

# Presenting Food

Presented by  
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<http://mysecreetchef.info/learn>

## The Five Senses

Although taste is a primary key into our enjoyment of food, the other four senses contribute as well. All of them combined allow you to enjoy food. For instance:

- **Sight:** An attractive plate sends a message to the brain that indicates that the dish will be enjoyable.
- **Smell:** Many scents give way to memories perhaps of foods you've eaten before or the situation you were in while you were dining. Again, scent is yet another trigger sent to the brain that something good [or bad] is on the way.
- **Touch:** Texture in food as well as temperature are measured by this sense and encourage us to eat - or wait for the dish to cool down a bit.
- **Sound:** Sizzling fajitas, the crack of a lobster shell, the snap of a cracker. They all are instruments that play a symphony to the dining experience.
- **Taste:** As the flavors dance about our taste buds our brain translates our absolute enjoyment or bitter hatred of the food.

An example to see your senses in action!

You have just ordered the polenta appetizer at your favorite restaurant. As your server brings the plate to your table, you **smell** the aroma of the flavors in the polenta. Once the plate is set, you **see** a biscuit-shaped round of polenta on your plate. Immediately your brain begins to process the shape until it comes in contact with the sense of **touch**. Once your fork touches the polenta and meets some resistance it finds that the polenta has been fried. The slight crunch you **hear** when cutting the polenta with your fork leads to an immediate desire to confirm with your **taste** buds that your other four senses are correct.

And it is noteworthy to remember that within this complexity of senses that enables us to enjoy our food, they also combine to help us to avoid foods that could be dangerous. For instance, a bad-smelling fish (smell), mold on bread (sight), mushy mystery meat (touch), celery that doesn't snap when broken (sound), and a simple unpleasantly flavored food (taste).

# Basic Principles

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## Flavor

A cornerstone in presenting any food is flavor. Adding a tomato slice to a bundle of asparagus just to add color may not work from the flavor standpoint. First, you should take a moment to break down the flavors inside the food you are serving and use one of those flavors as a garnish – perhaps a sauce, herb sprig, fruit slice. Whatever the flavor of the garnish, make sure that it compliments the dish.

## Eye Appeal

This principle deals with the overall composition of the plate. Many other factors aid in achieving the attractiveness of the dish – such as choice in positioning, cuts, color, textures, etc. If the plate is not appealing, it may not be eaten.

## Color

The addition of color to a plate is NOT a necessity. However, the proper application of color can enhance the dish. Too much color can be distracting, but the right amount of color (i.e., two or three related colors) can make a nice balance.

## Texture

Having more than one adds to its appeal. Crispy onion straws over steak atop mashed potatoes.

## Size

Portion sizes that are in proportion to one another are important as you do not want one part of the dish to overwhelm another.

## Plate

The actual dish on which you serve can complement the food. Choosing colors of china or shapes of dishes can add or detract from the appearance of the food.

## Symmetry

When plating foods, odd numbers are often preferred to even as they proved asymmetry.

## Identify

Normally, a garnish will identify a flavor or component of the dish being served. A basil leaf atop pasta lets the diner know there is basil in the dish.

## Temperature

Proper temperatures are an absolute in serving food. Cold items such as salads, should be served on chilled plates, perhaps even with a chilled fork. Hot items such as a roasted chicken entrée should be served on a warmed plate and far above room temperature. Presenting food at its prescribed temperature not only enhances the enjoyment of the food, but the flavor as well.

## Time

Starting with temperature, time is important. Cold items will begin to grow warm and hot items will eventually cool. Time is a key factor in making sure that the delivery or holding of the food is appropriate. It also plays a large part in when dishes should be garnished. For the most part, garnishes should be *a la minute* or at the last moment.

## Shape

Contrast in shapes can be very complimentary as long as it is not “over kill”. For example, three perfectly round shapes on a plate may translate to you as a theme whereas the diner would see polka dots.

## Texture

A plate full of purees may be enticing to someone who has their jaw wired shut, however, to many others, it is not. Contrasting a pureed vegetable with a crispy fried starch makes for variety in textures and the way the meal is perceived.

## Focal Point

Determine what you would like the diner to see first – in essence, the crown jewel of your plate. Build around that focal point and accent it, but to not overpower it.

# Techniques

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## Placement

The position of the food on the plate is one of the main foundations in presentation. How you place the food can decide if the plate will look like a tv dinner or a night out!  
The standard

## Stacking

A popular variation of placement where the starch is placed on the center of the plate, the vegetable is then placed upon it, followed by the protein which is normally topped with a sauce.

## **Borders**

The border or rim around the plate is normally presented clean – without so much as a smudge. However, it can be decorated by spraying or brushing a small amount of oil around the edge and then crumbing with freshly chopped herbs or ground spices.

## **Simplicity**

Most finished plates are beautiful in their simplicity. By using color, and a modest garnish, a plate can often be just as attractive as one with an intricately crafted carving.

## **Cuts**

Processing foods with the knife is where many a presentation begins. Meats can be carved into different components and fruits and vegetables can be cut into many different shapes including:

- Angles
- Oblique
- Julienne
- Shapes
- Crinkle

## **Sauce**

Sweet or savory sauces are a vital component of any finished dish. They can range from very simple to complex and be applied in different manners:

- Bottles
- Spoon
- Ladle

## **Glazing**

When a portion of food is simply shining, it appeals to the diner and invites them to eat. Sweet glazes include fruit coulis, syrups and thinned jams. Savory glazes are often as simple as a featherweight coat of oil or a sugar based glaze that has accompanied a side dish.

## **Clean**

Cleanliness in the presentation is a given, but making sure to clean up and thumbprints, spills, drops across the plate ensure a nice presentation.

## **Edible**

Every thing on the plate should be edible, including the garnish. Also keep in mind the following question... "Would YOU eat it?"