

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Cooking methods for every vegetable

9 Chapters | Philip Osztromok | Generated with Claude

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Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Chapter 1 · Know Your Vegetables

> **SKILL GOAL**
>
> Choose, store, wash and prepare vegetables, and know when frozen and tinned are the better buy.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Vegetables are the cheapest way to make a meal healthier and more interesting, and most are cooked badly because nobody explained the first step. This chapter is about **choosing, storing, washing and preparing**, and what frozen and tinned vegetables are good for. The rest of the course is about cooking methods.

How many portions?

The NHS 5 A Day advice is **at least five 80 g portions** of fruit and vegetables a day. A portion is the same weight for fresh, frozen or tinned (tinned in water, with no added salt or sugar, is the best choice). Potatoes don't count towards your five (they count as starchy food), and beans and pulses count only once however many you eat. A larger helping of salad or leafy greens is easy to eat; roughly a dessert bowl of salad leaves or about three heaped tablespoons of cooked vegetables is a portion.

Buying

- **Firm and heavy for their size** is the rule for most: carrots, courgettes, peppers, onions, squash.
- **Bright colour, no slime or mould:** leaves should be crisp, not limp, and cut ends should look fresh.
- **Buy in season** when you can; it is usually cheaper and tastes better.
- **Ugly vegetables are fine.** Odd shapes taste the same. Use the freezer for any you cannot finish.

Storing



Figure 1. Where vegetables like to live. Potatoes in the fridge turn sweet and brown more when fried or roasted; onions and potatoes kept together spoil faster.

- **Don't wash before storing** (except salad leaves you will use at once): damp vegetables rot. Wash just before cooking.
- **Leaves** keep best wrapped loosely in a clean cloth or paper towel in a bag, in the salad drawer.
- **Potatoes** go in a cool, dark, dry place, not the fridge. The Food Standards Agency advises this because fridge-stored potatoes make more acrylamide when fried or roasted.
- **Check regularly** and remove any that are turning, as rot spreads.

Washing and preparing

Wash vegetables **under cold running water**, scrubbing roots with a brush. For grit in leaves (spinach, leeks), swish them in a bowl of cold water and lift them out, leaving the grit behind. There is no need for special washes. Then trim, peel if needed, and cut into even pieces.

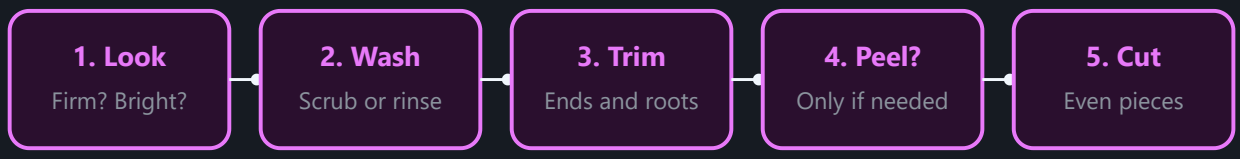


Figure 2. The order of preparing any vegetable. Skipping the first step is how a tired lettuce ends up in the salad bowl.

Peel or not? The skin of carrots, courgettes, cucumbers, potatoes, parsnips, aubergines and many other vegetables is edible and holds fibre and nutrients, so a good scrub often replaces peeling. Peel when the skin is tough or waxy (butternut squash, swede, celeriac, older parsnips), bitter, or damaged.

Frozen and tinned

KIND	GOOD FOR	WATCH FOR
Frozen (peas, sweetcorn, spinach, broccoli, green beans)	Cooking from frozen; soups, stews, stir-fries; cheap, and often frozen soon after picking	Don't thaw and refreeze; cook to steaming hot; check the pack for how to cook
Tinned (tomatoes, sweetcorn, chickpeas, beans)	Sauces, soups, stews; a store-cupboard standby	Pick those in water or juice with no added salt or sugar; drain and rinse beans
Fresh	Everything, in season, when you want crunch, colour or flavour	Spoils faster; buy what you will use

Frozen peas, spinach and sweetcorn are often better than the tired fresh ones in the shop, and tinned tomatoes are better than pale winter tomatoes for sauces.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Raw vegetable platter with two dips

20 minutes | 2 portions | washing, trimming and cutting raw

Raw vegetables show you what each one tastes like before any cooking. The platter alone is well over two portions of your five a day (an 80 g portion is roughly a dessert bowl of salad, or about three heaped tablespoons of chopped vegetables).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	carrot
½	cucumber
1	pepper (any colour)
4	radishes
100 g	sugar snap peas or broccoli florets
100 g	hummus
100 g	plain yoghurt
1 tbsp	chopped mint or chives
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Wash the vegetables under cold running water, scrubbing the carrot and radishes with a brush if they have soil on them.
2. Cut the carrot into sticks, the cucumber into thick coins or sticks, and the pepper into strips. Halve the radishes. Leave the sugar snap peas whole or break the broccoli into small florets.
3. Stir the herbs, salt and pepper into the yoghurt for the second dip. Serve it with the hummus.
4. Taste each vegetable on its own first, then with a dip. Write down what you notice.

LEVEL 1 · PRACTICE

Quick-pickled cucumber

10 minutes plus 1 hour | 4 portions | how salt and acid change a vegetable

A quick pickle needs no canning. Thin slices sit in a warm brine and are ready in an hour, crisp and sharp.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	cucumber
100 ml	white wine or cider vinegar
50 ml	water
1 tbsp	sugar
½ tsp	salt
1 tsp	dill, mustard seeds or peppercorns (optional)

1. Wash the cucumber and slice it into thin coins, about 3 mm.
2. Warm the vinegar, water, sugar and salt in a small pan, stirring, until the sugar and salt dissolve. Don't boil it for long.
3. Put the cucumber and any flavourings into a clean jar or bowl, and pour over the warm brine. Let it cool, then chill for at least 1 hour.
4. Keep it in the fridge and eat within about **1 week**. It is a quick pickle, not a preserved one.

LEVEL 2 · TECHNIQUE

Shaved vegetable salad

15 minutes | 2 portions | peeling into ribbons

A vegetable peeler turns firm vegetables into ribbons that soften in the dressing. It is a cut and a cooking-free method in one.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	medium courgette
1	medium carrot
½	fennel bulb (optional)
1 handful	rocket or salad leaves
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tbsp	lemon juice
1 tbsp	grated hard cheese (optional)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Wash the courgette and carrot. Trim the ends. Trim and halve the fennel if you are using it.
2. With a peeler, shave the courgette and carrot into long ribbons, turning them as you go. Slice the fennel as thin as you can.
3. Toss the ribbons with the leaves, oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Top with cheese. Eat within about 10 minutes, while crisp.

> **PEEL, NOT MANDOLIN**
>
> A peeler is a safer way to shave vegetables than a mandolin, and good practice for steady, even pressure.

LEVEL 3 · COMPARISON

Raw or roasted? A comparison plate

40 minutes | 2 portions | what heat does to a vegetable

Taking the same three vegetables raw and roasted on one plate teaches more than any description. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	carrots
150 g	broccoli florets
1	red pepper
1 tbsp	oil
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Wash and cut the vegetables into even pieces, carrots into batons, broccoli into florets and the pepper into strips. Keep half of each raw.
2. Toss the other half in the oil, salt and pepper, and spread them in a single layer on a tray. Roast for **20 to 25 minutes**, turning once, until tender with golden edges.
3. Serve raw and roasted together. Taste a raw and a roasted piece of each, one vegetable at a time.
4. Note the differences in sweetness, bitterness and texture.

> COLOUR
>
> **Go for gold.** Carrots, parsnips and other starchy vegetables form a chemical called acrylamide when roasted or fried at high temperatures. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to cook them to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Fridge or worktop: tomatoes

Does cold change the flavour?

1. Buy 4 ripe tomatoes of the same kind. Keep 2 in the fridge and 2 on the worktop for 2 days.
2. Bring the fridge ones to room temperature, then taste a slice of each, with a pinch of salt.

Look for: Cold dulls the flavour and softens the texture; many people find the worktop tomatoes sweeter and fuller. Note if you agree.

EXPERIMENT

Peeled or unpeeled carrot

Is the skin worth keeping?

1. Scrub 2 carrots. Peel one and leave the other unpeeled.
2. Roast or taste them side by side, raw and cooked.

Look for: A scrubbed carrot has a little more earthy flavour and a bit more chew. Peeled is smoother and sweeter. Decide which you prefer.

EXPERIMENT

Washing leaves

What does swishing remove?

1. Put a handful of unwashed spinach or leeks in a bowl of cold water and swish.
2. Look at the water, then lift out the leaves and look at the bottom of the bowl.

Look for: Soil and grit sink to the bottom. This is what you are eating if you don't wash leaves.

EXPERIMENT

Fresh or frozen peas

Which is better?

1. Cook a handful of fresh peas and a handful of frozen peas for the same time in simmering water (about 3 minutes).
2. Compare colour, sweetness and texture.

Look for: Frozen peas are often sweeter and brighter than fresh peas that have sat in the shop for days. Fresh, in season and just picked, may win.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Raw vegetable platter				
Quick-pickled cucumber				
Shaved vegetable salad				
Raw vs roasted				
Fridge vs worktop tomatoes				
Peeled vs unpeeled carrot				
Washing leaves				
Fresh vs frozen peas				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Limp vegetables	Old, or stored without moisture	Revive carrots and celery in cold water; cook the rest in soup

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Gritty leaves	Not washed enough	Swish in a bowl of cold water and lift out; repeat
Mouldy or slimy vegetables	Stored damp	Bin them; keep dry and check regularly
Bitter taste	Old, or the skin	Peel; try a pinch of salt or a little sweetness
Vegetables rotting fast	Stored with ethylene-producing fruit or too warm	Keep apart from apples and bananas; use the fridge or a cool cupboard

FOOD SAFETY

Knife safety: cut on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), and cut round or slippery vegetables on a flat face so they can't roll. A sharp knife is safer than a blunt one. Never catch a falling knife. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1 covers all of this.

Hygiene: wash vegetables that you will eat raw, and wash your hands, boards and knives after handling raw meat, fish or eggs. Packs of salad leaves labelled ready to eat do not need washing again unless the pack says to; follow the pack. For any other leaves and vegetables, wash them under cold running water. Washing removes soil and some germs but is not a guarantee, which is why vegetables that are risky raw (see the sprouts note) are cooked.

Sprouts: bean sprouts, alfalfa and other raw sprouted seeds grow in warm, damp conditions where germs thrive, and washing doesn't reliably remove them. Food-safety advice in several countries is that pregnant women, young children, older people and anyone with a weakened immune system should eat sprouts only when they have been cooked until steaming hot all the way through. This is general advice and I haven't checked the current UK Food Standards Agency wording, so look at their website if it applies to you.

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I know that five 80 g portions a day is the aim, and what counts.
- ☐ I know where each kind of vegetable is best stored.
- ☐ I wash vegetables properly and know when not to wash.
- ☐ I can decide when to peel and when to scrub.
- ☐ I know when frozen and tinned are the better choice.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 2 is Steaming and Boiling: cooking green and root vegetables in water.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Chapter 2 · Steaming and Boiling

SKILL GOAL

Cook green and root vegetables in water or steam so they keep their colour, bite and flavour.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Boiling and steaming are the simplest ways to cook a vegetable, and the easiest to get wrong. Done well, they give bright colour, a little bite, and a clean flavour that you can then season. Done badly, they give grey, soggy vegetables. The skill is mostly **timing** and **stopping at the right moment**.

