



Cooking Vegetables Primer

“Applying the correct cooking method to vegetables is more difficult than protein products like chicken or beef because of the wide variety of vegetables that require different care. A chicken breast is a chicken breast, but a vegetable can be a tough carrot or a tender mushroom. The one thing essential to great taste in vegetarian cooking is correct cooking method. “

-Chef Todd Mohr

Cooking Vegetables

Cooking affects vegetables in four ways:

Texture, Flavor, Color and Nutrients

Don't mix different types of raw vegetables when cooking

Boiling and Steaming Vegetables

Unless served immediately, vegetables are shocked in ice water bath

Prevents vegetables from being overcooked

Finished by applying another cooking method

Steaming is the ideal cooking method for fragile vegetables

Higher temperature, less agitation, less nutrient loss

Procedure for poaching or steaming vegetables

Trim, peel, cut vegetables to uniform sizes

Bring salted water or stock to boil

Add vegetables to water or steamer basket

Bring water or stock to low simmer

Drain quickly to avoid overcooking

Finish recipe and serve, or shock to cool

Sauteeing and Pan Frying

Sauteeing – cooking in small amount of fat

Pan frying – more fat, longer time, lower heat

Both methods can be used for finishing blanched vegetables

Braising

Braising is slow, moist heat method using a small amount of liquid

Braised meats are cooked in fat

Vegetables are not braised in fat, but in flavorful liquid

Baking

Baking vegetables means one of two things:

1) Starchy vegetables are baked from raw state because of the effect dry heat has on its' texture.

Any vegetable w/ enough moisture can be baked effectively, but drying effect of oven would ruin small, delicate vegetables

2) Vegetable casseroles are baked because:

Slow, all around heat allows product to cook undisturbed.

Agitation and stirring of range top cooking is not always desirable.

Baked beans will break up when stirred.

Dry heat produces effects like browning, caramelization of sugars.

Sweet potatoes are colorless in steamer but brown in the oven.

General rules of vegetable cookery

1) Don't overcook

Cook as close to service as possible in small quantities.

If cooked ahead, par cook, chill, reheat

2) Cut vegetables uniformly for even cooking

3) Start with boiling, salted water when poaching vegetables

4) To preserve color, cook red and white vegetables in a slightly acid liquid.

Cook green vegetables in a neutral to alkali liquid

Standards of Quality in Cooked Vegetables

Color

Bright, natural colors

Green vegetables should be fresh, bright, not olive, green

Appearance on plate

Cut neatly and uniformly, not broken-up

Attractively arranged or mounded on plate or dish

Not swimming in cooking water

Imaginative and appropriate combinations and garnishes

Texture

Cooked to the right degree of doneness

Should be crisp-tender, not mushy, not tough and woody.

Flavor

Full, natural flavor and sweetness

Strong flavored vegetables should be pleasantly mild

Seasonings

Lightly and appropriately seasoned

Should not mask the appropriate natural flavors

Sauces

Butter and seasoned butters should be fresh and used sparingly.

Vegetables should not be oily or greasy

Cream sauces should not be too thick

Sauces should enhance, not cover up natural flavor.

Vegetable combinations

Flavors, colors, shapes should be pleasant combination

Cook vegetables separately, then combine

Acid vegetables (tomatoes) added to green vegetables will discolor them. Add them just before service.