stocks are made using the combined boiling/simmering technique. In most cases, bring the bones, carcasses or vegetables to the boil, skim the stock or replace with fresh water and bring to the boil again. Once most impurities are removed add flavours such as herbs and vegetables and then simmer the stock until no more flavour can be pulled from the ingredients.
- Soups like stocks are made using the combined boiling/simmering technique. Bring the produce to the boil, then turn down the heat and simmer until they are tender and ready to blend.





What foods can we use when using the boiling and simmering technique

Meat

Salted meats such as corned beef, ox tongue, ham and bacon, and different bones for different flavoured stocks.

Poultry

Chickens for soup, stock and more

Vegetables

Many favourite vegetables can be boiled as a side dish for the family dinner. We can also boil/simmer vegetables to make them into puree or soup.

Fruit

We boil/simmer fruit (including berries) when we want to make fruit purees, soups and sauces.

Other

Eggs, egg noodles, rice noodles, rice, pasta

Temperatures for when using the boiling/simmering technique

When boiling the liquid, the temperature is 100 °C. When simmering the liquid, the temperature is just below this point.

What equipment do we need?

These techniques are always used on the stove top so we need pots, saucepans, kettles and other containers that are suitable for our chosen ingredients.



Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

Other cooking techniques are closely related to boiling and simmering such as poaching, stewing and braising.

Cooking foods at the correct temperature when using wet cooking techniques is vital as liquid can quickly rise from the poaching stage to the simmering stage and then on to the boiling stage. Some foods will forgive us if we get it wrong while others will not.

Study the ingredients you are about to cook, think carefully about what your objective is and determine which technique is best. Then make sure you have the correct heat and continually monitor that this heat is constant during the cooking process; these factors will determine the success and outcome of the meal.

Erik's thoughts on the boiling/simmering technique

Adults and children should eat five serves of vegetables everyday. If your main course is a portion-sized steak or a piece of poached fish then make sure to serve a bowl of steaming vegetables or some other vegetable component plus a green salad with the meal. When we boil vegetables it's important not to overcook them, the key is to keep the colour and crispy texture intact. As a rule, children do not like soggy foods so make sure the vegetables are crisp and full of nutrients.

As always, learn to know which vegetables need more cooking time. Then you can add sturdier and tougher vegetables to the boiling water first, and follow with delicate vegetables a few minutes later. This small tip will help in making sure that all the vegetables will be cooked to a crispy state at the same time.





Poaching

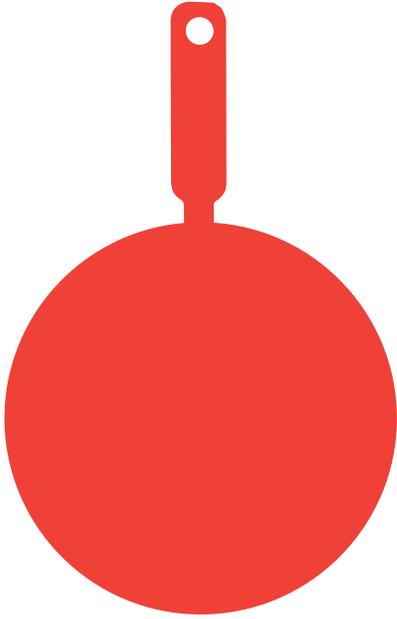
(a wet *cooking technique*)

The poaching technique is where we immerse our ingredients into a hot liquid, which will just cover the ingredients. Then we cook them at just below boiling point. We can poach foods either on the stove top or in the oven and flavour can be added by seasoning the liquid/stock we use.

Important to know

- The poaching technique is for tender foods that need a gentle cooking method that will keep the food moist and tender. This is a healthy alternative as it doesn't involve any fat and, hence, meals are full of flavour.
- Add a suitable stock, or vegetables, herbs, wine, vinegar or so on to the poaching liquid to add flavour. Sometimes we use the poaching liquid for a sauce to accompany the dish.
- As ingredients poach, there's a chance that part of them will start to float and just sit above the water level. To make sure that these parts do not discolour and dry out, we place baking paper on top of the ingredients and this will cover and keep them moist. We can even place an object on top of the paper to fully submerge the ingredients. It's important the cooking time is equal for all parts of poached foods.
- When poaching keep an eye on the temperature of the stock and make sure that it doesn't simmer or start to boil. If it does then we're stewing not poaching and as the ingredients are delicate they might fall apart, or overcook on the outside and undercook in the centre. Meat and fish can become tough in these cases, cook them for too long and eventually the flesh or meat will become very dry.
- Meat and fish will re-absorb some liquid if they cool down in the poaching stock. If we let them do so then keep in mind of the extra cooking time this adds to the produce.





Foods that are suitable for the poaching technique

Fish

Bream, dory, garfish, golden perch and many more. Some fish we can poach whole while some are cut into fillets or portion-size pieces.

Shell-fish

Poached stuffed squid, mussels and bugs

Poultry

Chicken breast

Fruit

Peaches, pears, prunes and more

Other

Eggs

Temperatures for when using the poaching technique

When poaching we aim to have the liquid temperature under boiling point at approximately 90 °C.

What equipment do we need?

Ovenproof dish, if poaching in the oven, or suitable fish kettle, saucepan or similar for the stove top.



Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

Poached eggs can be difficult to master so here are a few tips: make sure the eggs are fresh, this makes a big difference; the water temperature has to be spot on – not too hot, not too cold. Add the eggs just before the water starts to bubble and starts to simmer. Another tip is to swirl the water gently with a spoon to create motion in the water. This will rotate the egg's white over the yolk and protect the yolk from overcooking. Sometimes when professional chefs have trouble with eggs due to the whites not coagulating properly they add a little white vinegar to the pot to help the process. Just a dash will do, too much and the taste of vinegar will end up in the finished poached egg.

Erik's thoughts on the poaching technique

If the produce is poached perfectly, the tenderness and the retained moisture will make the food delicious. Considering the food is healthy and the poaching liquid can be made into a delicious sauce makes this a winner in my opinion. However, if you use this technique then you will need to be patient and watch the produce as you are cooking it. Should your ingredients overcook then the texture of the produce will be damaged, and this will spoil what could have been a perfect dish. So we only use the poaching technique if we're in the mood to be cooking and enjoying our time in the kitchen.



