

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Flavour, fire and preserving

9 Chapters | Philip Osztromok | Generated with Claude

COOKING SKILLS: VEGETABLES 2

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Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Chapter 1 · Spices and Flavour Bases

SKILL GOAL

Use spices and slow-cooked bases to build flavour into vegetable dishes.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Vegetables 1 taught the methods. This course is about **flavour**: how spices, aromatics and bases turn plain vegetables into something you'll want to eat again. The same few ideas appear in cuisines all over the world: toasting spices, cooking aromatics slowly, and building a sauce on a base.

Whole or ground?

	WHOLE SPICES	GROUND SPICES
Flavour	Fuller, more aromatic when toasted or ground fresh	Convenient, but fade faster
Shelf life	About 1 to 2 years if kept cool, dark and airtight	About 6 months to a year; replace when the smell has faded
Use	Toasted dry or in hot oil (tarka); ground in a mortar or coffee grinder	Added to food, or briefly fried in oil
Typical examples	Cumin, coriander, mustard and fennel seeds, cardamom pods, cloves	Turmeric, paprika, chilli powder, ground cumin and coriander

Waking spices up

- **Toast whole spices dry:** put them in a dry pan over a medium heat for **30 to 60 seconds**, shaking, until they smell strongly. Take them off at once. Burnt spices are bitter.

- **Fry in oil:** spices release their flavour into fat, which is why many recipes fry ground spices in oil for 30 to 60 seconds. Keep the heat moderate and add a splash of water if they catch.
- **Tarka:** whole spices sizzled in hot oil and poured over a finished dish, like a flavoured dressing.
- **Grind fresh** in a pestle and mortar or spice grinder for the strongest flavour.
- **Add at the right time:** ground spices early to cook out their raw edge; delicate herbs and garam masala near the end.

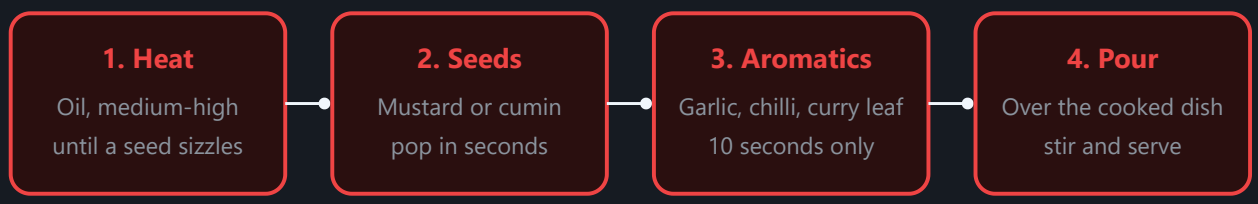


Figure 1. A tarka (also called tadka or tempering) is a spiced oil poured over a finished dish. It takes about a minute and changes everything.

Flavour bases

BASE	FROM	WHAT IT IS	USE IT FOR
Soffritto	Italy	Onion, carrot and celery cooked slowly in oil	Pasta sauces, soups, braises, risotto
Sofrito	Spain	Onion, pepper, garlic and tomato in oil, cooked until jammy	Stews, rice dishes, sauces
Mirepoix	France	Onion, carrot and celery (as soffritto but in butter), often not browned	Stocks, soups, sauces
Masala base	India	Onions browned with garlic, ginger, spices and tomato	Curries and dals
Holy trinity	Louisiana	Onion, green pepper and celery	Gumbo, jambalaya

The common thread: **aromatics cooked slowly in fat until they soften and sweeten**. Rush them and you get raw, sharp flavours.

Fresh, jarred or powder?

Fresh garlic and ginger taste brighter and cleaner than jars. Jarred pastes are handy, but they are often salty or preserved with acid. Garlic powder and ginger powder are different in character, not a direct swap. For a curry, fresh is worth the small effort.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Spiced roast cauliflower

35 minutes | 2 portions | coating vegetables in ground spices

The easiest way to start using spices: roast a vegetable you already know with a spice mix. Set the oven to 220°C (200°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

½	cauliflower, in florets
1 tbsp	oil
1 tsp	ground cumin
1 tsp	ground coriander
½ tsp	turmeric
½ tsp	smoked paprika
1 pinch	salt
2 tbsp	plain yoghurt, to serve
1 tsp	lemon juice

1. Mix the oil with the spices and salt in a large bowl to make a paste. Add the cauliflower and toss until every floret is coated.
2. Spread on a tray in a single layer with space between pieces (see Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 3).
3. Roast for **20 to 25 minutes**, turning once, until tender with browned edges. The spices should smell toasted, not burnt: turn the oven down if the edges darken too fast.
4. Serve with the yoghurt and a squeeze of lemon.

