

Healthy Cooking Styles

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Introduction

Have you ever tried sautéing with water or prepared a boiled salad? It is easy to get in a rut and prepare the same foods in the same way. The food you eat should be delicious and satisfying. Start with fresh, high quality ingredients and choose cooking styles that enhance the food's flavor and appearance. Let's take a closer look at how different cooking styles affect the flavor and texture of food.

Cooking is an art form. Not everyone considers themselves an artist, but when it comes to food everyone should know the basics. When putting together a menu for a nutritious and attractive meal, there is a lot to consider. The color, texture, and energy a food contributes to a dish are important to note. This fact sheet will emphasize the preparation of healthy and colorful vegetable and grain dishes that complete a meal. The United States Department of Agriculture recommends that our plates should include a large portion of vegetables and whole grains each day.

Plan variety into your menus to ensure you consume a broad range of nutrients, achieve a balance of nutrition and flavor, and enhance the enjoyment of your meal. The goal is food that is both nutritious and delicious.

Cooking Styles for Vegetables and Grains

This fact sheet describes five healthy cooking styles: steaming, sautéing, pressure-cooking, slow stewing, and boiling/blanching. These styles of cooking create a different energy in the food you are preparing. If you were to take a carrot and steam it until it just loses its crunch, it would taste different and provide different energy than a carrot that had been cooked a long time (Nishime style) using the slow stewing method.



Cooking styles can enhance the nutritional value of food. The following five healthy cooking styles create different textures and flavors and help retain nutrients.

When planning a menu, include several of these cooking styles to provide the best balance and nutrition in your meal.

Consider each of these cooking styles.

Steaming

Many cookware sets include a steamer basket. The proper way to steam a vegetable is to cut it into small pieces and put them into the steamer basket. Use a small amount of water in the pan below. Bring water to a boil and the steam will begin. Usually 3 to 5 minutes is ample time to soften most vegetables, making this a quick and easy way to prepare nutritious vegetables often. And, **don't** throw away the water used in steaming. Save and add it to soup stock.

Sautéing

The word sauté means to “jump” or “skip.” This popular cooking method can be done using oil, or if you want to eliminate fat in the dish, water may be used. For best results, avoid crowding too much food into the pan. The food should be cut into small, uniform pieces to ensure even cooking. It can be stirred constantly or allowed to brown on one side and then turned. Sautéing in oil requires higher heat. Pay close attention when using oil because it is important not to overcook when sautéing.

Pressure cooking

Pressure cooking is popular again now that pressure cookers have been redesigned for both ease of use and safety. Stove-top as well as electric pressure cookers are available and easy to use. Foods such as dried beans, soups, and stews are good candidates for the pressure cooker — they will cook quickly and retain their flavor. In general, when adapting recipes for use with a pressure cooker, you should use less liquid since there is no evaporation.

Pressure cooking drives heat into the center of the food you are cooking. Grains are often cooked successfully using this method. Grain that has been pressure-cooked often tastes sweeter and may be the most strengthening food you can consume.

Slow stewing (Nishime)

Cooking food longer results in a different taste and texture. Nishime is a Japanese style of “waterless cooking” that brings out the natural sweet taste in many root vegetables. The steam generated in this method of cooking allows the veggies to cook in their own juices, requiring only a little added water. A light seasoning toward the end of cooking brings out their full-bodied flavor and natural sweetness. Vegetables cooked in this manner are very soft and juicy.

Nishime-style stew is generally made up of sweet root vegetables cut into large irregular pieces and cooked in a tiny bit of water. A small piece (1 inch square) of kombu (a sea vegetable) placed in the bottom of the pot brings out the sweetness of the veggies, naturally tenderizes them by virtue of its glutamic acid, and lightly mineralizes the dish. Kombu is available in some larger grocery stores or in natural foods markets.

See the recipe section for ideas on different vegetable combinations that make Nishime-style cooking so tasty.

Boiling or blanching

Blanching, also known as parboiling, is cooking food briefly in hot water. This technique is typically used to partially cook a food that will be fully cooked using another method. It is often used to prepare fresh vegetables for freezing, because blanching deactivates enzymes that would cause continued ripening and helps the vegetables retain their shape and color.

Bright colors of vegetables are maintained when blanched or boiled. The natural sweetness and flavor in foods is brought out in this form of cooking. As in steaming, you can add the cooking water to soup stock.

Meal Planning to Add More Plants on the Plate

Plan every meal to include cooked whole grains and vegetable dishes. Be flexible and mindful of what foods are available locally and in season. Cooking styles vary with the season to accommodate the changing weather. The K-State Research and Extension Fact Sheet *Simple Seasonal Meals* (MF3217) explains the benefits of eating in season: food that tastes good, is good for you, and is often more reasonably priced than out-of-season produce.