Paoching



Steaming

(a wet *cooking technique*)

The steaming technique is where we cook ingredients in the vaporisation of boiling water. This is a very healthy way to cook foods and when using the steaming technique we learn to enjoy the natural flavours that foods have to offer.

Important to know

- If the food items are overly large, where the use of a pressure cooker or a much larger than normal pot is required to cook them, then consider choosing a different cooking technique such as braising.
- Once we have chosen to use the steaming technique to cook our food, we should try to determine for how long these foods will need to be steamed. This is so we do not overcook the ingredients. Getting the timing right when steaming will help keep most of the texture, colour and flavour intact in the dish. Steaming foods for too long will quickly deteriorate the quality. Make sure the chosen vessel is sealed tightly so little, if any, steam can escape; the success of steaming relies on this.
- Apart from using different vessels to steam food in, we can also use other items to create steam around our food. Wrapping food in foil or banana leaves with a little liquid are a couple of great ways to keep flavour and moisture in. The juices can be used to make an accompanying sauce for the dish.
- Puddings can be steamed in a saucepan on the stove top. Boiling water is added to the saucepan and water should reach half way up the sides of the moulds that the pudding mixture is in. Each mould should be covered with a separate piece of tight-fitting foil so steam/water doesn't spoil the pudding mixture. A tight-fitting lid or foil should cover the whole saucepan so the steam stays in with the puddings. During the steaming process we might have to add some more boiling water so the saucepan doesn't run dry. As said before, make sure the saucepan/pot is perfectly sealed, it's the key to successful steaming.





What foods can we use when using the steaming technique

Meats

Steamed mince stuffed in vegetables, pancakes and dumplings

Poultry

Both whole and portioned birds

Fish

Bream, dory, garfish, golden perch and more. Steamed fish balls made from mince.

Shell-fish

Crayfish, lobster, bugs, crab, scallops

Vegetables

Most whole vegetables can be steamed. Importance should be put into cutting the vegetable into an appropriate size before steaming it.

Other

Rice, puddings, custard, dumplings

Temperatures for when using the steaming technique

When steaming, the water is just above the boiling temperature of 100 °C.

What equipment do we need?

Steam kettle with rack, Asian-style bamboo steamer, double saucepan with steaming basket.



Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

Watch out when steaming smaller foods as steam can be more effective than boiling and can cook some foods faster than you might expect. When you take the lid off your steaming vessel make sure to do so carefully and away from your body so you do not burn yourself.

Avoid your vessel from cooking dry by topping it up if it needs it. Don't forget to use hot liquid or you'll be stopping the cooking process and might cause the food to dry and ruin its texture before steam is recreated.

Erik's thoughts on the steaming technique

Sometimes we use a pressure cooker to steam larger cuts of food. The concentrated steam in the closed pressure cooker can reduce cooking times and help keep flavours and nutrients from escaping the vessel. Not many novices and home cooks have pressure cookers in their homes these days. I don't use one and rather choose to braise larger pieces of meats.

Steaming smaller portions of fish can be simple yet flavoursome so if you want to taste the real flavour of foods then I recommend steaming. It's a very healthy way to cook. Instead of turning the stock that is left in the bottom of the steaming vessel into a sauce, leave it as a broth to accompany the food. This broth can be soaked up with bread or freshly cooked potatoes.



Steaming



Roasting

(a dry *cooking technique*)

Roasting is where we cook foods in an oven with radiated heat and circulating air. This technique covers different kinds of roasting such as oven-roasting, pot-roasting and more. Both meat and vegetables can benefit from roasting. We have to use a form of fat or oil to seal our food when roasting, this fat can also help to keep our piece of meat moist during the cooking process. To get an excellent result put some effort into basting the meat with the fat that accumulates in the bottom of the roasting tray or pot. This will seal in the juices and the roast will stay succulent. We should only use prime quality cuts when roasting meat because we must cook meats according to their toughness and when cooking in an oven we want to keep the cooking time to a minimum to prevent the meat drying out. Therefore, tough cuts of meats are better suited for the braising technique. Take note that the whole idea of cooking meat is to make it easier to chew, digest and add flavour.

Important to know

- Before roasting large pieces of meat, it is a good idea to seal the meat in a frying pan, then remove to a roasting tray and season with salt and pepper, add herbs, garlic or other chosen flavours, and slide into the hot oven. This will seal in the juices and the flavours of the meat.
- To make sure that large roasts don't burn to the bottom of the roasting tray or stew in any excess fat that melts from the marbling of the roast, place the roast on a rack or on a bed of small diced vegetables (onion, carrot, and celery). This isn't necessary for smaller roasts as the cooking time is shortened.
- Once cooked, meat should be removed from the oven and set aside to allow the meat to settle and re-absorb most of the juices. Even when the meat is removed from the oven it will continue to cook, keep this in mind to avoid overcooking.
- The juices that are in the bottom of the roasting tray should be used to make the accompanying gravy. Some chefs add water to the pan during the last 15 minutes of cooking to loosen the flavours from the meat and fat that lies around the roast. This stock, which will have a nice brown colour, is made into our gravy. If we have added vegetables to the roasting tray then this will increase the amount of flavour, colour and give body to the gravy.
- To add flavour and body to the roast we can stuff the roast, which will help keep it moist.
- To protect a lean piece of meat we can choose to either bard the meat with thin slices of fat or coat the meat with a protective crust.



Roasting

Pot-roasting

Pot-roasting is where we seal meat in a heavy-based pot then remove the roast and add a mix of small diced vegetables (onion, carrot, and celery). Sauté the vegetables. Then return the roast to the pot, and place the lid on top of the pot, and slide into the oven. Occasionally turn the roast while it's cooking. Towards the end of the cooking process remove the lid and let the oven brown the roast until it's finished. Once the roast is removed, add water to the pot; this stock will be the basis of the gravy. Meats that are medium quality in toughness (such as the cuts of meat that we use for braising) will benefit from pot-roasting as the steam in the pot tenderises the meat at the same time it's being roasted. Take note: when pot-roasting poultry, it's the older birds that will benefit from the pot-roasting technique.