> **TURMERIC STAINS**
>
> Turmeric turns worktops, wooden spoons and plastic boxes yellow. Use a bowl you don't mind, and wash up soon.

LEVEL 2 · TARKA

Tarka carrots

25 minutes | 2 portions | tempering whole spices in hot oil

Boil or steam the carrots until just tender (see Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 2), then pour a tarka over them. The spice oil is made in a minute and brings the dish to life.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	carrots, sliced or in batons
1 tbsp	oil
1 tsp	black or brown mustard seeds
1 tsp	cumin seeds
1	garlic clove, finely sliced
1	small green chilli, sliced (optional)
8	curry leaves (optional)
1 pinch	salt
1 tsp	lemon juice

1. Cook the carrots in boiling salted water for **5 to 8 minutes** until just tender. Drain and keep warm.
2. Heat the oil in a small pan over a medium-high heat. Add the mustard seeds and keep the lid close. When they begin to pop (about 30 seconds), add the cumin seeds.
3. After **10 seconds**, add the garlic, chilli and curry leaves. Stir for 10 seconds, until fragrant but not browned.
4. Pour the hot spiced oil over the carrots, add the lemon juice and toss.

> **HOT OIL AND CHILLIES**
>
> **Spitting seeds:** mustard seeds pop and jump out of hot oil. Keep a lid to hand and hold it between you and the pan, and use a pan with high sides. Never leave hot oil unattended, and never put water on an oil fire (turn off the heat and cover with a lid or damp cloth).
>
> **Chillies:** the heat is in the seeds and pith. Wear gloves or wash your hands thoroughly with soap

> after cutting chillies, and don't touch your eyes. Start with less than you think and add more at the end. Dairy (yoghurt, milk) soothes a mouth on fire better than water.

LEVEL 2 · BASES

Two flavour bases: soffritto and sofrito

40 minutes | 4 portions of each base (makes about 150 g of each) | slow cooking an aromatic base

A soffritto (Italian: onion, carrot, celery) and a sofrito (Spanish: onion, pepper, garlic, tomato) are the foundation of countless sauces, soups and stews. The skill is patience: cook slowly until soft and sweet, never browned.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	onion, finely diced
1	carrot, finely diced
1	celery stick, finely diced
2 tbsp	olive oil
1 pinch	salt
1	red or green pepper, finely diced
2	garlic cloves, chopped
2	ripe tomatoes, grated or chopped
1 tsp	smoked paprika

1. **Soffritto:** warm 1 tablespoon of oil in a pan over a low heat. Add the onion, carrot, celery and a pinch of salt and cook for **15 to 20 minutes**, stirring now and then, until very soft and sweet.
2. **Sofrito:** in a second pan, warm 1 tablespoon of oil and cook the onion and pepper over a low heat for **15 minutes**. Add the garlic and paprika for 1 minute, then the tomatoes. Cook for 10 to 15 minutes, until thick and jammy.
3. Use straight away as the start of a soup, stew or pasta sauce. Cool the rest quickly, cover and refrigerate for up to **2 days**, or freeze in portions.

> **FREEZE IN ICE-CUBE TRAYS**
>
> Frozen cubes of soffritto or sofrito are a quick way to start a meal on a busy night.

LEVEL 3 · MASALA

Curry base (masala)

50 minutes | 6 portions (makes about 600 g)

browning onions, blooming spices and cooking down tomatoes

The basis of most curries. Make a large batch and freeze it: with a spoon or two and some vegetables you have dinner in 20 minutes.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

2	large onions, finely chopped
3 tbsp	oil
4	garlic cloves, grated
3 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
1 tsp	cumin seeds
2 tsp	ground coriander
1 tsp	turmeric
1 tsp	garam masala
1 tin	400 g tin of chopped tomatoes
1	green chilli, chopped (optional)
1 tsp	salt

1. Warm the oil in a large pan over a medium heat. Add the cumin seeds for 20 seconds, then the onions with the salt. Cook for **15 to 20 minutes**, stirring often, until deep golden brown.
2. Add the garlic, ginger and chilli and cook for 2 minutes. Add the ground spices and cook for **1 minute**, stirring, so they toast and release their oils. Add a splash of water if they stick.
3. Add the tomatoes. Simmer for **15 to 20 minutes**, stirring, until the oil separates from the sauce and it has thickened to a paste.
4. Cool quickly, divide into portions, and keep in the fridge for up to **2 days** or freeze.

