Homemade Method™

Week 6: How to Plate your Food - Entice all of the Senses

Overview

Before food ever touches our mouths, we all EAT WITH OUR EYES first! If you are attempting to adopt a healthier eating lifestyle by cooking more, it is critical to make your meals LOOK delicious and appetizing so you will crave and enjoy them (and not feel deprived). Luckily, when you are cooking with fresh, seasonal ingredients, this is so easy to do - all it requires is a couple of moments of extra care & a little know how.

'Plating' is the term used in the culinary industry to describe the presentation of food on a plate. This week you will learn the secrets used by chefs in plating food to make it look as good as it tastes. You will be able to impress your guests, your family and yourself with beautiful, colorful dishes, bursting with beneficial nutrients & good health. Salut!

10 Tips for Plating Food

1. **Individual vs. Family Style**: Decide your plan of attack: Are you going to be plating individual plates (1 plate per person) or family style (everyone serves themselves at the table). If you are serving individual plates, then each plate should be plated more or less identically. If you are serving family style, then you can still apply these general tips to making the central dish look amazing.

2. **Choose your plate:** The size, depth, shape & color of the plate will all impact on the appeal of the dish. White is the most popular because it helps the colors to stand out and the focus is on the food. However, black can look dramatic against white or light foods, such as seafood & rice. Colors can be fun for kids, and best for sweets like desserts or fruit. Try to pick a plate which is the right size for the serving size - not too big, not too small.

3. **Arrange the food like a clock:** Typically, chefs arrange a protein at 2 o'clock, the vegetables between 3-9 o'clock and the starch at 10 o'clock. You can deviate, but it provides a general formula for balancing the presentation.

4. **Focus on colors & textures:** A dish will look appetizing if there are multiple contrasting colors and textures. So if your food is a monotone white, consider if you can add a vibrant green side, or some sliced tomatoes to lift it up. Similarly, if it is a single texture such as a polenta or stew, consider adding some croutons, a dollop of cream or a garnish to provide texture.

5. **Layer vertically:** Food that layers up vertically off the plate looks good because it draws your eyes to a central focal point. So try experimenting with placing your starch on the bottom, then cover with vegetables and finally balance your protein on top of the pile. Or try a dessert tower with fruit on the bottom, yoghurt next and then crushed nuts on top.

6. **Go for odd numbers:** It is standard practice by chefs go for odd numbers when you are including individual items on the plate, as they look better. For example, if you are serving shrimp, meatballs, etc, then plate 1, 3 or 5 - not evens.

7. **Use relevant garnish:** Garnish is such an awesome, simple touch that can lift and highlight any dish. However, if you are using garnish, then use something relevant that was included in the dish. So if you are serving a chicken pesto made with basil, then top it with a basil leaf - not a sprig of parsley.

8. **Think of your plate as a canvas:** The food is your paint, and the plate is your canvas. Consider the borders and framing provide by the plate. Step back and assess your handiwork and see if any additions or changes should be made.

9. **Keep it simple**: Don't overdo it. Plating food is really about celebrating the food, not creating something overly complex. If you are using fresh seasonal ingredients, they will do the work for you - Let the ingredients shine.

10. **Have fun!** Cooking and plating your food is an opportunity to relax and do something creative, artistic & mindful. It is relaxing and very satisfying because it is so easy to create something beautiful. It needn't take more than a couple of moments - a small afterthought to add a quick garnish, a drizzle of olive oil and a dollop of cream. It has such a dramatic impact on the appeal of your cooking. So experiment with it and have fun. Over time, it will become second nature!

Ideas & Inspiration

Here are some beautiful plating ideas that work to get you started.

1. **Smoothies:** Sprinkle the top with shredded coconut, a berry contained in the smoothie, cacao powder or chia seeds. Try serving in a mason jar with a spoon sticking out. Or a frosted cocktail glass.

2. **Eggs:** Place your toast on the side, place the egg on top so it half covers the toast. Sprinkle with paprika for red color or some parsley. Add sides of braised greens (spinach or kale) and sliced avocado or tomatoes. Eat a rainbow for breakfast!

3. **Sandwiches:** Layer nicely, cut in half, secure halves with a toothpick. Add a side salad, and some sliced orange.

4. **Fruit salad:** Add a dollop of yoghurt. Top with chopped toasted nuts. Then place a single berry on the top :)

5. **Salads:** Salads really do all of the work for you because they are so vibrant, colorful and alive! Consider serving in a big white bowl or even a wooden bowl. Instead of tossing the salad, try experimenting with laying the greens on the bottom and then placing other chopped ingredients in little piles on top. Add proteins (egg, sliced meats, nuts, cheese etc) last and spread across the top of the salad. This gives the mind the impression that it is eating a lot of food when actually it is mainly veggies. It also looks amazing! Adding fruits to salads is also great for the vibrant colors, textures & sweet flavor.

6. **Protein dinners:** Place the protein, veggies and starches around the plate in 3 interlocking piles, with the protein highlighted on top. Pour a sauce over the top of the meat, or garnish with a sprig of a herb used in cooking the protein.

7. **Soups & Stews:** Add a dollop of sour cream or yoghurt, some croutons, a drizzle of oil and a sprig of a fresh herb.