Examples of foods that are suitable for the roasting technique

Meats

Beef – Fillet, tenderloin, sirloin, topside, rump
Lamb – Shoulder, leg, rack, rump
Pork – Shoulder, blade, leg, loin
Poultry – Turkey, chicken, quail, duck

Vegetables

Pumpkins, onions, potatoes and other sturdy vegetables that can handle the heat and won't burn or dry out.

Temperatures for when using the roasting technique

Roasting meat

Start at a high temperature such as 220 °C if you have not sealed your roast first. This will give the roast a nice crisp colour, then turn down the heat to 180 °C and cook the roast at this temperature until the desired result.

Pot-roasting

Once you have sealed your roast to a nice golden colour on the stovetop, cook the pot-roast in the oven under a lid at 180 °C. Then at the end of the cooking time you can remove the lid to brown the roast further (should it need a little extra colour).



What equipment do we need?

Roasting pan/tray, roasting rack, basting utensils, ovenproof pot with tight-fitting lid

Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

If you seal your meat in the oven at a high heat instead of my preferred method (sealing it in a pan first) then make sure the meat has some fat protecting the surface such as skin on a chicken, or marble of fat on a leg of lamb so that the roast won't dry out. Do not season with salt before roasting if there is little or no fat marble on the piece of meat. Salt draws out moisture from raw meat and this will result in the meat drying out while it's trying to seal itself. Let the meat seal first then season.

Now that you understand that salt draws out moisture you will understand that rubbing salt into pork skin can help make pork crackling crispy.

Erik's thoughts on the roasting technique

Small roasts on weeknights are done quickly with this method. Throw in some potatoes and root vegetables and you'll sort out your family's dinner for that evening and have enough leftovers for the next day's dinner. This makes the hour spent on preparing this dish worth while and the leftovers can also be a welcome treat for your packed lunch the next day. Once the novice cook is comfortable with the roasting technique, then it's an opportunity for him or her to move on to the next level and add flavours by stuffing or crusting the roast. Many families in recent years have bought brand new stainless steel, top-of-the-range ovens for their kitchens. Still, many people don't study their new equipment and don't know how to use this tool to their full advantage. The fantastic functions these ovens have can help novice cooks in their quest for a more enjoyable cooking experience. Studying your kitchen's equipment and the benefits it can bring you is part of any cooking journey.





Baking

(a dry cooking technique)

The baking technique is where we heat food in an oven using hot radiated or circulating air. The aim is to find a balance where we bake our food without it drying out. Adding moisture to foods will help in this matter.

Important to know (bread and pastry)

- In the professional world, baking bread and pastries is an art, and one normally left to the professional baker and pastry chef. Their skill and experience is unmatched. The rewards when successfully creating breads and pastries (and the many different aspects to baking these foods) is well worth putting in the effort to learn for any novice cook.
- The first ingredient to come to mind when talking about baking and one of the most commonly used ingredients in the world of cooking is flour. To create bread, pastry, biscuits, cakes and so on, we have to add moisture to the flour. In bread, normally 40% of the combined weight is water. We also need to add yeast when making bread. Yeast fills dough with gas cells, which makes the bread rise and affects other qualities of the bread.
- When baking a cake we need to add moisture to the flour, which we get mainly from eggs, but some recipes also add dairy products such as milk. Different mixing steps are taken when making a cake, but the overall aim is to incorporate air bubbles into the batter which will influence the texture of the finished cake. We can also influence the texture of cakes by adding a leaven such as bicarbonate soda (when using bicarbonate soda the cake batter must contain acids to react with it. Common acid ingredients are buttermilk, yogurt, cocoa, chocolate, brown sugar, fruit juices and vinegar). Baking powder is a leaven, which contains both alkaline baking soda and an acid that helps the soda react and produce the gas bubbles.
- Place a tray of water in the bottom of the oven, which will create steam during the cooking process. This can help prevent some foods from going dry such as bread and some cakes.

Important to know (meat)

- When we bake whole cuts of meats we usually combined the meat with other ingredients to create a different type of dish from roasting whole pieces of meat. Examples of this are Wellington (where we wrap fillet or loin in a casing of mushroom stuffing and puff pastry), or tender cuts of meat or poultry baked in a salt crust.





Important to know (fish)

• When we bake fish in the oven we do so because it cooks the fish evenly and this can help both novice and professional cooks avoid overcooking the fish. We also have the opportunity to flavour the fish, stuffing it or basting it with herbs, spices, vegetables and more. These added ingredients can also help to give moisture to the fish keeping the flesh from drying out. If we leave the skin on the fish then this can also help protect the flesh from the dry heat. Sealing the skin of scaled fish to a nice golden colour in a frying pan before baking it in the oven will make the skin crisp and very tasty.

Examples of foods that are suitable for the baking technique

Flour or egg based dishes

Bread, pastry, biscuits, cakes, desserts, soufflés

Meat and poultry

Mostly covered under roasting.

Fish

Kingfish, mackerel, blue eye, bream, whiting, lobster

Vegetables

Tomatoes, onions, shallots, garlic, potatoes, mushrooms, peppers

Fruit

Apples, pears, bananas, pineapple

Ready meals

Baked pasta dishes, baked seafood dishes, meat loafs, shepard's pie, rice dishes, pizza

Temperatures for when using the baking technique

The large range of different foods, the amount of colour, and the amount we want to cook the ingredients all determine the temperature of our oven when using the baking technique. The range can vary from 100 °C to 240 °C.



What equipment do we need?

When baking bread, cakes and pastries we need cake, bun, pie and muffin tins, moulds and trays. For other foods we mostly need ovenproof dishes, good quality baking trays and sometimes racks to put the foods on.

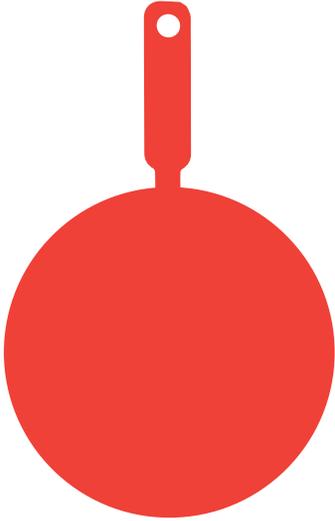
Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

When baking pastries and cakes we can use baking paper to prevent food from sticking to the tins and trays. It can also reduce the amount of colour the baking utensils give the produce. Remember that adding fat to produce when baking at high heat will give colour, caramelize and add flavour.