ALLERGENS AND CHILLIES

Allergens: shop-bought curry powders, pastes and stock cubes can contain mustard, celery, gluten, nuts or shrimp paste. Always read the label if anyone you are cooking for has an allergy.

Chillies: the heat is in the seeds and pith. Wear gloves or wash your hands thoroughly with soap after cutting chillies, and don't touch your eyes. Start with less than you think and add more at the end. Dairy (yoghurt, milk) soothes a mouth on fire better than water.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Whole or ground cumin

Which is stronger?

1. Toast 1 teaspoon of cumin seeds in a dry pan and grind them. Make two small batches of the roast cauliflower: one with your freshly ground cumin and one with shop-bought ground cumin.
2. Taste them side by side.

Look for: Freshly ground cumin tends to be fuller and more fragrant. If your ground cumin has been in the cupboard for over a year, the difference can be dramatic.

EXPERIMENT

Toasted or raw

Spice in the pan.

1. Stir ½ teaspoon of ground coriander into one half of some warm yoghurt. Fry ½ teaspoon in a little oil for 30 seconds and stir it into the other half.
2. Taste both.

Look for: The raw spice tastes dusty and a little raw; the cooked spice is rounder and warmer.

EXPERIMENT

Early or late

When to add the spice.

1. Make two small portions of the curry base. Add the ground spices at the start, with the onions, in one. Add them after the onions are browned, in the other.

Look for: Spices added too early can catch and turn bitter; added after the onions they keep their fragrance. Note which tastes better.

EXPERIMENT

Fresh or jarred ginger and garlic

A side-by-side taste.

1. Make two small batches of tarka carrots, one with fresh garlic and the other with jarred garlic paste. Do the same with fresh and jarred ginger in a second round if you like.

Look for: Fresh tastes brighter and sharper; jarred is milder, saltier and sometimes slightly sour.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Spiced roast cauliflower				
Tarka carrots				
Soffritto and sofrito				
Curry base				
Whole vs ground cumin				
Toasted vs raw				
Early vs late				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Fresh vs jarred				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Bitter spices	Burnt in a hot, dry pan or oil	Lower the heat; add a splash of water; start again if black
Raw, dusty taste	Spices not cooked	Fry them in oil for 30 to 60 seconds
Bland dish	Old spices or not enough salt	Replace spices; season at the end
Burnt garlic	Added too soon to hot oil	Add late and for seconds only
Onions pale and watery	Heat too low or pan crowded	Turn up the heat and let the water cook off
Too hot	Too much chilli	Add yoghurt, coconut milk or a little sugar; serve with rice

HOT OIL, CHILLIES AND STORAGE

Spitting seeds: mustard seeds pop and jump out of hot oil. Keep a lid to hand and hold it between you and the pan, and use a pan with high sides. Never leave hot oil unattended, and never put water on an oil fire (turn off the heat and cover with a lid or damp cloth).

Chillies: the heat is in the seeds and pith. Wear gloves or wash your hands thoroughly with soap after cutting chillies, and don't touch your eyes. Start with less than you think and add more at the end. Dairy (yoghurt, milk) soothes a mouth on fire better than water.

Allergens: shop-bought curry powders, pastes and stock cubes can contain mustard, celery, gluten, nuts or shrimp paste. Always read the label if anyone you are cooking for has an allergy.

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 toast whole spices without burning them.
- ☐ I can make a tarka and pour it over a dish.
- ☐ I can cook an aromatic base slowly until sweet.
- ☐ I know when to add ground spices and when to add fresh ones.
- ☐ I can store and reuse flavour bases safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 2 is Vegetable Curries and Stews: building a sauce and balancing heat, sweetness, salt and acid.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Chapter 2 · Vegetable Curries and Stews

SKILL GOAL

Build a vegetable curry or stew from a base, spices and liquid, and balance it at the end.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A curry or stew is a sauce with vegetables cooked in it. The difference between a good one and a flat one is rarely the recipe: it is how you **build the sauce, cook the vegetables in the right order, and balance the flavour at the end**.

The structure

1. **Base:** onion (and garlic and ginger) cooked in oil, slowly if you want sweetness, until golden if you want depth.
2. **Spices or paste:** fried for 1 to 2 minutes so they release their flavour.
3. **Liquid:** tomato, coconut milk, stock, yoghurt or a mix.
4. **Vegetables, in order:** dense ones first (potato, sweet potato, squash, carrot, cauliflower stalks), then medium (pepper, beans, aubergine), then quick (courgette, spinach, peas, herbs).
5. **Balance at the end:** salt, acid, sweetness and heat.