Boiling or steaming?

	BOILING	STEAMING
How it cooks	The vegetable sits in the hot water	The vegetable sits above the water, in the steam
Flavour and nutrients	Some vitamins (C and the B group) and flavour dissolve into the water	Less loss, because the vegetable isn't in the water
Speed	Fast: water is a very good heat carrier	A little slower
Best for	Leaves and greens in a big pan of salted water; root vegetables you will mash or glaze	Broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, asparagus, fish and anything delicate
Equipment	A big pan	A steamer basket or colander over a pan, with a lid

If you do boil, use the cooking water: it is a stock in waiting for soups and gravy.

The rules that make the biggest difference

- **Greens go into boiling water.** A big pan of salted, rolling-boiling water cooks them fast, so they stay bright. Putting them into cold water and heating slowly makes them olive-grey.
- **Roots start cold.** Put carrots, parsnips and other dense roots in cold, salted water and bring to the boil, so the outside doesn't overcook before the middle is soft.
- **Salt the water** (about 1 teaspoon per litre). Salted water seasons the vegetable as it cooks. It is not about cooking faster.
- **Cut to the same size** so everything is done together. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1 shows how.
- **Cook uncovered** for green vegetables: the acids that escape in the steam would otherwise stay in the pan and dull the colour. Cover for steaming.
- **Drain well,** and serve straight away, or refresh in cold water if you are cooking ahead.
- **Test, don't just time.** Taste a piece a minute before the end.

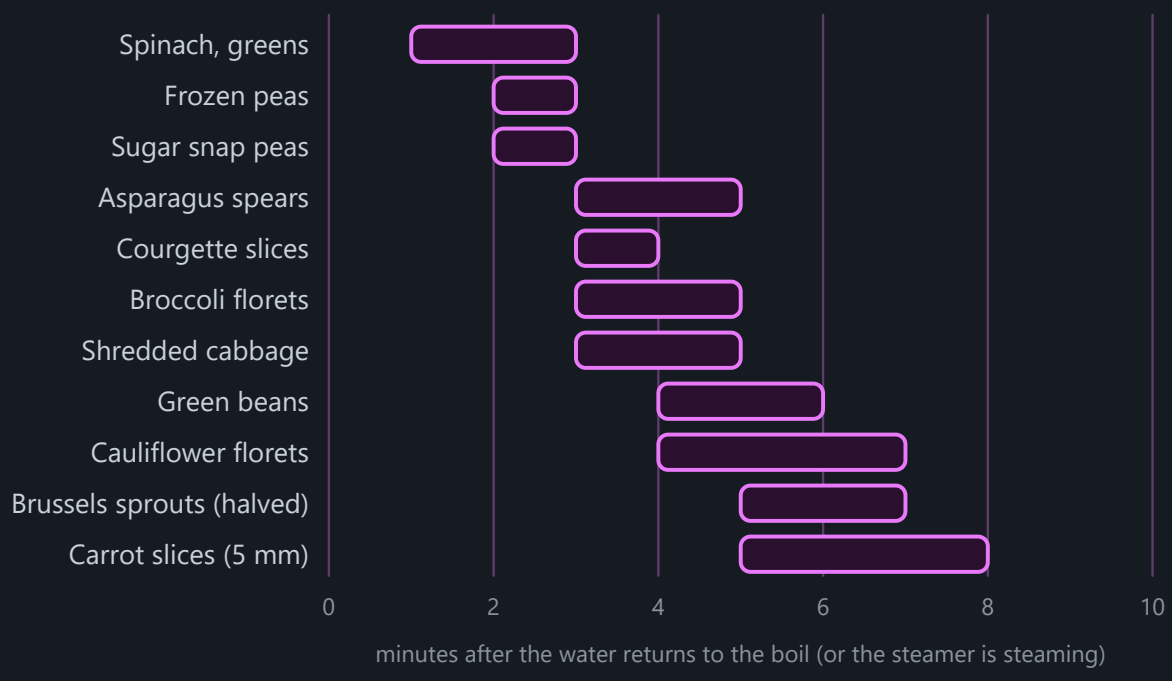


Figure 3. Typical times once the water is boiling or the steamer is steaming. They are a starting point: pieces differ in size and age, so taste one a minute before the end.

Telling when it's done

Vegetables are done when a fork or sharp knife goes in with a little resistance (**tender-crisp**) or easily (**soft**), depending on the dish. Most green vegetables are best tender-crisp. Root

vegetables for mashing or glazing should be soft.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Steamed broccoli with lemon

15 minutes | 1 portion | steaming, and watching the colour

Steaming cooks the vegetable in the steam, not in the water, so less flavour and fewer vitamins wash away. All you need is a pan with a lid and a steamer basket or a colander that sits on top.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

200 g	broccoli
1 tsp	olive oil or butter
½	lemon, a squeeze of juice
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut the broccoli into florets of about the same size, and peel the tough skin from the stalk, then slice it into coins. Wash them.
2. Put about 2 cm of water in the pan and bring it to the boil. Put the broccoli in the basket above the water (not touching it), cover, and steam for **3 to 5 minutes**.
3. Test a thick stalk piece with a fork or a taste. You want it **bright green and just tender, with a little bite**.
4. Toss with the oil or butter, a squeeze of lemon and seasoning, and serve at once.

> STEAM
>
> **Steam and boiling water:** lift lids away from your face, because the steam is hotter than the water. Use oven gloves for pan handles and steamers, and tip the pan away from you when draining. Don't carry a pan of boiling water across a room with people or pets in it.

LEVEL 2 · BOIL AND REFRESH

Boiled and refreshed green beans

20 minutes | 2 portions | salted water, timing, and stopping the cooking

Green vegetables in a large pan of salted boiling water stay bright. Dipping them in cold water afterwards (**refreshing**) stops the cooking, so you can cook ahead and warm them up in a minute.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

200 g	green beans, topped
1 tbsp	flaked almonds or seeds (optional)
1 tsp	olive oil or butter
1 pinch	salt
1 pinch	pepper

1. Fill a big pan with water, add about **1 teaspoon of salt to each litre**, and bring to a rolling boil. Have a bowl of very cold water (with ice if you have it) ready.
2. Cook the beans, uncovered, for **4 to 6 minutes**, until tender but still with a snap.
3. Drain, then plunge into the cold water for a minute. Drain again.
4. To serve, warm the oil in a pan, toss in the beans and nuts for 1 to 2 minutes until hot, and season.

> **NUTS**
>
> If you serve this to guests, ask about nut allergies, and use seeds instead if needed.

LEVEL 3 · GLAZE

Glazed carrots

25 minutes | 2 portions | boiling down to a glaze

A classic: the carrots start cooking in a little water and butter, then the water boils away and leaves a shiny coating. It is boiling and finishing in one pan.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	carrots
15 g	butter
1 tsp	sugar or honey
100 ml	water
1 pinch	salt
1 tbsp	chopped parsley (optional)

1. Peel or scrub the carrots and cut them into even slices, about 5 mm thick (or batons).
2. Put them in a wide pan with the butter, sugar, salt and water. The water should come about halfway up the carrots.
3. Bring to the boil, then simmer uncovered for **8 to 12 minutes**, until the carrots are just tender and the liquid has reduced to a glossy glaze.
4. If the carrots are tender but still watery, turn the heat up and boil for a minute or two. Toss to coat, scatter with parsley and serve.

LEVEL 3 · GREENS

Buttered greens

15 minutes | 2 portions | shredded greens, and draining them well

Dark leafy greens are cooked for just a few minutes in a big pan. The trick is draining thoroughly, so they glisten rather than swim.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

250 g	spring greens, cabbage or kale
10 g	butter
1 pinch	salt and pepper
1 pinch	grated nutmeg (optional)

1. Wash the leaves. Cut out any thick stalks and slice the leaves thinly.
2. Boil a large pan of salted water. Add the greens and cook **3 to 5 minutes**, until tender but still green.
3. Drain in a colander, pressing with a spoon to squeeze out the water.
4. Return to the warm pan with the butter, nutmeg and seasoning and stir until glossy.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Salted or unsalted water

What does the salt do?

1. Boil two small pans of water, one with 1 teaspoon of salt per litre and one with none.
2. Cook a handful of green beans in each for 4 minutes and taste them with no extra seasoning.

Look for: The beans in the salted water taste seasoned all the way through. The unsalted ones taste flat, and you will want to add salt on top.

EXPERIMENT

Lid on or lid off

Colour of green vegetables.

1. Boil two pans of salted water and cook broccoli florets in each for 5 minutes, one with the lid on and one with it off.
2. Compare the colours.

Look for: The covered pan tends to give a duller, more olive green. Uncovered stays brighter. Compare in daylight.

EXPERIMENT

Cold start or boiling start

Roots in cold or hot water.

1. Cut 2 carrots into the same slices. Put half in a pan of cold water and half into a pan of boiling water.
2. Cook both until a knife goes in and compare the texture of the outside and the middle.

Look for: Cold-start slices cook more evenly. The boiling start can leave a softer outside and a firmer middle, especially with thick pieces.

EXPERIMENT

Steamed or boiled

Side by side.

1. Cook the same amount of broccoli, one steamed for 4 minutes and one boiled for 4 minutes.
2. Compare flavour, colour and wateriness.

Look for: Steamed broccoli is often a little firmer and tastes more of itself. Boiled can be a little softer and more diluted. See which you prefer.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Steamed broccoli				
Boiled and refreshed green beans				
Glazed carrots				
Buttered greens				
Salted vs unsalted				
Lid on vs off				
Cold vs boiling start				
Steam vs boil				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Grey-green, dull colour	Overcooked, or covered, or started in cold water	Cook less, uncovered, in boiling water; refresh in cold water
Soggy vegetables	Cooked too long, or not drained well	Taste a minute early; drain and shake or press dry
Raw middle, soft outside	Pieces different sizes, or roots started in boiling water	Cut evenly; start roots in cold water
Bland vegetables	Unsalted water	Salt the water; finish with butter, oil, lemon or herbs
Glaze won't set	Too much water	Turn up the heat and boil off the liquid, stirring

STEAM AND HYGIENE

Steam and boiling water: lift lids away from your face, because the steam is hotter than the water. Use oven gloves for pan handles and steamers, and tip the pan away from you when draining. Don't carry a pan of boiling water across a room with people or pets in it.

Knife safety: cut on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), and cut round or slippery vegetables on a flat face so they can't roll. A sharp knife is safer than a blunt one. Never catch a falling knife. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1 covers all of this.

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I know to put greens into boiling water and roots into cold.
- ☐ I can salt the water and cut vegetables to an even size.
- ☐ I can test for tender-crisp and stop the cooking by refreshing.
- ☐ I can make a simple glaze.
- ☐ I know when steaming is better than boiling.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 3 is Roasting: dry heat, even pieces and golden edges.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Chapter 3 · Roasting

SKILL GOAL

Roast vegetables so they are tender inside and golden outside, never soggy or burnt.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Roasting cooks vegetables in dry heat. The surface dries and browns, and the browning (a set of reactions that create new flavours) turns vegetables sweet and savoury. A roasted carrot tastes quite different from a boiled one. There are only four things to control: **temperature, size, space and oil**.