If there's a risk of delicate ingredients (whether it's meat, fish or something else) drying out during the cooking process then it's a good idea to give the produce a protective coating or stuffing which will add moisture to the dish.

As heat rises the oven will be hotter at the top and cooler in the bottom. Be mindful of this if baking more items at the same time. If there is only one tray to go into the oven then use the middle shelf. The oven should be hot by the time we place food in it so the cooking process can start immediately and seal the food properly. Overloading the oven will make it go cold and can ruin the produce.

Baking foods at low heat gives us the opportunity to slowly cook them thoroughly without overcooking or burning. This can also help caramelize the outside of ingredients giving them a fantastic flavour.





Erik's thoughts on the baking technique

When 'baking' (as in bread and pastry) we need to be patient and take time with the preparation. Maybe our bread didn't turn out the way we wanted because we didn't let it rise for long enough, or perhaps our cake stuck to the baking tin because we didn't line the tin with baking paper. Shortcuts mean things can go wrong. If we teach ourselves a few cake, pizza, pie, and dessert recipes, and learn how to do them properly then we can start to experiment and create something of our own. Children love to cook, and 'baking' is where children who are new to cooking can really learn to enjoy helping in the kitchen. And trust me, if you give children the opportunity to help, they will have a great time and their interest will make them more curious to new foods, which will help make them want to eat healthy foods that their growing bodies so desperately need.

My family and I enjoy using the baking technique on weeknights, as once the preparation is done it's the sort of dish that looks after itself in the oven. Once you have washed the dishes from the preparation you will be ready to serve your baked fish, meatloaf, stuffed capsicum or so on with a green salad and some chat potatoes all adding up to a great wholesome meal.

Using this technique properly creates a healthy way of cooking and keeps the flavours of all the produce used in the meal.



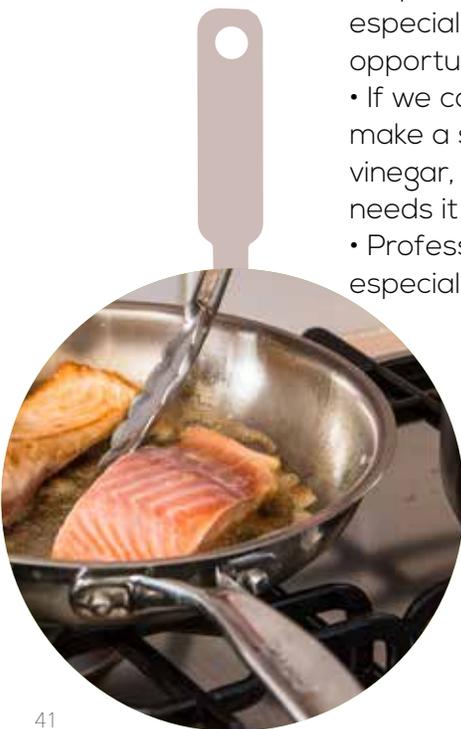
Pan-frying

(a dry *cooking technique*)

Pan-frying is a cooking technique where we cook foods in a frying pan in little fat or oil. This technique is suitable for foods that are tender and/or need little cooking time. We usually start with a high heat when pan-frying to seal the food and keep the juices and flavours in the ingredients, then we turn down the heat to avoid burning the food, and cook the ingredients at a medium heat until finished.

Important to know **(meat)**

- Small tender cuts of meat benefit from pan-frying. Most important is that we don't overcook the meat. We want to minimise moisture loss when pan-frying, to do this we must first seal in the juices of the meat and then cook for a short while over a medium heat to reach our desired result (rare/medium). It is important to ensure that we do not overcook the meat, causing it to toughen as the juices within dry up. Sealing the meat surface means we are drying out this surface to make it crispy. However, the inside is still moist. This is where the novice cook needs to learn, from looking and touching, to know which stage the meat is at. The firmer the meat is to touch then the more cooked it is.
- Resting even small cuts of meat is important because after you have removed the meat from the pan it will continue cooking for a short while. Keep this in mind as it can have a huge impact on the tenderness of the meat especially if it goes from medium to well done. Resting meat also gives it the opportunity to settle and re-absorb most of the juices.
- If we cook steaks in a frying pan it's a good idea to use the pan juices to make a sauce for the steaks. This can be done by deglazing the pan with wine, vinegar, stock, cream or other ingredients and then thicken this sauce if it needs it with a roux (butter and flour paste).
- Professional chefs use oil and butter when sealing off meats and other foods especially when pan-frying. Sometimes one or the other, sometimes both.



Pan-frying



- Oil can reach a higher temperature than butter can before it starts to discolour, smoke and burn. This is good news for when we want to seal foods, but using only oil can also make high-in-moisture foods such as meat stick to the pan if we're not careful as to how hot the oil is. If it's too hot we can damage the food surface that is touching the pan when we try to loosen the food to turn it over. In the case of meat sticking to a pan we might inadvertently create openings where the juices can flow out and cause the meat to dry. Professional chefs sometimes add a little butter to the pan as this helps regulate the browning and the meat keeps moist. Butter also adds and absorbs good flavour from the meat which then can be used for a pan sauce. Having said this, we need to watch that we do not braise our meat, cooking it at a temperature that isn't high enough, and that we don't cook it in too much oil or fat. Another point to note is that if we place too much food in our pan in one go then we'll lose heat and if the meat is extremely cold when it's placed into the pan then this will also result in loss of heat. All of these scenarios will make the meat go grey as it starts to stew and braise instead of frying; this can also result in the meat sticking to the pan.

Important to know **(fish)**

- When pan-frying fish, the same principles that we use for pan-frying meat apply with some additional notes. Getting colour when searing fish can be tricky because of the high moisture content in fish. The flesh and texture of fish is delicate and the aim when pan-frying it is to seal it with a nice colour as it cooks through. Unlike meat where we can flip it over several times while cooking to get the desired state, we cannot do this with fish to the same extent because the muscle layers in many fish start to separate as we cook them.
- Before searing and pan-frying fish fillets try to pat them dry as much as possible to remove moisture. The heat should be high when searing the fish but not as high as when searing meat. When the fillets show some colour and start to cook midway through the flesh, flip them over. As we're cooking them now at a reduced heat we can baste the fish with fat from the pan to help crisp the seared fish, which will also add flavour and moisture to the fillets.
- To help especially watery fillets of fish in this process we can crust the fish in flour making it easier to seal and colour.
- Create even thickness to fish fillets by tucking the tail under itself or score thicker parts of a fillet. This helps to create an even cooking time and prevents parts of the fish (such as the tail) cooking faster than other parts.