A key to creating beautiful, properly cooked dishes is to pay attention to the cutting styles for various vegetables. Irregular chunks cook more slowly than thin matchsticks. A sharp knife is an important kitchen tool as you experiment with cutting various shapes.

Use the variety of cooking styles and a wide array of vegetables to ensure you get all the spectrum of vitamins, minerals, fiber, and carbohydrates that your food can provide. The way foods are cooked dramatically alters their taste, nutritional value, and the way you feel after you eat. Always remember, cooking delicious and satisfying food is the most important goal.

Recipes

With this information in mind, how will you respond to the question, “What new cooking style am I going to try?” Let’s take a closer look at the five styles highlighted earlier and share directions and recipes for each one.



Steaming

Remember steaming vegetables is a quick and easy method to complete a healthy meal. Choose vegetables that are available locally and in season, when possible. Suggestions include Chinese cabbage, bok choy, chard, kale, or cabbage cut into thin strips. One large carrot, cut into thin strips, and 4 radishes, halved, may be added to the steamer basket and steamed over boiling water for about 2 minutes. Place on a serving dish, sprinkle with soy sauce, and eat immediately.

Sautéing: Sautéed Kale and Onion

- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 large onion, cut in fine crescents
- 10 kale leaves, stems removed
- 3 tablespoons water
- ½ to 1 teaspoon shoyu or low-sodium soy sauce

Brush skillet with oil. Saute onion until pieces are translucent. Thoroughly wash kale leaves and then cut the leaves, first in half lengthwise, then lay several leaves on top of each other and cut finely on the diagonal. Add to onions with water. Saute over medium heat 4 to 5 minutes.

Add shoyu or soy sauce and sauté 1 to 2 more minutes. Turn off heat and cover skillet until ready to serve.

Pressure Cooking: Pressure-cooked Brown Rice

Soak 2 cups of non-instant brown rice for 8 hours or overnight at room temperature. Pour off the soaking water and place rice in the pressure cooker. Add three cups of water and bring to a boil over medium heat. Add 2 pinches of sea salt and place lid on pressure cooker, making sure the lid seals. Once the pressure valve pops up, you may reduce the heat to low and set the timer for 45 minutes. Remove from heat and allow pressure to reduce naturally. Stir rice well and transfer to a serving bowl.

Slow Stewing/Nishime-Style Cooking: Nishime-style Vegetables

To begin a Nishime-style dish, place a 1-inch piece of kombu (a seaweed) in the bottom of a heavy pan. If you choose not to use kombu, you may substitute a generous pinch of sea salt. Add the following vegetables, layered or placed in individual sections: 1 onion cut into thick wedges, 1 cup cubed winter squash, and 1 carrot, cut into large chunks. Add a small amount of water and a tight-fitting lid to hold in the moisture produced by the slowly steaming vegetables. Bring to a boil over medium heat; reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until vegetables are just tender, about 25 minutes. Season vegetables lightly with soy sauce and simmer 10 minutes more, until all liquid has been absorbed into the vegetables. If water evaporates too quickly during cooking, add a little more and reduce the heat; it is cooking too quickly. Transfer to a bowl and serve.

Variations on other tasty Nishime combinations include:

- Onion, Brussels sprouts, and carrot
- Leek, parsnip, and turnip
- Onion, squash, and green cabbage wedges

Boiling or Blanching: Boiled Salad

Boiled salads are light, tasty salads of assorted blanched greens and other vegetables. They are mineral-rich and very lightly cooked to retain taste, texture, color, and nutrients. The cooking water may be saved to be used for soup stock. It works best to cut vegetables in small pieces so they cook quickly and result in a light salad. Consider using different shapes, such as rounds, cubes, matchsticks, ribbons, or small wedges.

Cook each vegetable separately to retain flavor and color. Strong flavored or brightly colored vegetables should be cooked last so they do not overwhelm the other vegetables.

Bring a pot of water to a boil over high heat. Add the first vegetable to a wire strainer and immerse in the boiling water. After 2 to 3 minutes,

remove the first vegetable and place it under cold water. Cook each vegetable in the same manner and place all boiled vegetables onto a serving platter or bowl, arranging to enhance the color contrasts. You may serve your boiled salad with your favorite dressing.

Suggested combinations for healthy and attractive boiled salads include:

- Carrot ribbons, cauliflower florets, and beet cubes.
- Green cabbage, fresh Brussels sprouts cut in thin, round slices, and carrot matchsticks.
- Broccoli, cabbage, daikon or radish rounds, diced carrots.
- Kale, leeks, cauliflower.

Use vegetable combinations that are in season and colorful when planning your boiled salads.

Conclusion

We hope you feel excited about trying one or more of these cooking styles. Our wish for you is that you could create a kitchen that is truly a source of health and joy. Use your creativity to prepare food to better fill our needs for taste and variety. Enjoy!

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