What makes a good roast

- **A hot oven,** usually 200°C (180°C fan), or 220°C (200°C fan) for brassicas and thin pieces. Too cool and the vegetables dry out without browning.
- **Even pieces,** so that everything is done at the same time. Smaller pieces cook faster and brown more.
- **One layer, with space.** Overcrowded vegetables give off steam that can't escape, so they stew instead of roasting.
- **Just enough oil:** roughly 1 tablespoon for each 400 g to 500 g of vegetables, tossed in a bowl so each piece is lightly coated. Too little and they scorch; too much and they're greasy.
- **Dry vegetables.** Wash them ahead and pat dry.
- **Turn once,** halfway through.
- **A big tray,** with low sides so that air circulates.

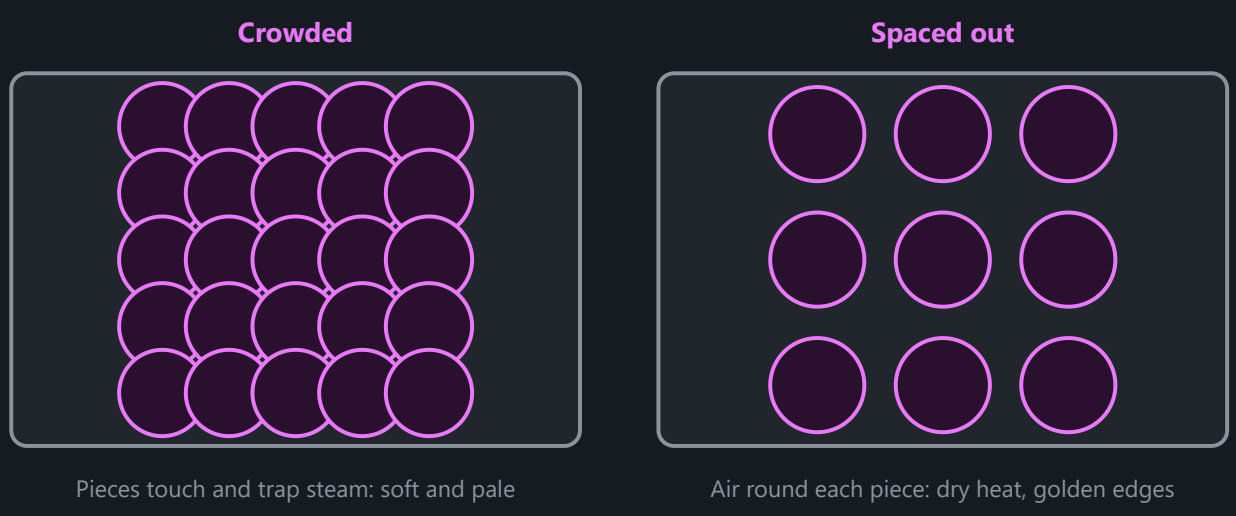


Figure 4. Same vegetables, same oven. Crowded pieces trap steam and stew; spaced pieces roast and brown. Use two trays rather than one packed one.

Roughly how long?

VEGETABLE	CUT	OVEN	TIME
Carrots, parsnips	2 cm batons	200°C (180°C fan)	35 to 45 minutes
Butternut squash	2 cm chunks	200°C (180°C fan)	25 to 35 minutes
Beetroot	2 cm chunks, peeled	200°C (180°C fan)	35 to 45 minutes (wear gloves: it stains)
Cauliflower, broccoli	Florets	220°C (200°C fan)	20 to 25 minutes
Brussels sprouts	Halved	220°C (200°C fan)	20 to 25 minutes
Courgette, aubergine	3 cm chunks	200°C (180°C fan)	25 to 30 minutes
Peppers, onions	Strips or wedges	200°C (180°C fan)	25 to 35 minutes
Whole tomatoes (slow)	Halved	180°C (160°C fan)	35 to 45 minutes

These are starting points. Ovens vary, so check a minute or two before the time, and test with a knife.

Seasoning

Salt and pepper and a herb are enough. Add a little acid at the end (lemon juice, vinegar) to lift the flavour, and fresh herbs at the end, as they burn if roasted for a long time. Spices (cumin,

paprika, coriander) are good with squash, cauliflower and carrots.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Roast root vegetables

45 minutes | 2 portions | even pieces and one layer

The simplest roast, and the one that teaches the most. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	carrots
2	parsnips
1	red onion, in wedges
1½ tbsp	oil
3 sprigs	thyme (or 1 tsp dried)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Scrub or peel the carrots and parsnips and cut into pieces of the same thickness (batons about 2 cm thick). Cut any thick parsnip tops in half lengthways.
2. Toss in a bowl with the oil, salt, pepper and thyme, so that every piece is lightly coated.
3. Spread in **a single layer** on a large tray, with space between pieces. Add the onion.
4. Roast for **35 to 45 minutes**, turning once halfway, until tender inside and golden at the edges.

> COLOUR
>
> **Go for gold.** Carrots, parsnips and other starchy vegetables form a chemical called acrylamide when roasted or fried at high temperatures. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to cook them to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.

LEVEL 2 · BRASSICAS

Roast cauliflower, broccoli and sprouts

35 minutes | 2 to 3 portions | browning and the sweetness it brings

Roasting brings out sweetness in brassicas and removes the cabbage smell that comes from overcooking. Set the oven to 220°C (200°C fan), a bit hotter than for roots.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

½	cauliflower, in florets
1	head of broccoli, in florets
150 g	Brussels sprouts, halved
1½ tbsp	oil
1 tsp	ground cumin or paprika (optional)
½	lemon, juice only
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut everything to similar-sized pieces. Dry the vegetables well after washing, as damp pieces steam.
2. Toss with the oil, spice, salt and pepper and spread on a large tray, cut sides down where you can.
3. Roast for **20 to 25 minutes**, turning once, until the cut sides are golden and the stalks are tender.
4. Finish with the lemon juice.

LEVEL 2 · SOFT AND SWEET

Roast tomatoes and peppers

45 minutes | 2 portions | slow roasting for concentrated flavour

A lower oven (180°C, or 160°C fan) and a longer time turns tomatoes and peppers soft, sweet and jammy. Good on toast, in pasta, or blitzed into a soup.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	ripe tomatoes (cherry or plum)
2	peppers, in strips
2	garlic cloves, in their skins
1 tbsp	oil
1 tsp	dried oregano or fresh thyme
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Halve plum tomatoes (cherry ones can stay whole). Put them cut side up on a tray with the pepper strips and unpeeled garlic.
2. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with salt, pepper and herbs.
3. Roast for **35 to 45 minutes**, until the tomatoes have collapsed and the pepper edges are lightly browned.
4. Squeeze the soft garlic out of its skin and mash it into the tomatoes.

LEVEL 3 · TIMING

A tray of mixed roast vegetables

50 minutes | 3 portions | putting slow and fast vegetables on one tray

Different vegetables roast in different times. The skill is to cut the slow ones smaller, or start them first, so everything finishes together. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	courgette, in thick slices
1	red pepper, in chunks
1	small aubergine, in chunks
150 g	butternut squash, peeled, in 2 cm chunks
1	red onion, in wedges
2 tbsp	oil
1 tsp	mixed herbs
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut the squash into 2 cm chunks, the aubergine and pepper into 3 cm chunks, and the courgette into thick slices. Keep everything about the same thickness.
2. Toss the squash and onion with a third of the oil, salt and pepper and spread on 2 trays. Roast for **10 minutes**.
3. Toss the rest of the vegetables with the remaining oil and herbs. Add them to the trays, with spaces between.
4. Roast for a further **25 to 30 minutes**, turning once, until everything is tender and browned in places.

> **TWO TRAYS**
>
> If the vegetables won't fit in a single layer, use two trays and swap them between the shelves halfway through.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Oven temperature

Cooler or hotter.

1. Roast the same cut carrots on two trays: one at 160°C (140°C fan) and one at 220°C (200°C fan), for 30 minutes.
2. Compare colour, texture and sweetness.

Look for: The cooler tray is softer and paler; the hotter tray browns faster, with a crisper edge. Watch the hotter one: it can go from golden to dark brown quickly. Aim for golden.

EXPERIMENT

Crowded or spaced

Steam versus roast.

1. Put half a tray of cauliflower florets tightly packed on one tray, and the same amount spread out on another.
2. Roast both at 220°C (200°C fan) for 20 minutes.

Look for: The crowded tray comes out paler and softer, the spaced tray golden at the edges.

EXPERIMENT

How much oil

None, a little, a lot.

1. Toss 3 batches of carrot batons with no oil, 1 teaspoon of oil, and 1 tablespoon of oil per 200 g.
2. Roast all together at the same temperature.

Look for: No oil gives dry, leathery vegetables; a little gives a good colour; a lot gives greasy ones.

EXPERIMENT

Covered or uncovered

Foil on, foil off.

1. Roast two trays of squash chunks, one covered tightly with foil for 15 minutes then uncovered for 15, and one uncovered for 30.

Look for: The covered tray starts steaming, so it is softer inside; the uncovered tray browns more. Covering is useful for tough vegetables that need to soften before they brown.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Roast root vegetables				
Roast cauliflower, broccoli and sprouts				
Roast tomatoes and peppers				
Tray of mixed roast vegetables				
Oven temperature				
Crowded vs spaced				
Oil amount				
Covered vs uncovered				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Pale and soft	Crowded tray, damp vegetables, or oven too cool	Use 2 trays; dry well; raise the temperature

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Burnt outside, hard middle	Too hot, or pieces too big	Lower the oven; cut smaller
Dark brown or black edges	Too hot or too long	Take out earlier; aim for golden (see the box)
Greasy	Too much oil	Use less; blot on kitchen paper
Sticking to the tray	Too little oil, or turned too soon	Leave until golden before turning; line the tray with baking paper

HOT OVEN, HOT TRAY

Hot oven and trays: use dry oven gloves (a damp one conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little rather than reaching in, and put hot trays on a heatproof surface. Open the door and step back, because the steam is hot.

Go for gold. Carrots, parsnips and other starchy vegetables form a chemical called acrylamide when roasted or fried at high temperatures. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to cook them to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.

Knife safety: cut on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), and cut round or slippery vegetables on a flat face so they can't roll. A sharp knife is safer than a blunt one. Never catch a falling knife. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1 covers all of this.

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I roast at the right temperature for the vegetable.
- ☐ I cut pieces evenly and spread them in one layer.
- ☐ I use just enough oil and dry the vegetables first.
- ☐ I can combine slow and fast vegetables on one tray.
- ☐ I cook to golden, not dark brown.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 4 is Stir-Frying: a hot pan, small pieces and quick cooking.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Chapter 4 · Stir-Frying

SKILL GOAL

Stir-fry vegetables so they stay bright and crisp, never soggy or burnt.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Stir-frying is fast cooking in a very hot pan, with the food kept moving. It gives vegetables bright colour and a savoury, slightly smoky taste called *wok hei* ('breath of the wok'). It goes wrong in one of three ways: the pan isn't hot enough, there's too much in it, or the pieces are too big.