Examples of foods that are suitable for the pan-frying technique

Meats

Beef – Rump, rib eye, scotch fillet, sirloin, T-bone

Lamb – Noisette, cutlet, fillet, loin chops

Pork – Fillet, loin cutlet, bacon

Poultry – Chicken breast, chicken thigh

Fish & Shellfish

Orange roughy, red emperor, salmon, tuna, prawns, scallops, calamari

Vegetables

Tender vegetables that need little cooking time.

Other

Some cheeses, eggs, crepes, crumbed risotto cakes or other coated foods.

Temperatures for when using the pan-frying technique

When pan-frying meat, the temperature sealing the meat is around boiling point and if we seek a medium-rare steak then the centre of the meat will be 55 °C to 60 °C. Having said this, we have little chance of checking on this so it's all about using our eyes, touch and gut feeling when cooking meat and other foods in a pan.





What equipment do we need?

There are some specialised pans for different frying jobs but these are mainly meant for professional chefs. Novice cooks should be able to cover a range of different frying tasks and quantities with 2 to 3 good quality pans. Remember: we don't want the pan to be too big or too small when frying our food; therefore, we need a few different sizes.

Good pans and pots are not cheap but well worth their money. Get ones with a strong, thick base. Pans and pots that are thin on the bottom will eventually buckle and that can be a problem, especially if you have an electric stove top. The heat won't distribute evenly around the pan/pot base; you'll have too much heat where the pan is touching the stove top and too little where it isn't. If you choose non-stick remember to buy non-stick utensils so you don't damage the coating.

Make sure the pan/pot has a good sturdy handle. A tight-fitting lid is great for when you are cooking stews, sauces and other wet dishes. I like lids to be made out of glass so you can check on your creation with ease.

Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

To make a sauce for your steaks once you have sealed and cooked them, remove them from the pan and place to the side, the juice should also be kept. Sauté the aromatic flavours that you want your sauce to taste of, for example, onion and mushrooms. Do this in the same pan and sauté until these are coloured. Then remove the mushrooms and onions from the pan. Deglaze the pan with some wine or vinegar. We do this to loosen all the lovely caramelized flavours that are sticking to the pan; this adds flavour and colour. Now add a little stock plus the juices we had put aside. As the stock is simmering, thicken it with roux (butter and flour paste). Once the sauce is thick and you have cooked out the flour lumps, return the mushrooms and onions and reduce the temperature until you have a nice thick sauce. Add a spoonful of cream and your favourite freshly chopped herbs. Season with salt and pepper. Your sauce will be the talk around town.



Eriks's thoughts on the pan-frying technique

The frying pan known as the sauté pan in the world of professional chefs is where both novice and professional cooks can find real enjoyment in cooking. It's a fast and exciting way to cook, and if we have organised ourselves with the proper preparation in regards to the ingredients, the intense flavours that we can extract using the pan-frying technique makes this a winner in my eyes. This requires effort and care in preparing not only our main component of the dish, but also the add-ons such as herbs, spices, vegetables, stocks, sauces and so on, that will create the combined flavours of the dish in the end. As I have said before: it's our eyes, taste, imagination, fingertips, smell, curiosity and gut feeling that will determine how any dish will eventually turn out. The journey of finding and creating new tastes when pan-frying will never end and this is one of the reasons why it's so popular with professional chefs.





Stir-Frying

(a dry *cooking technique*)

Stir-frying is where we cook foods for a very short time at high heat in little oil. Because of the short cooking time the wok or stir-fry pan doesn't have to have a heavy base; it can be relatively thin. This is a dry cooking technique that is suitable for food items that are tender and/or need little cooking time. We start and finish with high heat when stir-frying.

Important to know

- Preparation is everything when stir-frying. As the cooking process is quick and rapid, it's advisable to have all the food ingredients and preparation done before heating the stir-fry pan. As said before, the cooking time is quick so it's important the ingredients are cut into equal sizes so we don't have a scenario where the finished dish has some ingredients that are cooked and some that are not. Of course some food items will be denser than others and need a longer cooking time but this isn't a problem as we enter the ingredients in the order of how long they need to cook. It should be noted the experienced and professional chefs add aromatics first to mix the flavours from these into all the other added ingredients.
- If we have a situation where we're not sure that ingredients will cook tenderly before they start to burn then add a little stock or water to help speed up the tendering process of the more denser foods. Once the stock or water has cooked dry then the items should be half cooked; add a little more oil and stir in the more delicate foods that need a shorter cooking time. We should aim to have all items cooked at the same time.
- For the novice cook it's important to learn and understand when to cook and add different ingredients whilst tossing and stirring. We should make sure the food doesn't colour and burn, but the pan must still maintain heat – this is important in order to get a warm, crisp and flavoursome result.



Stir-Frying



- Professional wok cooks sometimes add and cook ingredients separately and remove them again before they are cooked through. Once they have individually cooked all the main components of the dish that need a longer cooking time at an intense heat they then return all ingredients to the wok and reheat them together thus finishing the stir-fry perfectly.
- Do not add oil to the stir-fry pan until it's hot and we're ready to cook. If we do, the prolonged high heat can damage the oil, and the flavour of the finished dish will be tainted. We cannot use butter to stir-fry because butter cannot reach the high heat that is required when we use the stir-fry technique.

Examples of foods that are suitable for the stir-frying technique

Meats

Beef-Rump, loin, fillet, topside

Lamb-Loin, eye of loin, neck fillet

Pork-Loin, rump, topside, bacon

Poultry-Chicken breast and thigh, duck breast, turkey breast

Fish & Shellfish

Trevally, snapper, barramundi, prawns, scallops, calamari

Vegetables

Tender vegetables that need little cooking time

Temperatures for when using the stir-frying technique

We require high heat when stir-frying, we must try to maintain this high heat as we're stirring and tossing the wok or stir-fry pan. Putting too many ingredients in the pan at one go will make the pan go cold, and the ingredients will stick.