Choosing a sauce base

BASE	CHARACTER	GOOD WITH
Onion, tomato and spices	Tangy, rich, classic	Cauliflower, potato, spinach, aubergine
Coconut milk	Creamy, sweet, mellow	Sweet potato, squash, green beans, courgette
Yoghurt or cream	Mild, rich, cooling	Spinach, paneer, potatoes (stir in at the end, off the boil)
Stock and herbs	Light, savoury	Stews and braises

Balancing

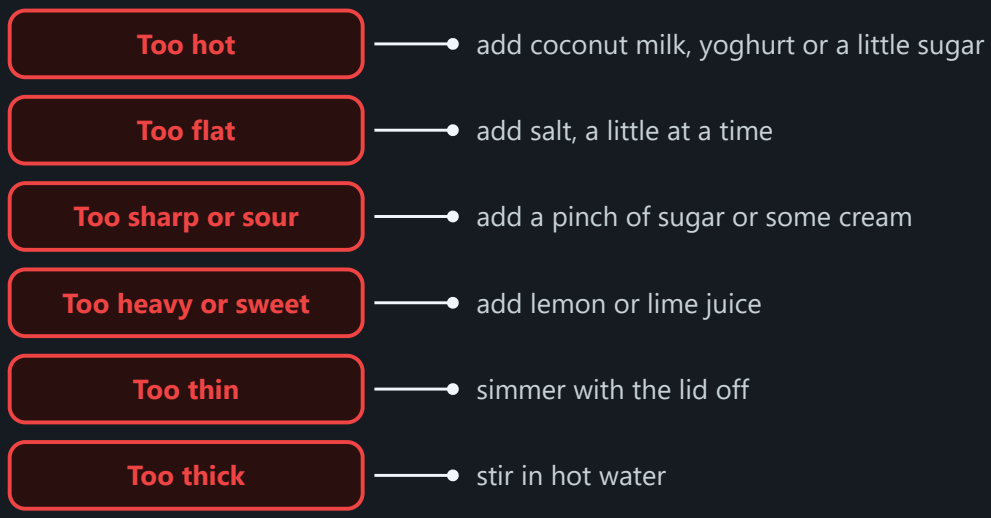


Figure 2. Taste at the end and fix one thing at a time. Most curries are rescued by salt, a little acid or a little sweetness.

Taste at the end, adjust one thing at a time, and taste again. Salt lifts all the flavours; acid (lime, lemon, tamarind, vinegar) brightens; a little sugar rounds off sharpness.

Heat

The heat comes from chilli and from black pepper and ginger. **Add less than you think,** because you can add heat at the end but cannot take it out. Serve something cooling with it: yoghurt, cucumber, rice or bread.

Curry stays better the next day

Many curries improve overnight as the flavours blend. Cool them within 1 to 2 hours, refrigerate and eat within 2 days, and reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. Don't leave rice out: see the box.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Aloo gobi (potato and cauliflower)

40 minutes | 3 portions | a dry curry, cooked slowly in its own steam

A dry curry: little sauce, so the vegetables are coated and cooked in spiced oil and a splash of water. It uses the spice bases from Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 1.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

2	medium potatoes, in 2 cm chunks
½	cauliflower, in small florets
1 tbsp	oil
1 tsp	cumin seeds
1	small onion, chopped
1 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
2	garlic cloves, grated
1 tsp	turmeric
1 tsp	ground coriander
1	tomato, chopped
1 tsp	garam masala
1 handful	chopped coriander leaves
1 tsp	salt

1. Heat the oil in a wide pan with a lid over a medium heat. Add the cumin seeds for 20 seconds, then the onion and a pinch of salt. Cook for **8 minutes** until soft and golden.
2. Add the ginger and garlic for 1 minute, then the turmeric and coriander for 30 seconds, stirring. Add the tomato and cook for 3 minutes.
3. Add the potatoes and 3 tablespoons of water, cover and cook on a low heat for **10 minutes**. Add the cauliflower, stir, cover and cook for **10 to 12 minutes more**, stirring now and then, until both are tender.
4. Stir in the garam masala and the rest of the salt, and scatter with coriander.

RICE AND ALLERGENS

Rice with curry: cook rice as in Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 2. Cooked rice that is left at room temperature can make you ill, so cool leftovers within 1 hour, keep them in the fridge, eat within 1 day, and reheat only once until steaming hot all the way through.