The rules

- **Prepare first.** The cooking takes 5 minutes, so wash, dry and cut everything first, and mix the sauce in a bowl. Once you start, you can't stop to chop.
- **High heat.** Heat the empty pan until a drop of water skitters on it, then add the oil. A wok is ideal, but a large heavy frying pan works.
- **A suitable oil:** one that can take high heat, such as vegetable, rapeseed or groundnut. Extra virgin olive oil isn't suited.
- **Small, similar pieces,** thinly cut so that they cook in a minute or two.
- **Hard vegetables first,** soft ones last: carrots and broccoli, then peppers and mushrooms, then leaves and spring onions.
- **Don't crowd the pan.** Too much food drops the temperature and the vegetables stew. Cook in batches if needed.
- **Dry vegetables.** Wet vegetables steam and spit.
- **Sauce at the end,** so it coats rather than boils the vegetables.
- **Keep it moving** with a spatula or tossing, but let things sit for a few seconds when you want browning.



Figure 5. Heat zones in a wok. A frying pan works the same way: cook in the hot middle and push finished food to the cooler edge.

Order of cooking

ADD	EXAMPLES	TIME IN THE PAN
1. Aromatics	Garlic, ginger, chilli	10 to 15 seconds (don't let them burn)
2. Hard vegetables	Carrot, broccoli, cauliflower, green beans	2 to 3 minutes
3. Medium vegetables	Pepper, courgette, mushrooms, cabbage	1 to 2 minutes
4. Soft and leafy	Pak choi, spinach, spring onions, bean sprouts	30 seconds to 1 minute
5. Sauce	Soy sauce, a little sugar, water or stock	30 seconds, until it bubbles and coats

Sauce

A basic stir-fry sauce is 1 tablespoon of soy sauce, 1 teaspoon of sugar or honey and a splash of water or stock, plus garlic and ginger. Soy sauce is very salty, so you rarely need extra salt. For a thicker sauce, stir 1 teaspoon of cornflour into the cold liquid before adding it.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Simple vegetable stir-fry

15 minutes | 1 portion | heat, order and speed

Cooking is quick, so everything is cut, washed, dried and measured out *before* the pan goes on the heat.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1	carrot, in thin sticks
1	red pepper, in strips
100 g	broccoli, in small florets
1	spring onion, sliced
1 tbsp	vegetable or rapeseed oil
1 tbsp	soy sauce
1 tsp	honey or sugar
1 tbsp	water

1. Mix the soy sauce, honey and water in a small bowl. Lay the vegetables out in order: carrot and broccoli first, then pepper, then spring onion.
2. Heat a wok or large frying pan over a high heat until it is just beginning to smoke. Add the oil, swirl, and add the carrot and broccoli. Stir and toss for **2 minutes**.
3. Add the pepper and cook for **1 more minute**.
4. Pour in the sauce, toss for 30 seconds until it bubbles and coats everything, add the spring onion and serve at once.

> **HOT OIL**
>
> **Hot oil:** never leave a pan of hot oil unattended. If oil starts to smoke, take the pan off the heat and let it cool. Never put water on a pan fire: turn off the heat and cover it with a lid or damp cloth, then get out of the room and call 999 if it spreads. Dry vegetables well, because water on hot oil spits.

LEVEL 2 · LEAVES

Garlic and ginger greens

10 minutes | 1 to 2 portions | garlic without burning, and quick-cooked leaves

Leaves cook in a minute. Garlic burns in seconds. The aim is a fragrant, glossy plate, not black specks.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

200 g	pak choi, greens or spinach
2	garlic cloves, sliced
1 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
1 tbsp	vegetable oil
1 tsp	soy sauce
1 tsp	toasted sesame oil (optional)

1. Cut the pak choi into 3 or 4 pieces, or slice large leaves into ribbons. Wash and shake dry.
2. Heat the oil in a wok over a high heat. Add the ginger and garlic and stir for **10 to 15 seconds**, until fragrant but not coloured.
3. Add the greens straight away and toss for **1 to 2 minutes**, until the leaves wilt and the stalks are tender-crisp.
4. Add the soy sauce and sesame oil, toss and serve.

LEVEL 3 · COMBINING

Vegetable fried noodles

25 minutes | 2 portions | adding the noodles and sauce at the right moment

Noodles go in after the vegetables have started to cook, so nothing overcooks. Cook the noodles first, drain, and cool them under cold water so they don't stick.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

100 g	dried egg noodles or rice noodles
1	carrot, in thin sticks
100 g	cabbage, finely shredded
1	pepper, in strips
2	spring onions, sliced
1	garlic clove, sliced
1½ tbsp	vegetable oil
2 tbsp	soy sauce
1 tsp	sugar
1 tsp	toasted sesame oil (optional)

1. Cook the noodles as the pack says, drain, rinse in cold water, and toss with a few drops of oil.
2. Mix the soy sauce and sugar. Cut the vegetables thin and similar in size.
3. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a wok until very hot. Add the carrot and cabbage and stir-fry for **2 minutes**, then add the pepper and garlic for **1 minute**.
4. Add the noodles and sauce, and toss with two spoons for **2 minutes**, until hot all the way through. Add the spring onion and sesame oil and serve.

COOLING NOODLES

Don't leave cooked noodles at room temperature for long. If you cook them ahead, cool quickly, chill, and use within 1 day.

LEVEL 3 · PROTEIN

Tofu or egg stir-fry

25 minutes | 1 portion | adding protein without breaking it up

Firm tofu goes in first and needs to brown without being stirred too often. Eggs are an alternative: scramble them in the hot pan first and set aside.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

150 g	firm tofu
1	Lion-marked egg (alternative to the tofu)
1	pepper, in strips
100 g	mushrooms, sliced
2	spring onions
1½ tbsp	vegetable oil
1 tbsp	soy sauce
1 tsp	grated fresh ginger

1. **Tofu:** press it between kitchen paper for 10 minutes, then cut into 2 cm cubes. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in the wok, add the tofu and leave it for 1 to 2 minutes to brown before turning. Fry for **5 minutes** in all, then lift out.
2. **Egg instead:** beat the egg and scramble it in the oiled pan for **1 minute**, until fully set. Lift out.
3. Add the rest of the oil, then the mushrooms and pepper, and stir-fry for **3 minutes**. Add the ginger.
4. Return the tofu or egg, add the soy sauce and spring onions, toss for 1 minute and serve.

> **EGGS**
>
> Eggs with the British Lion mark are safe to eat lightly cooked, but for stir-fries cook them until set.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Pan heat

Hot or medium.

1. Stir-fry two batches of the same sliced pepper and carrot for 3 minutes, one in a very hot pan and one on medium heat.

Look for: The hot pan gives colour and bite; the medium pan gives softer, paler, slightly watery vegetables.

EXPERIMENT

Batch size

A full pan or a half pan.

1. Stir-fry 200 g of vegetables, then 400 g in the same pan, for the same length of time.

Look for: The bigger batch drops the temperature, leaves liquid in the pan and cooks unevenly. Cook large amounts in two batches.

EXPERIMENT

Big or small pieces

Cut size.

1. Cut one carrot into thick chunks and one into thin matchsticks. Stir-fry each for 3 minutes.

Look for: The thin pieces are done; the chunks are still raw. Small pieces are what make the quick method work.

EXPERIMENT

Sauce early or late

When to add the sauce.

1. Stir-fry two portions of the vegetables, adding the sauce at the start of one and at the end of the other.

Look for: Sauce added early boils the vegetables and goes dull; sauce added late glazes them and keeps them crisp.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Simple vegetable stir-fry				
Garlic and ginger greens				
Vegetable fried noodles				
Tofu or egg stir-fry				
Pan heat				
Batch size				
Big vs small pieces				
Sauce early vs late				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Soggy, watery vegetables	Pan not hot enough, too much in it, or wet vegetables	Heat the pan longer; cook in batches; dry the vegetables

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Burnt garlic	Added too soon or pan too hot	Add it later, for a few seconds only; lift off the heat if it browns
Raw middle	Pieces too thick	Cut smaller; start the hard vegetables first
Everything sticks	Not enough oil or the pan isn't hot	Heat first, then add oil
Too salty	Soy sauce plus salt	Use soy sauce as the only salt; add a splash of water or squeeze of lime

HOT OIL

Hot oil: never leave a pan of hot oil unattended. If oil starts to smoke, take the pan off the heat and let it cool. Never put water on a pan fire: turn off the heat and cover it with a lid or damp cloth, then get out of the room and call 999 if it spreads. Dry vegetables well, because water on hot oil spits.

Knife safety: cut on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), and cut round or slippery vegetables on a flat face so they can't roll. A sharp knife is safer than a blunt one. Never catch a falling knife. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1 covers all of this.

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I prepare everything before the pan goes on.
- ☐ I heat the pan before adding the oil.
- ☐ I add vegetables in order, hardest first.
- ☐ I don't crowd the pan, and I add the sauce last.
- ☐ I can cook noodles and a protein into a stir-fry.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 5 is Sautéing and Pan-Frying: browning in a pan without steaming.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Chapter 5 · Sautéing and Pan-Frying

SKILL GOAL

Brown vegetables in a pan so they are golden and flavourful, not grey and soggy.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Sautéing (from the French *sauter*, 'to jump') means cooking vegetables in a little fat in an open pan, over a fairly high heat, until they brown. Pan-frying is the same idea with a bit more fat or bigger pieces. The browning is where the flavour comes from, and the enemy of browning is **moisture**.

Why vegetables stew instead of brown

Vegetables are 80% to 95% water. In a hot pan, that water comes out as steam. If the pan is crowded or the heat is low, the water can't escape and the vegetables simmer in their own liquid: grey and soft, not golden. To brown: **enough heat, enough room, and leave them alone**.

The rules

- **Preheat the pan** for a minute before adding oil.
- **One layer,** with room between pieces. Cook in batches rather than crowd.
- **Dry vegetables** brown. Pat them dry after washing.
- **Don't stir all the time.** Leave them for a minute or two to form a crust, then turn.
- **Pieces of even size,** so they cook together.
- **Salt wet vegetables late** (mushrooms, courgettes), because salt draws out water.
- **Butter burns,** so mix it with oil or add it near the end. Oil alone tolerates more heat.
- **Add garlic late** (the last 30 seconds): it burns and turns bitter.

Which pan?

PAN	GOOD FOR	NOTES
Heavy stainless steel	Browning, a crust, building flavour in the pan	Preheat well; food sticks at first, then releases when browned
Cast iron	Searing, keeping heat; wedges of cabbage or leeks	Heavy and slow to heat; needs care to avoid rust; acidic foods can strip its seasoning
Non-stick	Delicate or sticky foods, easy cleaning	Use medium heat, not very high; avoid metal utensils; browns less

Sauté, stir-fry or pan-fry?

METHOD	HEAT	PIECES	MOVEMENT
Stir-fry	Very high	Small	Constant
Sauté	Medium-high	Even, small to medium	Tossed every minute or so
Pan-fry	Medium-high, then lower	Thicker slices or wedges	Left alone, turned once

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Garlic mushrooms

15 minutes | 2 portions | browning without stewing

Mushrooms are mostly water, which is why they go grey and rubbery if you crowd or salt them too soon. Give them space and heat.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

250 g	mushrooms (button, chestnut or a mix)
15 g	butter
1 tbsp	oil
2	garlic cloves, finely sliced
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1 tsp	lemon juice
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Wipe the mushrooms clean with a damp cloth or brush off the dirt (don't soak them, as they soak up water). Cut large ones into thick slices or quarters.
2. Heat the oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms in **one layer** (in two batches if needed) and leave them for 2 minutes without stirring, until the underside is golden.
3. Toss, cook for 3 to 4 minutes more until browned, then add the butter and garlic for the last **30 seconds**.
4. Season, add the lemon juice and parsley and serve on toast or as a side.