What equipment do we need?

We need a good quality non-stick, stir-fry pan with a high edge so we can sauté and stir our ingredients. If we're using an electric stove top then the bottom of the pan must be thick so we can build up the heat; it needs to be flat, circular, and must cover our electric burners so it can generate as much heat as possible. If we're using gas and there is a special wok burner on the stove then we can use a more traditional wok. Make sure the pan has a sturdy handle as the weight of the combined ingredients adds up.

Wooden utensils are used to stir the ingredients, as we do not want to scrape the pan's surface.

Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

When we stir-fry and want a sauce to glaze and stick to our ingredients, or to create a wet dish (like a stew) use cornflour to thicken the stock that the ingredients have been poached or stewed in. Normally, the starch component of the dish (rice/noodles) is then served on the side instead of combined in the stir-fry. Once the ingredients are cooked and the stock is simmering, enter a paste of mixed water and cornflour. Stir the wok/stir-fry pan continuously whilst we bring the temperature of the stock to the boiling point. After a few minutes of boiling we're ready to serve our dish.

Erik's thoughts on the stir-fry technique

The rise in popularity of this cooking technique is very much due to the result that it brings to the table and the ease with which it's accomplished. With never-ending combinations in flavour to choose from, novice cooks and professional chefs can experiment and create endless new dishes.

The results are fresh in flavour, crispy in texture and, to top it off, healthy and wholesome. This is due to sparse amounts of fat being added and the short cooking time keeps the nutrient loss to a minimum. A true favourite with my family; brilliant stir-fries can be whipped up with small amounts of leftover produce, spices and herbs, and dried noodles or rice. It's up to your imagination to create the dish.





Grilling

(a dry cooking technique)

The grilling technique is cooking food placed under or over a heat source (grill) at a high heat. The key is to cook not only the outside of the ingredient, but at the same time to cook the core of the ingredient. Depending on how close the ingredients are to the heat supply and the strength of the heat, will determine this.

Important to know

- The high heat of grilling means we should use oil to help seal and cook our ingredients as other fats will burn.
- We might have to turn down the heat once both sides of the food have been sealed so that the weaker heat will cook the ingredients until they are tender.
- Smaller size portions benefit best, otherwise the high heat of the grill can burn the outside of food and not cook the inside thoroughly.
- Cut off any sinew from the pieces of meat; cooking reduces the size of the sinew, which results in squeezing out the juices from the meat as it's cooking.
- If the skin is left on when grilling fish then score the skin or it will reduce in size whilst cooking and will squeeze the juices out of the flesh.
- When using a flat grill (i.e. BBQ hot plate), ensure that the ingredients are dry before grilling them, as excess moisture added to the grill can make them stew.
- The grill must always be properly cleaned before using; old burnt fat and meat will prevent us from sealing the ingredients and make them stick. The flavour from old burnt fat and meat will also spoil the flavour of any new foods.
- Marinate food to add flavour. This can be done for any amount of time from minutes to overnight. The longer the food marinates, the more flavour it will absorb. It's important not to marinate delicate foods for too long or with too strong a marinade as this can damage the texture of the food and give it too much flavour, which takes away the food's natural taste.
- Grilling under a grill (where the heat comes from above) allows us to seal, sizzle and caramelize foods. As we are sealing the top of the ingredient crisp, the aim is to, at the same time, cook and tenderise the ingredient to a finished state without over-cooking it. Different fats and oil can help us achieve this; they also help in keeping the food moist.



Examples of foods that are suitable for the grilling technique

Meats

Beef – Rump, fillet, sirloin, T-bone, burgers

Lamb –Cutlets, loin chop, tender loin, chump chop, kebabs

Pork –Tender loin, loin cutlet, bacon, spare ribs, sausages

Poultry–Chicken wings and drumsticks, turkey breast, duck breast, patties

Fish & Shellfish

Salmon, tuna, sardines, snapper, mullet, calamari, scallops

Vegetables

Mushrooms, Mediterranean vegetables, tomatoes, vegetable burgers

Fruit

Nectarines, pineapples, apples, baked bananas

Other

Polenta cakes, bread

Temperatures for when using the grilling technique

Just as it is with pan-frying, it's all about using our eyes, touch and gut feeling when cooking meat and other foods on a grill. If you have an opportunity to regulate the heat of your chargrill or barbecue then do so; perhaps have more charcoal to one side than the other of the grill, or regulate the gas. The benefit of this is so you can seal on one half while cooking to the finished stage on the other. Resting the meat or keeping food warm can be done at the outer edges, but don't leave it there for too long as it will dry out quickly due to a lack of moisture and the intense high heat surrounding it.

What equipment do we need?

Flat, heavy-based, ridged grill pan for indoor grilling. Grill top that is part of our kitchen oven (heat from above). Outdoor gas or charcoal barbecue.





Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

Remember that chargrills and barbecues can get extremely hot so it's important to cut foods to a suitable size to seal and cook the food before they start to burn or dry out.

When using skewers, which we often do when using the grilling technique, remember to soak the skewers for 15 minutes in water before threading food onto them; this will prevent them from burning. Foods that we skewer should be cut into bite-size pieces and have approximately the same cooking time. Try to use many different products and colour combinations to wow your guests. After being threaded, skewered food can be marinated to add flavour. Watch that excess oil from marinated foods doesn't drip onto the flames of your grill. This will create excessive smoke and flames and can taint the flavour. A little smoky flavour is desirable, too much is just too much.

Erik's thoughts on the grilling technique

There is quite an art to cooking a good grill or barbecue even though it's still a simple way to entertain family and friends. Because of the expense in buying top end cuts, I take time to make some cheaper options for the chargrill, these range from Asian-flavoured pork and chicken patties to skewers full of vegetables and marinated thin strips of beef, chicken or fish. Marinating your own chicken drumsticks gives you the chance to create your own flavours instead of leaving it to your local butcher or supermarket. Even though you are just cooking a barbecue you still have the opportunity to surprise your guests and even yourself.

