

Common Cooking Terms & Techniques

Al dente

This usually refers to pasta and it is when you cook it until just firm. This can include vegetables as well.

Bake/Roast

Surrounding your food with a consistent temperature on all sides. The entire oven reaches a certain temperature. Typically, you cook the food in an oven using dry heat.

Baste

Moisten food while cooking it by spooning, squirting, or brushing a liquid, such as stock, onto the food to add flavor and prevent it from drying out.

Beat

In a circular motion, rapidly whisk, spoon, or use a mixer to create a smooth mixture.

Blanching

A technique used to cook veggies just enough without leaving them mushy or discolored.

Steps to Blanching:

1. Prepare an ice bath- put water and ice into a large bowl.
2. Heat a large pot of water to a rolling boil. Use about 1 gallon of water per pound of food to be blanched.
3. Add salt to the water. Make sure it is very salty.
4. Immerse the food in the boiling water until cooked.
5. Drain and transfer food to the ice bath to quickly cool.
6. Once cool, remove food from ice bath and pat dry.

Boil

In reference to liquid- to reach or cause to reach the temperature at which it bubbles and turns to vapor.

In reference to food- to cook or be cooked by immersing in boiling water or stock.

Braise

First, cook the food in butter or oil until brown, then gently simmering in a small amount of liquid over low heat for a long period of time in a covered pan until tender.

Broil

Expose your food to direct heat on a rack or spit. Typically, you place the food on the top rack of your oven to get direct heat, cooking the food quickly. This is often used for melting food like cheese. A typical broiler reaches around 550F.

Brown

Usually done on the stove-top over high heat to brown food.

Caramelize

Heat up sugar until it liquefies and becomes a syrup. You can also caramelize other foods, such as onions or fruit, and is meant to get a brown color and sweet flavor out of the food.

Chop

To cut food into large pieces, generally ½ to ¾ inch.

Cream

Beat ingredients together (usually sugar and a fat) until smooth and fluffy.

Dash

1/8 teaspoon.

Diced

Cut into small squares typically 1/4 to 1/8 inch. When you dice, you want to make your pieces a consistent size so that they cook evenly.

Dredge

Lightly coat uncooked food with a dry mixture, like flour, cornmeal, or breadcrumbs. After it is dredged, the food is typically pan fried or sautéed.

Dress

Coat foods with a sauce, much like you would a salad or wings.

Drizzle

To pour liquid back and forth over a dish in a fine stream, usually melted butter, oil, syrup, or melted chocolate.

Dust

Coat food lightly with a powdery ingredient, such as confectioners' sugar or cocoa. Think of dusting French toast with powdered sugar.

Fillet

Cut the meat away from the bone. This refers to a piece of meat, poultry, or fish.

Flambé

To drizzle a flammable liquor over a food while its cooking. It is then ignited just before serving.

Fold

When you combine light ingredients, such as whipped cream or beaten eggs whites, with a heavier mixture, using an over-and-under motion.

Grease

Coat the interior of a pan or dish with shortening, oil, or butter to prevent food from sticking during cooking.

Julienne

Cut food, such as vegetables, into long, thin matchstick-like strips about 1/16 to 1/8 inch.

Knead

The process of mixing dough into a uniform mass using the hands or a mixer.

Marinate

Soak food in a sauce or flavored liquid for a long period of time. This is usually done to a meat, poultry or fish.

Minced

Cut food into as small of pieces as possible. You will see this done often with garlic.

Pan Fry

Cook larger chunks of food over medium heat, flipping once only. Flipping it only once helps keep the food moist and tender.

Pinch

1/6 Teaspoon. You can also use your fingers to grab a pinch of the ingredient.

Poaching

This involves gently cooking something in simmering liquid between 140F to 180F. This typically refers to delicate items such as eggs or fish.

How to Poach:

1. Bring the poaching liquid (water, stock, or whatever the recipe calls for) to a boil on the stove.
2. Add whatever you are poaching to the pot. The liquid should cover it by about an inch.
3. Reduce heat to just below a simmer. The liquid shouldn't be bubbling but the surface will appear to ripple.
4. Cook thoroughly.

Purée

To mash or grind food until it is completely smooth. A good example of this would be baby food.

Sauté

This is a French term meaning “to jump”. Sautéing involves cooking uniformly cut ingredients at a high heat with oil, often without letting them sit in the pan for too long.

Steps to Sauté:

1. Cut ingredients uniformly to ensure they cook evenly.
2. Add 2 -3 teaspoons of oil to the sauté pan.
3. Preheat the pan on medium-high heat.
4. Add ingredients.
5. Reduce heat to medium.
6. Cook thoroughly, keeping ingredients in constant motion in the pan.

Sear

To brown the surface of meat by quick-cooking over high heat. This will help to seal in the meat’s juices.

Shred

Done on a grater with larger holes, resulting in long, smooth stripes to cook or melt.

Simmer

Bring a pot to a boil, then reduce the heat until there are no bubbles.

Sliced

A vertical cut down the length of the food. Unless the recipe specifies, you can cut it as thick or thin as you like.

Smidgen

1/32 teaspoon.

Steam

To cook food on a rack or in a steamer set over boiling or simmering water.

Steep

To soak a dry ingredient in a liquid just under the boiling point to extract the flavor, much like you would do with tea.

Stew

Cook food covered over low heat in a liquid for a long period of time.

Whip

To beat food with a whisk or mixer to incorporate air and increase volume.

Whisk

To beat ingredients with a fork or a whisk.

Zest

Shaving the outer, colored peel of a citrus fruit. Typically done with a zester as shown below.