> **SALT AT THE END**
>
> Salt draws water out of mushrooms, so add it once they are browned.

LEVEL 2 · SPONGES

Pan-fried courgettes and aubergine

25 minutes | 2 portions | oil, heat and patience

Aubergine soaks up oil like a sponge, while courgette gives off water. Both brown best when you cook them separately.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	courgettes, in 1 cm slices
1	small aubergine, in 2 cm cubes
2 tbsp	oil
1	garlic clove, sliced
1 pinch	salt, pepper and dried oregano

1. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large pan over a medium-high heat. Add the courgette slices in a single layer and cook for **3 to 4 minutes a side** until golden. Lift out.
2. Add the remaining oil and the aubergine. Cook, turning every minute or two, for **8 to 10 minutes**, until soft and golden. A splash of water in the pan helps the aubergine soften without more oil.
3. Return the courgettes with the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Season with salt, pepper and oregano.

> **AUBERGINE**
>
> Never eat aubergine raw: it is better soft and cooked all the way through.

LEVEL 2 · WILT

Wilted spinach or greens with garlic

10 minutes | 2 portions | wilting leaves, and getting rid of the water

Spinach shrinks to a fraction of its volume. 200 g of raw leaves makes about one portion of cooked.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

200 g	spinach or spring greens
1 tbsp	olive oil
1	garlic clove, sliced
1 pinch	chilli flakes (optional)
1 tsp	lemon juice
1 pinch	salt

1. Wash the leaves well and shake off most of the water (a little clinging water is useful).
2. Warm the oil with the garlic and chilli over a medium heat for 30 seconds, without browning.
3. Add the leaves in handfuls, turning with tongs, for **1 to 3 minutes**, until wilted. Tougher greens take 3 to 5 minutes.
4. Tip into a colander and press out the excess liquid, then season and add lemon juice.

LEVEL 3 · COLOUR

Pan-fried cabbage or leeks

30 minutes | 2 portions | browning thick pieces and cooking them through

Thick pieces need two stages: brown the outside in the pan, then add a little water and cover so the middle softens.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

½	small green or white cabbage, cut in 2 cm wedges
2	leeks, trimmed and washed
20 g	butter
1 tbsp	oil
1 tsp	cider vinegar
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut the leeks in half lengthways and wash well under running water to get rid of grit, then slice into thick pieces or leave in halves.
2. Heat the oil and half the butter in a large pan on medium-high. Add the cabbage wedges (cut side down) and leeks and brown for **4 to 5 minutes**, without moving them.
3. Turn, add a splash of water (3 to 4 tablespoons), cover, and cook on a low heat for **8 to 10 minutes**, until tender.
4. Uncover, let any water evaporate, then add the remaining butter, vinegar, salt and pepper.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Crowded or spaced pan

The mushroom test.

1. Cook 250 g of mushrooms in a small pan (crowded) and 250 g in a large pan or in two batches (spaced), for 8 minutes each.

Look for: The crowded pan is full of liquid and the mushrooms are grey; the spaced pan is dry and golden.

EXPERIMENT

Salt early or late

Courgette slices.

1. Salt one batch of courgette slices and leave them for 10 minutes. Leave another unsalted. Pat both dry and fry the same way.

Look for: The salted batch leaks water first, then browns more easily. The unsalted batch releases water in the pan. Note which browns better.

EXPERIMENT

Pan type

Steel, cast iron and non-stick.

1. Fry the same sliced onion or courgette in each type of pan you have, at the same heat, for the same time.

Look for: Compare browning, sticking, and how much oil each needs.

EXPERIMENT

Stir or leave

Stirring versus waiting.

1. Fry two batches of cabbage wedges: one stirred constantly, one left for 4 minutes before turning.

Look for: The unstirred batch gets a deep golden crust on the cut side. The stirred one is pale.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Garlic mushrooms				
Courgettes and aubergine				
Wilted greens				
Pan-fried cabbage or leeks				
Crowded vs spaced				
Salt early vs late				
Pan type				
Stir vs leave				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Grey, watery vegetables	Crowded pan, low heat, or salted too soon	Cook in batches; preheat; salt later

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Burnt outside, raw inside	Pan too hot, pieces too thick	Lower the heat, cover with a splash of water
Sticking	Not preheated, or turned too soon	Wait: food releases when browned
Greasy aubergine	It absorbs oil	Use less oil; add a splash of water and cover
Bitter garlic	Burnt	Add late; start again if it blackens

HOT OIL AND HYGIENE

Hot oil: never leave a pan of hot oil unattended. If oil starts to smoke, take the pan off the heat and let it cool. Never put water on a pan fire: turn off the heat and cover it with a lid or damp cloth, then get out of the room and call 999 if it spreads. Dry vegetables well, because water on hot oil spits.

Knife safety: cut on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), and cut round or slippery vegetables on a flat face so they can't roll. A sharp knife is safer than a blunt one. Never catch a falling knife. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1 covers all of this.

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I preheat the pan and cook in a single layer.
- ☐ I leave vegetables alone long enough to brown.
- ☐ I know when to salt and when to add garlic.
- ☐ I can brown thick pieces and finish them with a splash of water.
- ☐ I can choose the right pan.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 6 is Soups: sweating, simmering and blending.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Chapter 6 · Soups

SKILL GOAL

Make a vegetable soup from any vegetables, with good flavour, texture and seasoning.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Soup is the easiest way to eat a lot of vegetables, and a forgiving way to use the ones that are going soft. The method is almost always the same, and the quality depends on a few small things: **how you start the onion, what liquid you use, and how you season at the end**.

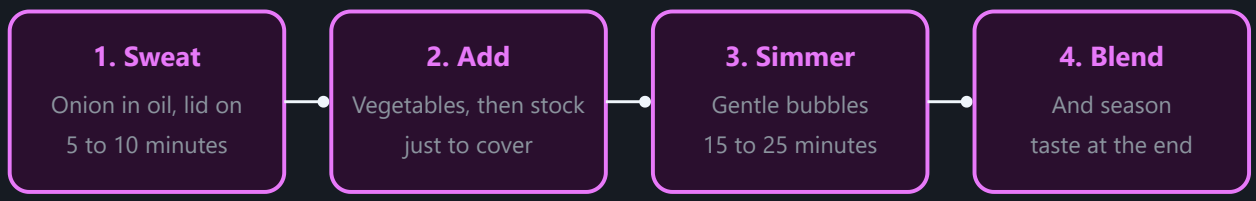


Figure 6. The pattern behind almost every vegetable soup. Change the vegetables and the seasoning and the method stays the same.

Sweating or frying the onion?

	SWEATING	FRYING (BROWNING)
Heat	Low-medium, lid on	Medium-high, lid off
Time	8 to 10 minutes	10 to 15 minutes
Result	Soft, sweet, translucent; clean flavour	Golden or brown; deeper, more savoury flavour
Best for	Delicate soups: tomato, carrot, green	Hearty, brown soups: onion, mushroom, lentil

The liquid

- **Stock** (a cube, powder or bouillon, or homemade) adds depth. Check the salt: stock cubes are salty, so taste before adding more.
- **Water** works if the vegetables are flavourful (tomatoes, mushrooms, roast vegetables). Season more.
- **Just enough:** cover the vegetables by about 1 cm. You can thin a soup, but you can't thicken it without boiling it down.

Texture

- **Smooth:** blend fully. A potato, a handful of oats or a slice of bread thickens a thin soup.
- **Half-blended:** blend a third of it, then stir it back in for body and some chunks.
- **Chunky:** leave whole, and cut the vegetables in similar sizes.

Seasoning at the end

Taste and adjust once the soup is finished. If it is flat, add salt or a squeeze of lemon. If it's sharp, add a pinch of sugar or a little cream. Fresh herbs, a swirl of yoghurt, a few seeds or some croutons make it a meal.

Storing and freezing

Cool soup quickly (within 1 to 2 hours: divide into shallow containers), cover, and keep in the fridge for up to **2 days**. It freezes well (for best quality, within about 3 months). Defrost in the fridge, and reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Tomato soup

30 minutes | 2 portions | sweating onion and blending

Good tinned tomatoes make better winter soup than pale fresh ones. The soup is half the time spent on the onion.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	onion, chopped
1 tbsp	oil or butter
1 tin	400 g tin of chopped tomatoes
1	garlic clove, chopped
300 ml	vegetable stock
1 tsp	sugar (optional)
1 tbsp	cream or yoghurt, to finish (optional)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Warm the oil in a saucepan over a low-medium heat. Add the onion and a pinch of salt and cook with the lid on for **8 to 10 minutes**, stirring now and then, until soft and translucent, not browned. This is **sweating**.
2. Add the garlic for 1 minute, then the tomatoes, stock and sugar. Bring to the boil, then simmer for **15 minutes**.
3. Blend until smooth (see the safety box), reheat, and taste. Add salt, pepper and more sugar if it tastes too sharp.
4. Swirl in the cream or yoghurt.

> **BLENDING**
>
> **Blending hot soup:** hot liquid expands and can blow the lid off a jug blender and scald you. Use a stick blender in the pan if you can. If you use a jug, let the soup cool for 10 minutes, fill the jug no more than half, remove the centre cap of the lid and cover it with a folded tea towel, and start on the lowest speed. Don't blend with the lid fully sealed.

LEVEL 2 · SIMMER AND BLEND

Carrot and ginger soup

40 minutes | 3 portions | balancing sweetness and spice

Carrots are sweet, ginger is warm, and the stock holds them together.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

400 g	carrots, peeled and sliced
1	onion, chopped
1 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
1 tbsp	oil
500 ml	vegetable stock
1	orange, a squeeze of juice (optional)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Sweat the onion in the oil for 8 minutes until soft. Add the ginger for 1 minute.
2. Add the carrots and stock. Bring to the boil, then simmer, partly covered, for **20 to 25 minutes**, until the carrots are very soft.
3. Blend until smooth. Reheat, taste, and season. Add orange juice if you want brightness.

> **BLENDING**
>
> **Blending hot soup:** hot liquid expands and can blow the lid off a jug blender and scald you. Use a stick blender in the pan if you can. If you use a jug, let the soup cool for 10 minutes, fill the jug no more than half, remove the centre cap of the lid and cover it with a folded tea towel, and start on the lowest speed. Don't blend with the lid fully sealed.

LEVEL 2 · GREEN

Green soup (courgette and spinach)

35 minutes | 3 portions | keeping green soup green

Green vegetables go grey if they cook too long. Add the spinach at the very end, and cool the soup quickly if it is not to be eaten at once.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	onion, chopped
2	courgettes, sliced
150 g	spinach
1	medium potato, diced (to thicken)
1 tbsp	oil
600 ml	vegetable stock
1 handful	basil or mint leaves
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Sweat the onion in the oil for 5 minutes. Add the courgettes and potato and cook for 3 more minutes.
2. Add the stock, bring to the boil and simmer for **10 to 12 minutes**, until the potato is soft.
3. Add the spinach and herbs and cook for **1 minute**, just until wilted.
4. Blend straight away until smooth, season, and serve.