Allergens: curry pastes and powders, stock cubes and coconut products can contain mustard, celery, gluten, nuts or shrimp paste. Many Thai curry pastes contain shrimp paste, so check the label for a vegetarian one. Paneer and cream are dairy.

LEVEL 2 · PURÉE

Saag paneer (spinach and paneer)

35 minutes | 2 portions | wilting and blending greens into a sauce

Spinach cooks down to almost nothing and becomes the sauce. The paneer (or tofu) is browned first so it keeps its shape.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	fresh spinach (or 150 g frozen)
200 g	paneer, in 2 cm cubes (or firm tofu)
1 tbsp	oil
1	small onion, chopped
2	garlic cloves, grated
1 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
1 tsp	ground cumin
½ tsp	turmeric
1	green chilli, chopped (optional)
2 tbsp	single cream or plain yoghurt
1 pinch	salt

1. Wash the spinach. Wilt it in a large pan with just the water clinging to its leaves for 2 to 3 minutes. Drain, press out the water and blend or chop finely.
2. Heat half the oil in a pan and fry the paneer cubes for 2 to 3 minutes a side until golden. Lift out. (Tofu: press it first.)
3. Add the rest of the oil and soften the onion for 8 minutes. Add the garlic, ginger, chilli, cumin and turmeric for 1 minute.
4. Stir in the spinach and a splash of water, simmer for **5 minutes**, add the paneer and cream, and season. Heat through gently.

CHILLIES

> **Chillies:** wear gloves or wash your hands thoroughly with soap after cutting chillies, and don't touch your eyes. Start with less than you think and add more at the end. Dairy (yoghurt, milk) soothes a mouth on fire better than water.

LEVEL 2 · COCONUT

Coconut vegetable curry

40 minutes | 3 portions | adding vegetables in the order they cook

A forgiving, family-friendly curry. The order matters: dense vegetables first, quick ones last.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	small sweet potato or squash, in 2 cm chunks
1	pepper, in strips
100 g	green beans, halved
1	courgette, in chunks
1 tbsp	oil
1	onion, sliced
2 tbsp	medium curry paste (check it is vegetarian)
1 tin	400 ml tin of coconut milk
100 ml	water or vegetable stock
1 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	lime juice
1 handful	coriander or basil leaves

1. Fry the onion in the oil for 6 to 8 minutes. Add the curry paste and cook for **1 to 2 minutes**, stirring, until fragrant.
2. Add the coconut milk, water and sweet potato. Bring to a gentle boil and simmer for **10 minutes**.
3. Add the pepper and beans and simmer for **5 minutes**, then the courgette for **3 to 4 minutes**, until everything is tender.
4. Taste: add sugar, lime juice and salt until balanced (see the diagram). Scatter with herbs.

> **ALLERGENS**
>
> **Allergens:** curry pastes and powders, stock cubes and coconut products can contain mustard, celery, gluten, nuts or shrimp paste. Many Thai curry pastes contain shrimp paste, so check the

> label for a vegetarian one. Paneer and cream are dairy.

LEVEL 3 · PASTE

Thai-style green curry

35 minutes | 3 portions | frying the paste, then balancing salt, sweet, sour and heat

Thai curries balance four tastes at once. Fry the paste in the thick top of the coconut milk first so it releases its aroma.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	small aubergine, in 2 cm chunks
100 g	green beans, halved
1	courgette, sliced
1 handful	baby corn or bamboo shoots (optional)
1 tbsp	oil
2 tbsp	green curry paste (vegetarian)
1 tin	400 ml tin of coconut milk
100 ml	water
1 tbsp	soy sauce
1 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	lime juice
1 handful	Thai basil or basil leaves

1. Open the tin without shaking and spoon the thick cream from the top into a hot pan with the oil. Fry the paste in it for **2 minutes**, stirring, until the oil starts to separate.
2. Add the rest of the coconut milk, water and aubergine. Simmer gently for **8 minutes**, then add the beans, courgette and corn for **4 to 5 minutes**.
3. Season with soy sauce (instead of fish sauce), sugar and lime juice. Taste and adjust.
4. Stir in the basil just before serving.

> **SHRIMP PASTE AND HEAT**
>
> **Check the paste:** traditional curry pastes contain shrimp paste, so buy one labelled vegetarian or vegan. Pastes vary a lot in heat, so start with 1 tablespoon and add more at the end.

> **Chillies:** wear gloves or wash your hands thoroughly with soap after cutting chillies, and don't touch your eyes. Start with less than you think and add more at the end. Dairy (yoghurt, milk) soothes a mouth on fire better than water.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Simmer time

Short or long.