I slightly marinate meat in a sugary solution during the weeknights when using the ridged grill pan at home. This gives a slightly sweet and slightly burnt flavour to the meat as the pan caramelises the surface of the meat. This combined with a great looking criss-cross pattern makes cooking what it is – a journey of effort that makes food taste better. Sometimes we will fail, mostly we will succeed, but the journey should never stop for novice cooks or professional chefs.





Deep-frying

The deep-frying technique is where the food cooks in enough oil to cover it completely. Deep-fried food should be crisp on the outside and have a carefully cooked centre. Most foods need to be coated before being deep-fried so as to form a crust protecting the interior of the foods.

Important to know

- We give foods a coating to seal a crust around it, which will keep the oil from being absorbed into the interior of the food. This crust will have a crispy texture to it once cooked and we can flavour this crust to compliment the food we're deep-frying. The crust can also hold food together that otherwise could not be deep-fried. Many Asian finger foods are covered by a wrapping such as wonton, spring roll or rice paper wrappers. These help keep fillings together and makes the finger foods easy to hold and eat. Coatings can be as simple as flour (plain or corn) to help crisp foods. For a solid coating, we can make a batter like a beer batter, or a tempura batter, or crumb the food in flour then whisked eggs and finally breadcrumbs.
- We can use vegetable, sunflower, and canola oil to deep-fry. The idea is not to spoil the oil with too much moisture from the foods as we're frying them or let other ingredients and impurities damage the oil, which will stop it from maintaining optimum heat.
- Sometimes we have to pre-cook ingredients when we deep-fry as our chosen ingredients are too big to cook through in one go. The aim is to cook them first at a lower than normal frying heat (approximately 140 °C). If we cook large tough items at high heat then we risk them burning on the outside and staying raw in the middle. This can happen when, for example, we cook fresh potato chips. After pre-cooking the ingredients we can turn up the heat of the oil and seal the food crisp whilst cooking it through.



Deep-frying

Examples of foods that are suitable for the deep-frying technique

Most tender foods can be deep-fried with success. We must make sure that they are cut into equal sizes that we know will cook and stay tender whilst frying and that they are coated appropriately to save them from drying out.

Meat

Pork meat balls and ribs, braised beef and lamb croquettes

Poultry

Chicken thigh and breast (crumbed), chicken drumsticks, quail

Fish

Kingfish, blue eye, blue grenadier and flathead. Some battered, some dusted in flour and quickly fried crisp.

Shellfish

Squid, abalone, blue swimmer crab, prawns and oysters. Some battered, some dusted in flour and quickly fried crisp.

Zucchini, eggplant, capsicum, fennel, pumpkin, and potatoes. Some battered (tempura style), some floured and quickly fried crisp.

Fruit

Banana, pineapple (battered)

Other

Tofu, rice noodles, egg noodles, herbs



Temperatures for when using the deep-frying technique

Deep-fry delicate foods that are wrapped or crumbed at 160 °C to 170 °C. Tender foods that can handle some heat should be fried at approximately 170 °C to 200 °C. When we have to double-cook foods because of their size or toughness, pre-cook them at around 140 °C, then turn up the heat to 180 °C to cook them crisp.

What equipment do we need?

Most people at home do not have a deep fryer, if this is the case, then maybe deep-frying is best left to the local resteraunter. If you do happen to have a home version that is safe and you have read the how-to manual, then proceed whilst following the manufacture's instructions. If in doubt, do not venture on, it's not worth the risk; deep-frying can be a dangerous cooking technique if you don't know what you're doing. Remember: water and moisture will make hot oil spit and splatter and can spray quite a distance.

Erik's tips, ideas and know-how

Make sure your oil is hot enough before you place food into it, if the oil is still cold then the food won't crisp and will soak in oil and ruin the produce. It's important not to place too much produce in the fryer in one go as this will bring down the temperature of the oil and, again this means the food will become soggy instead of crispy.

Use a spoon called a spider (wire strainer) to remove foods from your deep fryer. The hot oil will seep through the wire and you can then move your deep-fried items to a tray layered with paper towel, which will soak up any excess oil.

Erik's thoughts on the deep-frying technique

Most of us love the taste of crispy tempura vegetables or a piece of fresh fish, beer battered and cooked in fresh oil. The fat content of deep-fried food isn't something we can ignore and they, like some other foods, should be considered as a 'now and then' item only, or served on special occasions. Using this as a guide, we will enjoy the crispy and flavoursome combinations when ordering deep-fried foods when dining out.

As said before, it's important if we use the deep-frying technique at home that we make sure we have the proper equipment and know how to use it.



Parallel dishes



It is important that we all understand that once we have learnt a cooking technique, that the same technique can be applied to create many other wonderful dishes. The only difference being the ingredients we use to create the dish.

This means that the technique will often carry over to other cuisines from other parts of the world.

Here are a few examples of such parallels:

Braising

- Veal Osso Buco with tomatoes (Italy).
- Braised honey pork (China).
- Braised beef short ribs (Korea).
- Lamb biryani (India).
- Conejo con patatas / Rabbit braised with potatoes (Spain).

Stewing

- Dahl (India).
- Panang curry (Malaysia).
- Pato en pepitoria / Duck with pumpkin seeds (Latin America).
- Sausage and lentil stew (Italy).
- Gaeng Ped Moo / Red pork curry (Thailand).
- Chicken Cacciatore (Italy).

Boiling-Simmering

- Vitello tonnato / Veal with tuna sauce (Italy).
- Sin Sul Lo/Banquet Firepot (Korea).
- Aromatic sea crabs (France).
- Calamari Ripieni (Italy).

Poaching

- Vinegar poached chicken (Italy).
- Poached steelhead fish (China).
- Poached halibut with warm vinaigrette (France).

Steaming

- Ikan Panggang / Fish cooked in banana leaves (Indonesia).
- Cold steamed lamb with pungent sauce (China).
- Soy Zing Dan Gow / Steamed sponge cake (China).



Roasting

- Roast duck with Parma ham (Italy).
- Rolled veal and kidneys (France).
- Tatemado/Pork pot roast (Mexico).
- Florentine roast pork (Italy).
- Saddle of English lamb with wild mushroom stuffing (England).

Baking

- Red Mullet with fennel (Italy).
- Besugo al horno / Baked whole fish with lemon and potatoes (Spain).
- Brotola al horno / Oven baked bream with root vegetables (Uruguay).
- Spanakopita / Filo spinach pie (Greece).