> BLENDING
>
> **Blending hot soup:** hot liquid expands and can blow the lid off a jug blender and scald you. Use a stick blender in the pan if you can. If you use a jug, let the soup cool for 10 minutes, fill the jug no more than half, remove the centre cap of the lid and cover it with a folded tea towel, and start on the lowest speed. Don't blend with the lid fully sealed.

LEVEL 3 · CHUNKY

Chunky minestrone-style soup

50 minutes | 4 portions | adding things in the right order

A chunky soup is about layers: slow vegetables first, quick ones and pasta last. No blending.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	onion, diced
1	carrot, diced
1	celery stick, diced
1	courgette, diced
1 tbsp	oil
1 tin	400 g tin of chopped tomatoes
750 ml	vegetable stock
50 g	small dried pasta
100 g	green beans or cabbage, chopped
1 tsp	dried mixed herbs
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Sweat the onion, carrot and celery in the oil for **10 minutes** on a low-medium heat, until soft.
2. Add the tomatoes, stock, herbs and courgette. Bring to the boil and simmer for **15 minutes**.
3. Add the pasta and the beans or cabbage and simmer for the pasta's cooking time (usually 8 to 10 minutes) until it is tender.
4. Season and serve. If it thickens, loosen with a little hot water.

> **PASTA**

> Pasta keeps soaking up liquid. If you want leftovers, cook the pasta separately and add it to each bowl, or accept a thicker soup the next day.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Sweated or fried onions

Two pots of tomato soup.

1. Make half the tomato soup recipe twice. Sweat the onion for 8 minutes in one, and fry it until golden brown for 12 minutes in the other.

Look for: The sweated version is bright and clean; the fried version is deeper and slightly sweeter and more savoury. Neither is wrong.

EXPERIMENT

Stock or water

Carrot soup.

1. Make two small batches of carrot soup, one with stock and one with water. Season both only with salt.

Look for: The stock version tastes rounder and more savoury. The water version is simple and fresh, and may need more seasoning.

EXPERIMENT

Blend method

Stick blender or jug.

1. Blend one batch with a stick blender in the pan. Blend another in a jug blender after letting it cool for 10 minutes, following the safety box.

Look for: A jug usually gives a smoother soup; a stick blender is quicker and has less washing up.

EXPERIMENT

Texture

Smooth, half or chunky.

1. Take 3 bowls of the same soup: fully blended, a third blended, and left whole.

Look for: Compare the mouthfeel. Many people find the half-blended one the most satisfying.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Tomato soup				
Carrot and ginger soup				
Green soup				
Chunky minestrone-style soup				
Sweated vs fried onions				
Stock vs water				
Blend method				
Smooth vs chunky				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Bland soup	Not enough salt, acid or stock	Season at the end; add a squeeze of lemon or a pinch of sugar
Too salty	Stock cube plus salt	Add water or unsalted stock, a peeled potato, or a splash of cream

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Watery	Too much liquid	Simmer uncovered to reduce; thicken with a potato
Grey-green soup	Overcooked greens	Add the spinach at the end; blend and cool quickly
Lumpy blended soup	Vegetables not soft enough	Simmer longer and blend again
Burnt on the bottom	Heat too high	Don't scrape; pour into a clean pan and carry on

HOT LIQUIDS AND STORAGE

Blending hot soup: hot liquid expands and can blow the lid off a jug blender and scald you. Use a stick blender in the pan if you can. If you use a jug, let the soup cool for 10 minutes, fill the jug no more than half, remove the centre cap of the lid and cover it with a folded tea towel, and start on the lowest speed. Don't blend with the lid fully sealed.

Steam and boiling water: lift lids away from your face, because the steam is hotter than the water. Use oven gloves for pan handles and steamers, and tip the pan away from you when draining. Don't carry a pan of boiling water across a room with people or pets in it.

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can sweat an onion without browning it.
- ☐ I know how much liquid to add.
- ☐ I can blend a soup safely.
- ☐ I can choose between smooth, half and chunky.
- ☐ I season at the end and store leftovers properly.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 7 is Salads and Dressings: leaves, dressings and warm salads.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Chapter 7 · Salads and Dressings

SKILL GOAL

Build a salad with crisp leaves, a balanced dressing and the right timing.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A salad is an arrangement of cold or warm vegetables, with a dressing that brings them together. What separates a boring salad from a good one is rarely the ingredients. It is **dry, crisp leaves; a balanced dressing; seasoning; and timing**.

Crisp leaves

- **Wash and dry.** A salad spinner is the best tool: wet leaves dilute the dressing.
- **Crisp them in cold water** for 10 to 15 minutes if they are limp, then dry them and keep them in the fridge wrapped in a cloth.
- **Tear soft leaves** (lettuce) with your hands and cut tough ones (cabbage, kale) thin. A knife can bruise soft leaves.
- **Mix leaves** for flavour and texture: soft, bitter (rocket, chicory), peppery (watercress) and crisp (cos).

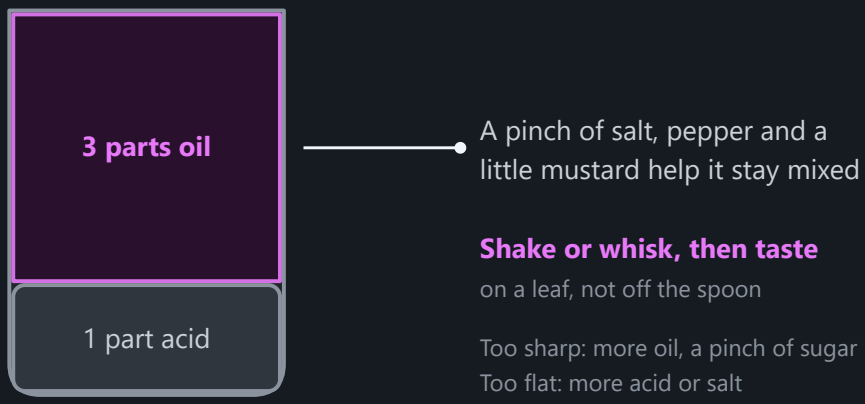


Figure 7. The classic vinaigrette: three parts oil to one part acid. Adjust to taste and to the acid you use.

Vinaigrette

The basic dressing is **3 parts oil to 1 part acid**, with salt, pepper and a little mustard (the mustard helps the oil and acid stay mixed). Some acids are stronger than others, so taste. Add more acid if it is flat, and more oil if it is sharp.

ACID	FLAVOUR	GOOD WITH
Lemon juice	Bright, fresh	Green salads, fish, leaves, grains
Cider vinegar	Fruity, mild	Cabbage, coleslaw, apple, root vegetable salads
Red or white wine vinegar	Sharp, clean	Tomatoes, classic green salad
Balsamic vinegar	Sweet, dark	Roast vegetables, bitter leaves, strawberries

Dress at the right moment

- **Delicate leaves:** just before serving, or they wilt.
- **Tough vegetables** (cabbage, grated carrot, kale): dress ahead and let sit, so they soften.
- **Grains and potatoes:** while still warm, so they soak up the flavour.
- **Tomatoes:** salt first, dress after.

Use less dressing than you think: start with a teaspoon or two per portion, toss, and add more if needed.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Green salad with vinaigrette

10 minutes | 2 portions | the 3:1 dressing

The simplest salad and the base for all the others. Making the dressing in a jar means you can shake it.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	round lettuce or 2 handfuls of mixed leaves
3 tbsp	olive oil
1 tbsp	lemon juice or cider vinegar
1 tsp	Dijon mustard
1 pinch	salt
1 pinch	pepper

1. Wash the leaves, then **dry them thoroughly** in a salad spinner or between clean tea towels. Wet leaves dilute the dressing and make it slide off.
2. Put the mustard, acid, salt and pepper in a jar. Add the oil and shake hard until thick and creamy.
3. Taste on a leaf, not off the spoon, and adjust.
4. Toss the leaves in just enough dressing to give a light coat, **just before serving**.

> DRESSINGS
>
> **Dressings:** make fresh dressings the day you want them, keep them covered in the fridge, and use within **2 days**. Don't leave garlic or herbs steeping in oil at room temperature: garlic in oil can grow the bacteria that cause botulism if kept warm or too long.

LEVEL 1 · PRACTICE

Tomato salad

15 minutes plus 10 minutes | 2 portions | salt and time as seasoning

With ripe tomatoes, nothing more is needed. The trick is salt, applied about 10 minutes ahead.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

3	ripe tomatoes in different shapes or colours (about 400 g)
½	small red onion, thinly sliced
2 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	red or white wine vinegar
1 handful	basil leaves
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut the tomatoes into wedges or thick slices with a sharp knife (a serrated one helps). Lay them on a plate.
2. Season with salt and leave for **10 minutes**. They give off juice and become sweeter and more flavourful.
3. Add the onion, oil, vinegar and pepper, and tear over the basil. Spoon the juice over the top.

LEVEL 2 · GRAIN

Couscous salad

25 minutes | 2 portions | a grain base with vegetables and a dressing

Grains soak up dressing, so you can dress them while still slightly warm. Couscous is the quickest.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

100 g	couscous (or bulgur wheat)
150 ml	boiling water or hot stock
½	cucumber, diced
2	tomatoes, diced
2	spring onions, sliced
1 handful	chopped parsley or mint
2 tbsp	olive oil
2 tbsp	lemon juice
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Put the couscous in a bowl, pour over the boiling water or stock, cover, and leave for **5 minutes**. Fluff with a fork.
2. Cool for 10 minutes. Mix the oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper and stir into the couscous.
3. Stir in the vegetables and herbs, then taste and adjust.

> **KEEPING IT**
>
> Eat on the day, or chill quickly and eat within 1 day. Cooked grains, such as rice and couscous, should not stand at room temperature for long.

LEVEL 3 · WARM

Warm roast vegetable salad

45 minutes | 2 portions | dressing warm vegetables, leaves just wilting

Warm vegetables absorb dressing better than cold ones, and slightly wilt the leaves. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	red pepper, in strips
1	courgette, in thick slices
1	red onion, in wedges
150 g	butternut squash, in 2 cm chunks
1 tbsp	oil
2 handfuls	rocket or spinach
2 tbsp	olive oil
1 tbsp	balsamic or cider vinegar
50 g	feta or goat's cheese (optional)

1. Toss the vegetables with the 1 tablespoon of oil, salt and pepper and roast on a large tray in a single layer for **30 to 35 minutes**, turning once.
2. Whisk the olive oil and vinegar with a pinch of salt.
3. Put the leaves in a large bowl. Tip the warm vegetables on top, pour over the dressing and toss.
4. Crumble over the cheese and serve at once.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Dressing ratio

How much oil?

1. Make three small dressings with the same lemon juice and mustard: 1 part oil to 1 part acid, 3 parts oil to 1 part, and 5 parts oil to 1 part.
2. Taste each on a leaf.

Look for: 1:1 is sharp, 3:1 is balanced, 5:1 is mellow and oily. Your own best ratio may differ with the acid.

EXPERIMENT

Dress early or late

Wilting.

1. Dress half a bowl of lettuce 30 minutes before eating. Dress the other half just before.

Look for: The early-dressed leaves are limp and dark; the late-dressed leaves are crisp.