1. Cook two small batches of the coconut curry: one for 10 minutes after the coconut milk goes in, one for 25 minutes.

Look for: The longer simmer is thicker and mellower, but the vegetables are softer, and the colours duller. Decide where your preference lies.

EXPERIMENT

Coconut or tomato

Two bases, same vegetables.

1. Make half the coconut curry recipe, and half again with a tin of tomatoes instead of the coconut milk.

Look for: The coconut version is creamy and sweet; the tomato version is tangier and sharper. Notice how the spices taste different in each.

EXPERIMENT

Acid at the end

Before and after.

1. Take a spoonful of finished curry and taste it. Add ¼ teaspoon of lime juice and taste again.

Look for: A little acid wakes everything up. A lot makes it sour: add a drop at a time.

EXPERIMENT

Heat levels

More and less.

1. Make the green curry with 1, 2 and 3 teaspoons of curry paste in small separate pans, or taste the same curry with 0, 1 and 2 chopped chillies.

Look for: Note where it becomes too hot for you. Everyone's tolerance differs, so write yours down.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Aloo gobi				
Saag paneer				
Coconut vegetable curry				
Thai-style green curry				
Short vs long simmer				
Coconut vs tomato				
Acid at the end				
Heat levels				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Watery sauce	Too much liquid or vegetables not cooked down	Simmer with the lid off; mash a few potatoes in
Split or oily coconut sauce	Boiled too hard	Simmer gently; whisk in a splash of water
Curdled yoghurt	Boiled after adding	Take off the heat, stir in at the end
Flat flavour	Not enough salt or acid	Add salt, then lime juice
Mushy vegetables	Added too soon	Add in order: dense first, quick last
Burnt base	Heat too high	Add a splash of water; start again if black

HOT PANS, ALLERGENS AND LEFTOVERS

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.

Chillies: wear gloves or wash your hands thoroughly with soap after cutting chillies, and don't touch your eyes. Start with less than you think and add more at the end. Dairy (yoghurt, milk) soothes a mouth on fire better than water.

Allergens: curry pastes and powders, stock cubes and coconut products can contain mustard, celery, gluten, nuts or shrimp paste. Many Thai curry pastes contain shrimp paste, so check the label for a vegetarian one. Paneer and cream are dairy.

Rice with curry: cook rice as in Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 2. Cooked rice that is left at room temperature can make you ill, so cool leftovers within 1 hour, keep them in the fridge, eat within 1 day, and reheat only once until steaming hot all the way through.

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 build a curry from base, spices, liquid and vegetables.
- ☐ I add vegetables in the right order.
- ☐ I can balance salt, sweet, sour and heat.
- ☐ I know how to fix a sauce that is too thin or too thick.
- ☐ I store curry and rice safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 3 is Braising and Slow Cooking: cooking vegetables gently until silky.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Chapter 3 · Braising and Slow Cooking

SKILL GOAL

Braise vegetables until silky and sweet, with a glossy glaze rather than a watery sauce.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Braising is cooking food gently in a small amount of liquid with the lid on. It turns tough, fibrous or strongly flavoured vegetables (fennel, red cabbage, leeks, celery, onions) into something silky and sweet. It is slow, but almost all of the time is spent unattended.

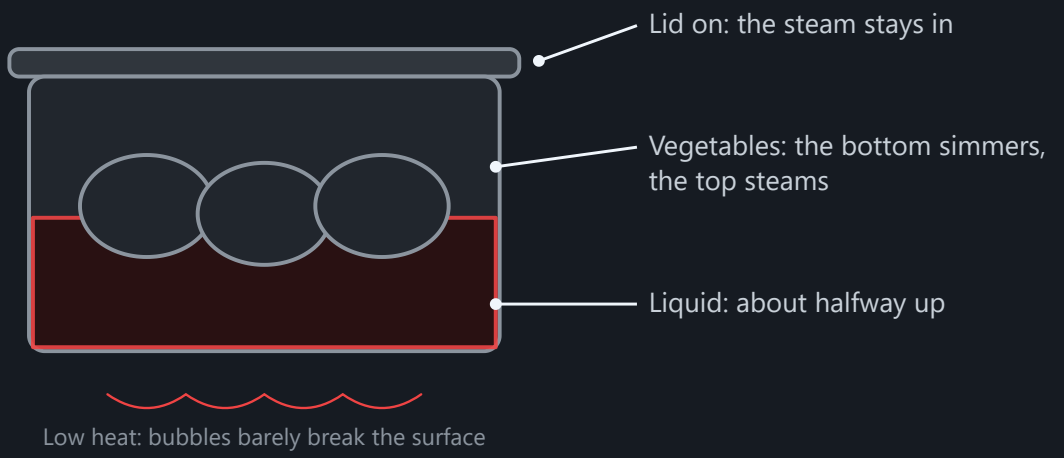


Figure 3. A braise: a lid, a little liquid and a gentle heat. The vegetables simmer below and steam above.