Pan-frying

- Veal alla Milanese / Parmesan crumbed veal (Italy).
- Bacalao colorao / Salt cod with red peppers (Mexico).
- Pechugas de pollo Villeroy / Chicken breast in cream and crumb coating (France/Spain).

Stir-frying

- Pla Cian / Thai style fried fish (Thailand).
- Singapore noodles (Singapore).
- Char Kway Teow / Stir fried rice noodles (Malaysia).
- Nasi Goreng / Fried rice (Indonesia).

Grilling

- Pollo alla diavola / devils chicken (Italy).
- Chuletas de cordero con pimientos asados / Lamb cutlets with soft red peppers (Spain).
- Bhangra chatni / Grilled mackerel with green chutney (India).

Deep-frying

- Pestinos / Fritters in honey syrup (Spain).
- Empanadas de cuiticoche o champignons / Mushroom and sweet corn pasties (Mexico).
- Samosas (India).
- Tempura (Japan).



Advice for when you are cooking at home

Keep your kitchen tidy at all times. Trying to cook dinner in a crammed kitchen with lots of clutter and un-essential stuff lying around on limited bench space is not recommended.

Before attacking the task of cooking the evening dinner, or a feast for friends, think a little ahead and work out what components of the dish are going to take the longest time to prepare and cook. No need to start preparing the green salad that is to go with your pasta dish just because it is easy to get out of the way. You are wasting time. Get on with the time consuming items first. If pasta is on the menu then put some water on the boil first. The aim is that by the time the water has come to the boil and the added pasta is cooked, you will be close to having created the pasta sauce. If the sauce won't be ready in time then simply turn down the heat and don't add the pasta until the sauce is close to being ready. The heat under the water can be turned up again to cook the pasta – thus coordinating the finishing time of the two components of the dish.

Timing and keeping busy in the kitchen is important as these are part of the joy of cooking. It's like when you have long days at work that seem to go on forever; usually it's because you're bored, not learning, and not busy enough. Other days fly by; these days are usually the result of plenty to do, and satisfaction from either a job well done or achieving something special. These days make us feel that we've had a fantastic work day and have, maybe, even learnt some new skills along the way.

By getting on with the job ahead of us in the kitchen, focusing on the learning curve, health benefits, and the result of a delicious meal, we'll quickly start to enjoy cooking and understand the benefits from the efforts that we put into cooking.





Once your meal is under control and simmering nicely, then tidy up. Wash the dirty pots, pans and dishes, and get this out of the way. This is so that once you sit down to enjoy your meal, there is little else to do than wash your plates and cutlery and wipe down the kitchen benches and stove top. There is nothing worse than washing up dishes from a great dinner after we've finished eating it. It kind of takes the shine off a fantastic meal. Worst still if you leave the dishes to the next day. Then you're stuck with the task of washing up dishes before you can cook for that day's dinner. This is where we can start to get grumpy and a little lazy because we still have to cook. If you also have time to get packed lunches ready for the next day while cooking dinner, this would be ideal and make the morning rush a little less hectic.



Glossary

BARD: To wrap lean pieces of meat with thin slices of fat such as beef fat or bacon to protect the meat from drying out whilst roasting. This protective wrap also adds flavour to the meat.

BASTING: To occasionally cover and coat an ingredient during the cooking process with either water, oil, stock or another liquid, which regulates the temperature of the ingredient's exterior. Basting a piece of meat with hot juices and fat which gather in the bottom of the roasting tray will help keep the meat moist.

CARAMELISE: Many foods have a natural sugar content, and sometimes we bring this out to intensify the flavour of the food with the help of heat and added fat. As the food is cooking the natural sugar is drawn to the surface of the ingredient. The longer the ingredient and the outer layer of sugar cooks the more colour the food will gain. The temperature, amount of time, and the natural sugar content of the ingredient will determine how well it will caramelize.

DEGLAZE: We deglaze pots, pans and oven trays that have been used to cook, for example, meat. Deglazing releases the flavours and particles stuck/burnt onto these cooking utensils; otherwise the flavours would simply be lost as they are sent to the washing basin. Whilst the utensil is still hot add water or – if your recipe calls for it – red or white wine, vinegar, stock or similar. As the liquid simmers, the flavour that is attached to the utensil will loosen. Once the utensil is deglazed, this flavoured liquid is turned into a sauce to accompany the dish.

LEAVEN: A reaction of small bubbles of gas is created in dough or batter which forces the dough/batter to rise, and gain a lighter texture. Yeast, baking soda and baking powders are examples of leavenings that cause this chemical reaction to occur.

LIQUID: A liquid (even something as simple as water) ends up as a sauce, soup, stock, juice or similar that can accompany the dish. It's up to the cook to learn to flavour the liquid depending on the amount of time the liquid is cooked with ingredients, the amount of liquid added, and what flavours are added.

PULSES: Sometimes called 'legumes', pulses are dried peas, beans and lentils. They are all from the bean family and grow on plants. Here are a few varieties – chickpeas, split peas, soybeans, kidney beans, cannelloni beans, navy beans, green and brown lentils.

Resting (allow to rest): Is where we remove food from the heat and let the ingredient settle before serving it. For example, we allow meat to rest for two reasons. Firstly, 'after heat' continues to cook the meat even though it's away from the heat. And secondly, when meat rests, it re-absorbs the juices back to the centre. This helps to avoid losing too much moisture when the meat is carved.

ROUX (BUTTER-PASTE): Used to thicken sauces. Equal weight of plain flour and melted butter is blended into a paste. This butter-paste is then ready to add to boiling/simmering liquid as a thickening agent (see 'The theory behind sauce').





STARCH: When plating up and serving a meal, professional chefs refer to supplementary rice, potatoes, polenta, pasta and similar as the accompanying starch. This is because they are high in starch, and compliment dishes with sauce.

STEAM KETTLE: A purpose made, long oval steaming pot that is excellent for cooking, for example, large fish, on the stovetop. This kettle has an easy to remove rack, which helps to remove the food effortlessly. The rack keeps the fish or other item above the liquid, which is steaming the food. This liquid can be used to make an accompanying sauce.

Happy healthy eating

Erik Jorgensen



kitchendreamteam