EXPERIMENT

Soak the leaves

Reviving limp leaves.

1. Take two bunches of slightly limp lettuce. Soak one in cold water for 15 minutes; leave the other. Dry both well and compare.

Look for: Soaking brings back crispness to leaves that have lost water. It won't fix leaves that are slimy or rotten.

EXPERIMENT

Acid type

Four vinegars.

1. Make four dressings with the same oil, mustard and salt, but with lemon juice, cider vinegar, white wine vinegar and balsamic vinegar.
2. Taste each on the same leaf.

Look for: Notice sweetness, sharpness and aroma. Write down which one you would choose for which salad.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Green salad with vinaigrette				
Tomato salad				
Couscous salad				
Warm roast vegetable salad				
Dressing ratio				
Early vs late				
Soaking leaves				
Acid type				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Limp leaves	Dressed too early, or old leaves	Dress at the last moment; soak in cold water

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Dressing separates	No emulsifier, or not shaken	Add a little mustard; shake or whisk harder
Too sharp	Too much acid	Add oil or a pinch of sugar
Flat salad	Not enough salt or acid	Season; add lemon juice
Watery bowl	Wet leaves, or salted watery vegetables early	Dry leaves; salt cucumber and tomato just before serving
Soggy grain salad	Too much liquid	Drain grains; measure the water

SALAD SAFETY

Leaves and raw vegetables: wash everything that will be eaten raw, apart from packs labelled ready to eat (follow the pack). Dry leaves well, and use a separate board for salad and for raw meat and fish. Keep salads cold and don't leave them out for hours.

Dressings: make fresh dressings the day you want them, keep them covered in the fridge, and use within **2 days**. Don't leave garlic or herbs steeping in oil at room temperature: garlic in oil can grow the bacteria that cause botulism if kept warm or too long.

Knife safety: cut on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), and cut round or slippery vegetables on a flat face so they can't roll. A sharp knife is safer than a blunt one. Never catch a falling knife. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1 covers all of this.

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can dry and crisp leaves.
- ☐ I can make a vinaigrette from the 3:1 ratio and adjust it.
- ☐ I know when to dress different kinds of salad.
- ☐ I can build a grain salad and a warm salad.
- ☐ I store dressings and leftover salads safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 8 is Baking, Stuffing and Gratins: filled and baked vegetables.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Chapter 8 · Baking, Stuffing and Gratins

SKILL GOAL

Bake stuffed vegetables and gratins so the shell, filling and topping are all cooked through.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Stuffed vegetables and gratins look impressive but are really baking with a plan. The problem to solve is always the same: **the vegetable and its filling or sauce need to finish cooking at the same time**, and the middle has to be hot all the way through.

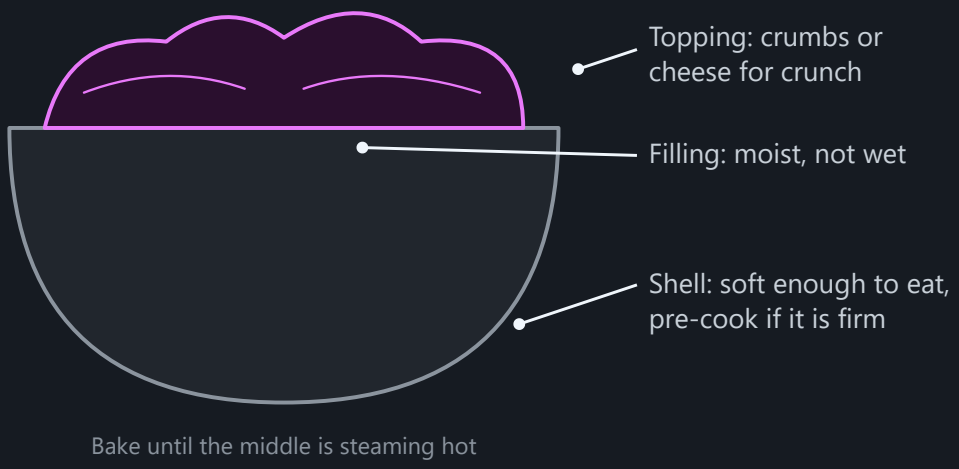


Figure 8. The three parts of a stuffed vegetable. The shell and the filling need to finish cooking at the same time.

Which vegetables to stuff

VEGETABLE	PREPARE	PRE-COOK?
Peppers	Halve lengthways, remove the seeds	Yes, 10 minutes in the oven or 3 minutes boiled
Courgettes, marrow	Halve and scoop out the flesh	Yes, 10 minutes (the flesh goes in the filling)
Aubergines	Halve, scoop out the flesh, leaving a thick shell	Yes, 20 minutes: they take longer
Tomatoes (large)	Cut off the top, scoop out the seeds	No: bake for 20 to 25 minutes
Onions, squash	Hollow out, or halve	Yes: they are dense
Mushrooms (large)	Remove the stalk	No: 15 to 20 minutes

The filling

- **Moist, not wet.** A filling that is too wet makes the shell soggy, but a dry filling is stodgy. A little sauce or oil holds it together.
- **Already cooked,** or at least things that cook in the time: soft vegetables, cooked grains, breadcrumbs, cheese, herbs, nuts.
- **Well seasoned,** because the shell is mild and the filling has to carry the flavour.
- **Cool before filling** if it contains rice or other cooked grains, so it doesn't sit warm for long.

The sauce for a gratin

A **white sauce** (butter and flour cooked together, then milk) is the base of cauliflower cheese and most gratins. Add the milk slowly while stirring, and simmer for a few minutes to lose the raw-flour taste. Cheese goes in off the heat, so it stays smooth.

When is it done?

- A knife slides into the vegetable with no resistance.
- The filling is **steaming hot in the middle**, and bubbling at the edges for a gratin.
- The top is golden. If it browns before the middle is hot, cover with foil.
- **Rest for 5 to 10 minutes** so that the filling sets and doesn't burn the mouth.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Stuffed peppers

50 minutes | 2 portions | pre-cooking the shell and filling the boat

Peppers are the easiest stuffed vegetable: they hold their shape and are quick to prepare. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	large peppers, halved lengthways and deseeded
150 g	cooked couscous or cooked rice (cooled)
1	small onion, finely chopped
1 tbsp	oil
1	tomato, diced
50 g	grated cheese
1 tbsp	chopped herbs (parsley, basil)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Roast the pepper halves, cut side up, on a tray with a little oil for **10 minutes** to start softening them.
2. Meanwhile, fry the onion in the oil for 5 minutes until soft. Stir in the grain, tomato, herbs, half the cheese, salt and pepper.
3. Spoon the filling into the pepper halves, mounding it slightly. Top with the rest of the cheese.
4. Bake for **20 to 25 minutes**, until the peppers are tender and the filling is steaming hot in the middle, with the top golden.

> RICE AND GRAINS
>
> **Cooked rice and grains:** cool cooked rice quickly (ideally within 1 hour), keep it in the fridge, eat within 1 day, and reheat only once until steaming hot all the way through. Cooked rice can carry spores of a bacterium that survive cooking and multiply at room temperature, so don't leave it standing out.

LEVEL 2 · SCOOP AND FILL

Stuffed courgettes (or aubergines)

55 minutes | 2 portions | scooping the shell and using the flesh in the filling

Courgettes are watery. Scooping out the middle and cooking it down in the pan keeps the filling from being soggy. Aubergines work the same way, but need longer.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	medium courgettes
1	small onion, finely chopped
1	garlic clove, chopped
1 tbsp	oil
40 g	breadcrumbs
40 g	grated cheese or feta
1 tbsp	chopped herbs
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Halve the courgettes lengthways and scoop out the flesh, leaving a shell about 1 cm thick. Chop the flesh. Place the shells on a tray and bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for **10 minutes** (aubergines: 20 minutes).
2. Fry the onion in the oil for 5 minutes, add the garlic and chopped flesh and cook for 5 to 8 minutes until the liquid has gone.
3. Off the heat, stir in half the breadcrumbs and cheese, herbs, salt and pepper. Fill the shells and top with the remaining crumbs and cheese.
4. Bake for **20 to 25 minutes** until golden and the shells are tender.

LEVEL 2 · LAYERED

Vegetable tian (a layered bake)

1 hour 15 minutes | 3 portions | layering, and baking until soft all the way through

A tian is just thin slices of vegetables arranged in rows and baked until tender. Ratatouille is the stewed version. Use a shallow baking dish.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	courgette, thinly sliced
1	aubergine, thinly sliced
3	tomatoes, thinly sliced
1	onion, finely sliced
2	garlic cloves, chopped
3 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	dried thyme or herbes de Provence
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil, soften the onion and garlic for 8 minutes, and spread on the bottom of the dish.
2. Overlap the vegetable slices in rows, standing them on their edges and alternating, so they fill the dish tightly.
3. Drizzle with the remaining oil, scatter with thyme, salt and pepper, and cover with foil or baking paper.
4. Bake at 190°C (170°C fan) for **35 minutes** covered, then **15 to 20 minutes** uncovered until tender and the edges are browned.

> **SLICE EVENLY**
>
> Slices of the same thickness (about 3 mm) cook together. A sharp knife works, and a mandolin is quicker, with the guard on.

LEVEL 3 · SAUCE

Cheesy vegetable gratin

55 minutes | 3 portions | making a cheese sauce and finishing in the oven

A gratin is a dish topped with sauce and crumbs, baked until golden. Cook the vegetables first so they only need to brown. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	small cauliflower, in florets
2	leeks, sliced thickly
25 g	butter
25 g	plain flour
300 ml	milk
80 g	strong cheese, grated
1 tsp	mustard (optional)
2 tbsp	breadcrumbs
1 pinch	salt, pepper and nutmeg

1. Boil the cauliflower and leeks in salted water for **5 to 6 minutes**, until nearly tender. Drain well and tip into a baking dish.
2. Melt the butter, stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute. Add the milk a little at a time, stirring to avoid lumps, and simmer for 3 to 4 minutes until thick.
3. Off the heat, stir in most of the cheese, mustard, salt, pepper and nutmeg. Pour over the vegetables.
4. Scatter with the crumbs and remaining cheese and bake for **20 to 25 minutes** until bubbling and golden.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Pre-cooked or raw shell

Peppers.

1. Fill four pepper halves with the same filling. Bake two straight away, and bake two after 10 minutes of pre-roasting. Bake all for the same total time.

Look for: The raw shells are firmer, sometimes underdone; the pre-roasted shells are tender and sweet. Note the difference in time.

EXPERIMENT

Wet or dry filling

Soggy test.

1. Fill two courgette shells: one with a filling that has been cooked down until dry, and one with the raw chopped flesh stirred in.

Look for: The raw filling releases water and leaves the shell sitting in liquid. The cooked-down filling holds together.

EXPERIMENT

Covered or uncovered

Tian or gratin.

1. Bake two small dishes of the tian: one under foil for the whole time, one uncovered.

Look for: Covered vegetables steam and stay soft and pale; uncovered ones brown and dry out. Many recipes use both.

EXPERIMENT

Rest or serve at once

The 10-minute pause.