How braising works

- **Brown first (optional).** A few minutes of colour on the cut sides adds flavour: the same browning as in Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 5.
- **A little liquid:** stock, water, tomatoes or juice, coming about halfway up. Too much and you are boiling.

- **A tight lid** keeps the steam in, so the top half of the vegetables cooks as well.
- **Low heat:** the liquid should barely tremble. Fast boiling toughens and breaks vegetables up.
- **Reduce at the end.** Take the lid off for the last 5 to 10 minutes to boil the liquid down to a glaze.

Hob or oven?

	HOB	OVEN
Heat	Direct from below; easy to check and adjust	Even, all round; needs an ovenproof pan with a lid
Typical setting	Lowest ring, lid on	150 to 160°C (130 to 140°C fan)
Best for	Quick braises (fennel, leeks), which you want to watch	Long braises (red cabbage, big batches), which you can forget

Sweet and sour

Braised vegetables often rely on a balance of sweet (sugar, honey, apple, onion) and sour (vinegar, lemon, tomato). Taste at the end and adjust. The acid also keeps red cabbage red.

Which vegetables?

VEGETABLE	TIME (LOW HEAT)	NOTES
Fennel wedges	20 to 25 minutes	Keep the root so the layers hold
Leeks	15 to 20 minutes	Wash very well
Celery hearts, onions	30 to 40 minutes	Peel onions; leave a bit of root
Red cabbage	45 to 60 minutes	Needs acid for the colour
Carrots, parsnips, beetroot	25 to 40 minutes	Cut evenly
Aubergine (caponata)	25 to 35 minutes	Fry first so it doesn't go to mush

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Braised fennel

40 minutes | 2 portions | browning, then braising

Fennel turns from crunchy and aniseedy to soft, sweet and mellow. Brown it first, then add liquid and cover.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	fennel bulbs, trimmed and cut into wedges
1 tbsp	olive oil
1	garlic clove, sliced
100 ml	vegetable stock
1 tbsp	lemon juice
1 tbsp	grated Parmesan-style hard cheese (optional)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Trim the stalks and base of the fennel (keep the fronds for garnish) and cut each bulb into 4 wedges through the root so the layers hold.
2. Heat the oil in a wide pan with a lid. Brown the fennel wedges for **3 to 4 minutes a side**. Add the garlic for 30 seconds.
3. Add the stock and lemon juice, bring to a simmer, cover and cook on a low heat for **20 to 25 minutes**, turning once, until a knife slips in easily.
4. Uncover and boil off any remaining liquid to a glaze. Season, and top with cheese and fennel fronds.

LEVEL 2 · SWEET AND SOUR

Sweet-and-sour red cabbage

1 hour 15 minutes | 4 portions | the acid that keeps red cabbage red

Red cabbage turns blue-grey if cooked without acid. The vinegar keeps the colour, and slow cooking turns it sweet and silky. It reheats well.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

½	small red cabbage, finely shredded
1	onion, sliced
1	apple, grated
1 tbsp	oil or butter
2 tbsp	cider vinegar
1 tbsp	sugar or honey
100 ml	water
1 pinch	salt
1 pinch	ground cloves or cinnamon (optional)

1. Soften the onion in the oil for 5 minutes in a large pan with a lid.
2. Add the cabbage, apple, vinegar, sugar, water, salt and spices and stir.
3. Bring to a simmer, cover and cook on a low heat for **45 to 60 minutes**, stirring now and then and adding a splash of water if it dries.
4. Uncover for the last 10 minutes to let the liquid reduce. Taste and balance the sweetness and sourness.

> **BETTER THE NEXT DAY**
>
> Red cabbage tastes even better the next day. Cool quickly, keep it covered in the fridge and eat within 2 days.

LEVEL 2 · SILKY

Braised leeks with mustard

35 minutes | 2 portions | braising delicate vegetables without breaking them

Whole leeks braised until silky are a classic side. Handle them gently and wash well, as grit hides between the layers.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

3	leeks, trimmed and washed
1 tbsp	butter
1 tbsp	oil
150 ml	vegetable stock
1 tsp	Dijon mustard
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Cut the leeks into 5 cm lengths. Slit lengthways and rinse thoroughly under running water, fanning out the layers to remove grit.
2. Heat the butter and oil in a wide pan. Add the leeks, cut side down, and brown for **3 minutes** without moving.
3. Add the stock, cover and braise on a low heat for **15 to 20 minutes**, until very tender.
4. Lift out the leeks. Boil the liquid to reduce by half, stir in the mustard, and pour over. Scatter with parsley.