1. Cut into one portion of gratin straight from the oven. Leave another for 10 minutes, then cut.

Look for: The rested gratin holds its shape and is not scalding hot; the unrested one runs and burns the mouth.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Stuffed peppers				
Stuffed courgettes				
Vegetable tian				
Cheesy vegetable gratin				
Pre-cooked vs raw shell				
Wet vs dry filling				
Covered vs uncovered				
Rested vs not				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Hard shell, hot filling	Shell not pre-cooked	Pre-roast firm vegetables first

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Soggy bottom	Wet filling or watery vegetable	Cook the filling down; drain water from the dish
Burnt top, cold middle	Oven too hot, or dish too deep	Cover with foil; lower the heat; bake longer
Lumpy sauce	Milk added too quickly	Whisk hard; sieve if needed; add milk gradually next time
Bland filling	Under-seasoned	Taste the filling before filling the shells
Grainy cheese sauce	Boiled after adding the cheese	Add cheese off the heat

HOT DISHES AND FOOD SAFETY

Hot oven and trays: use dry oven gloves (a damp one conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little rather than reaching in, and put hot trays on a heatproof surface. Open the door and step back, because the steam is hot.

Cooked rice and grains: cool cooked rice quickly (ideally within 1 hour), keep it in the fridge, eat within 1 day, and reheat only once until steaming hot all the way through. Cooked rice can carry spores of a bacterium that survive cooking and multiply at room temperature, so don't leave it standing out.

If you add meat: any minced meat or sausage in a filling must be cooked right through to steaming hot, with no pink and clear juices (70°C for 2 minutes), and the meat added raw must be cooked in the filling, not left in the stuffing to warm slowly.

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I know which vegetables to pre-cook.

☐ I can make a moist, well-seasoned filling.

☐ I can make a simple cheese sauce.

☐ I can tell when a stuffed vegetable or gratin is cooked through.

☐ I rest bakes before serving.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 9 is Putting It Together: planning vegetables for a week and for guests.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1

Chapter 9 · Putting It Together

SKILL GOAL

Plan vegetable meals for a week and for guests, choosing the right method for each dish.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

The last chapter puts the methods together. You can steam, boil, roast, stir-fry, sauté, make soup, dress a salad and bake a gratin. Cooking for yourself and for guests is mostly **planning**: choosing which methods to use, in which order, and how to eat plenty of vegetables without it feeling like effort.

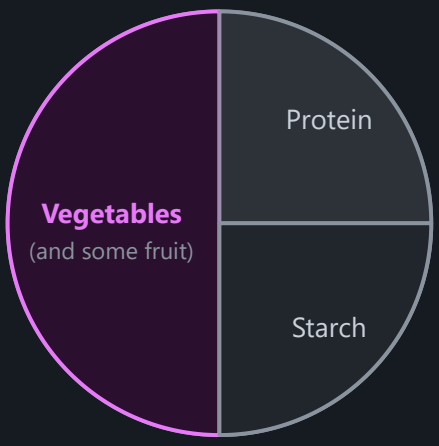
Choosing a method

METHOD	BEST FOR	ROUGHLY HOW LONG	TIP
Steam or boil	Greens, broccoli, beans, carrots	3 to 8 minutes	Greens in boiling water, roots start cold
Roast	Roots, squash, brassicas, peppers, tomatoes	20 to 45 minutes	Space them out, don't crowd
Stir-fry	Thin-sliced mixed vegetables, greens	3 to 6 minutes	Hot pan, prepare first
Sauté or pan-fry	Mushrooms, courgettes, cabbage, leeks, greens	5 to 15 minutes	One layer, don't stir too much
Soup	Anything soft, or going soft	30 to 50 minutes	Sweat the onion, season at the end
Raw or salad	Leaves, cucumbers, tomatoes, radishes, young vegetables	10 minutes	Dry leaves, dress late

METHOD	BEST FOR	ROUGHLY HOW LONG	TIP
Bake or stuff	Peppers, courgettes, aubergines, whole dishes	40 to 75 minutes	Pre-cook shells, rest before serving

Planning for five a day

A **portion is 80 g** (the NHS 5 A Day guide), and potatoes don't count. It is easier than it sounds when vegetables are part of every meal.



A simple rule of thumb: about half the plate is vegetables, of different colours.

It is a guide, not an official target.
Count portions across the whole day.

Figure 9. A plate rule of thumb for a main meal. It is a guide for planning, not a rule.

MEAL	IDEAS	ROUGHLY HOW MANY PORTIONS
Breakfast	Sliced tomato or mushrooms with eggs or toast; spinach in an omelette; a banana or berries on porridge	1
Lunch	Soup and salad; a tray-bake box; a frittata slice with leaves; sandwich with salad	1 to 2
Dinner	Half the plate of vegetables: a stir-fry, roast tray or stuffed vegetable with a grain	2 to 3
Snacks	Carrot or pepper sticks and hummus; a piece of fruit	1

A week plan doesn't need to be fancy. Choose two or three vegetables to buy as the base (for example carrots, a cabbage, a bag of spinach), then cook them in different ways on different

days: roast on Monday, stir-fry on Wednesday, soup on Friday. Fresh, frozen and tinned all count.

Cooking for guests

- **Choose dishes that don't compete for the hob.** One roast, one boiled and one raw dish work well together.
- **Make ahead** what you can: the dressing, the soup, the gratin (bake just before), the tray of roast vegetables (reheat).
- **Ask about diets and allergies** in advance, including nuts, dairy, gluten and eggs.
- **Season at the end,** and taste everything before it goes to the table.
- **Serve hot food hot and cold food cold.** Don't leave dishes out for more than 2 hours.

Your skills table

Fill in what you have learned in this course, in your own words, as a quick reference for yourself.

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Steaming and boiling: my best vegetable and timing				
Roasting: my oven temperature and tray				
Stir-frying: my pan and oil				
Sautéing: my favourite vegetable to brown				
Soup: my house soup				
Salad: my house dressing ratio				
Baking: my best stuffed or baked dish				

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

A vegetarian dinner with three vegetable dishes

50 minutes | 2 portions | timing three dishes so they are ready together

Roast, boil and raw: three methods from this course on one plate. The longest dish goes on first. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	butternut squash or carrots, in wedges or batons
1 tbsp	oil
200 g	greens (cabbage, spring greens or broccoli)
10 g	butter
2	tomatoes, sliced
½	small red onion, finely sliced
1 tsp	olive oil and vinegar for the salad
100 g	halloumi (or 2 Lion eggs, fried or poached)

1. **At 0 minutes:** toss the squash with the oil, salt and pepper and roast on a tray, turning once. It needs **35 to 40 minutes**.
2. **At 20 minutes:** slice the tomatoes and onion, salt the tomatoes, and leave for 10 minutes. Wash and shred the greens.
3. **At 30 minutes:** boil the greens in salted water for 3 to 5 minutes, drain well, and toss in the butter. Dress the tomatoes.
4. **At 35 minutes:** fry the halloumi for 1 to 2 minutes a side until golden (or fry or poach the egg until the white is set). Serve everything together.

> **WRITE A RUNNING ORDER**
>
> Work backwards from when you want to eat. The slowest dish starts first, and the quick ones fit around it.

LEVEL 2 · MAKE AHEAD

Make-ahead vegetable tray bake

50 minutes | 4 portions | one tray, several lunches

A big tray of roasted vegetables gives you lunches and dinners for 2 days. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	red onion, in wedges
2	peppers, in chunks
2	courgettes, in thick slices
200 g	cherry tomatoes
200 g	butternut squash, in 2 cm chunks
2 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	dried oregano
100 g	feta cheese
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut the squash into small chunks (it is the slowest). Toss it with a third of the oil and roast for **10 minutes**.
2. Toss the other vegetables with the rest of the oil, oregano, salt and pepper, and add them to the tray in a single layer (use two trays if needed).
3. Roast for **25 to 30 minutes**, turning once, then crumble over the feta and return for 5 minutes.
4. Eat some hot. Cool the rest quickly, divide into boxes, and chill within 1 to 2 hours. Eat within **2 days**, reheated until steaming hot, or cold in a salad.

> LEFTOVERS
>
> **Leftovers:** cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

LEVEL 3 · FLEXIBLE

Vegetable frittata

25 minutes | 2 to 3 portions | using up vegetables, set through

Frittata is a way to turn almost any cooked vegetables into a meal that works hot or cold. Use a pan that can go under the grill, or finish it in the oven.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

4	Lion-marked eggs
1	small onion, sliced
1	courgette, grated or diced
100 g	spinach
50 g	cheese, grated
1 tbsp	oil
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Soften the onion in the oil for 5 minutes. Add the courgette and cook for 3 to 4 minutes, then the spinach until wilted. Squeeze or drain off any liquid.
2. Beat the eggs with salt, pepper and most of the cheese and pour over the vegetables. Cook on a low heat for **5 to 6 minutes**, until the edges are set.
3. Finish under a hot grill for 3 to 5 minutes (or in a 180°C oven for 10 minutes) until it is **completely set** and golden, with no runny egg.
4. Cool and chill any leftovers quickly; eat within 2 days, hot or cold.

> **EGG**
>
> Lion-marked eggs can be served runny for most people, but a frittata to be kept or taken to work should be cooked until completely set. For anyone in a higher-risk group, cook eggs until solid: pregnant women, children under 5, people aged 65 and over, and anyone with a weakened immune system.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Seasonal swap

Same method, different vegetable.

1. Choose one recipe from the course (a roast tray, a stir-fry or a soup). Make it with vegetables that are in season now instead of the ones the recipe lists.

Look for: The method works with a whole family of vegetables. Write down what you used, how long it took, and whether you would do it again.

EXPERIMENT

A timed session

Three dishes in 45 minutes.

1. Pick three dishes (for example roast squash, buttered greens and a tomato salad). Write a running order with times. Cook them and note when each was ready.

Look for: The common mistakes are the slow dish started too late and the quick dish ready too soon. Adjust the plan and try again.

EXPERIMENT

Your own vegetable dish

Make it yours.

1. Choose one vegetable you like. Decide the method, the seasoning and one other ingredient. Cook it, taste it, and change one thing.

Look for: Write the recipe in your own words in the table above: quantities, times, and what you would change.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Vegetarian dinner				
Make-ahead tray bake				
Vegetable frittata				
Seasonal swap				
Timed session				
My own vegetable dish				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Everything ready at different times	No running order	Write one: slowest first, working backwards
Too many vegetables go off	Over-buying	Plan 3 vegetables a week; freeze extra; make soup
Family doesn't like vegetables	Boiled and bland	Roast, add cheese or sauce; hide in soups and sauces; one new vegetable at a time
Meals take too long	Too many dishes	Use one tray or one pan; batch cook at the weekend
Leftovers taste dull	Reheated more than once, or stale	Eat within 2 days; reheat once; add fresh herbs or lemon

FOOD SAFETY

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

Knife safety: cut on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), and cut round or slippery vegetables on a flat face so they can't roll. A sharp knife is safer than a blunt one. Never catch a falling knife. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1 covers all of this.

Hot oven and trays: use dry oven gloves (a damp one conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little rather than reaching in, and put hot trays on a heatproof surface. Open the door and step back, because the steam is hot.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can pick the right method for a vegetable.
- ☐ I can write a running order for three dishes.
- ☐ I can plan a day of vegetables to reach five portions.
- ☐ I know how to store and reheat leftovers safely.
- ☐ I have my own house vegetable dish.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1 is complete. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, Potatoes 1 and 2 and the rest of the series are good companions.