LEVEL 3 · SICILIAN

Caponata (sweet-and-sour aubergine stew)

1 hour | 4 portions | frying then stewing, and balancing sweet and sour

A Sicilian classic, served warm or cold. The aubergines are fried first so they hold their shape, then everything is stewed together.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2	medium aubergines, in 2 cm cubes
3 tbsp	olive oil
1	onion, diced
2	celery sticks, diced
1 tin	400 g tin of chopped tomatoes
2 tbsp	capers, rinsed
50 g	green olives, stoned and halved
2 tbsp	red wine vinegar
1 tbsp	sugar
1 handful	basil leaves
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a large pan and fry the aubergine cubes in two batches for **8 to 10 minutes**, until golden and soft. Lift out.
2. Add the last tablespoon of oil, and soften the onion and celery for 8 minutes. Add the tomatoes and simmer for **10 minutes**.
3. Return the aubergine and add the capers, olives, vinegar and sugar. Simmer, uncovered, for **10 to 15 minutes**, until thick and glossy.
4. Taste for balance of sweet, sour and salt (the capers and olives are salty, so go easy on extra salt). Stir in the basil and cool a little before serving.

KEEPING

> Caponata keeps in the fridge, covered, for up to 2 days. Serve at room temperature, not straight from the fridge.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Lid on or off

Braising versus simmering.

1. Braise two portions of fennel wedges: one with the lid on throughout, one uncovered.

Look for: The covered one is soft and silky; the uncovered one dries out at the top and stays firmer. The lid is what makes it a braise.

EXPERIMENT

The braising liquid

Water, stock or juice.

1. Braise three small portions of leeks in water, vegetable stock and diluted apple juice.

Look for: Water tastes plain; stock adds savoury depth; juice adds sweetness. Note which suits leeks.

EXPERIMENT

Hob or oven

Two ways of cooking the same cabbage.

1. Cook half the red cabbage on the hob and half in a covered ovenproof dish at 150°C (130°C fan) for the same time.

Look for: The oven version is more even and needs no stirring; the hob version is easier to check. Compare the texture.

EXPERIMENT

Overnight rest

Day one and day two.

1. Taste the red cabbage hot on the day you make it. Cool the rest quickly, refrigerate it, and taste it reheated the next day.

Look for: Flavours often blend and mellow overnight. Reheat until steaming hot, once only.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Braised fennel				
Sweet-and-sour red cabbage				
Braised leeks				
Caponata				
Lid on vs off				
Braising liquid				
Hob vs oven				
Day one vs day two				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Tough vegetables	Not cooked long enough, or heat too low	Cover and cook longer; add a splash of liquid
Mushy	Too hot or too long	Lower the heat; check earlier

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Burnt on the bottom	Not enough liquid or heat too high	Add water; lower the heat
Blue-grey red cabbage	No acid	Add vinegar or lemon juice
Watery sauce	Lid on too long	Uncover and boil down
Too sharp	Too much vinegar	Add a pinch of sugar, or some butter

HOT PANS AND STORAGE

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 can brown vegetables and then braise them with the lid on.
- ☐ I use just enough liquid and a low heat.
- ☐ I reduce the liquid to a glaze at the end.
- ☐ I can balance sweet and sour.
- ☐ I can store and reheat braised dishes safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 4 is Grilling, Charring and Barbecue: direct heat, char and smoke.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Chapter 4 · Grilling, Charring and Barbecue

SKILL GOAL

Grill and char vegetables over direct heat for smoky flavour and good marks, without burning them.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Grilling, charring and barbecuing cook food by direct, intense heat, which browns the surface quickly and adds a smoky flavour that you can't get from an oven. Vegetables are ideal: they cook fast, they love char and they don't need much else.

Grill pan, grill or barbecue?

	GRIDDLE (GRILL) PAN	OVEN GRILL	BARBECUE
Heat	From below, ridged pan gives stripes	From above	From below, with smoke
Smoke	Little; ventilate the room	Little	Plenty: the main flavour
Good for	Slices, planks, corn	Peppers, halloumi, tomatoes	Everything, especially charred whole vegetables
Watch for	Smoky kitchen	Burning under the element	Flare-ups, and safety (see the box)

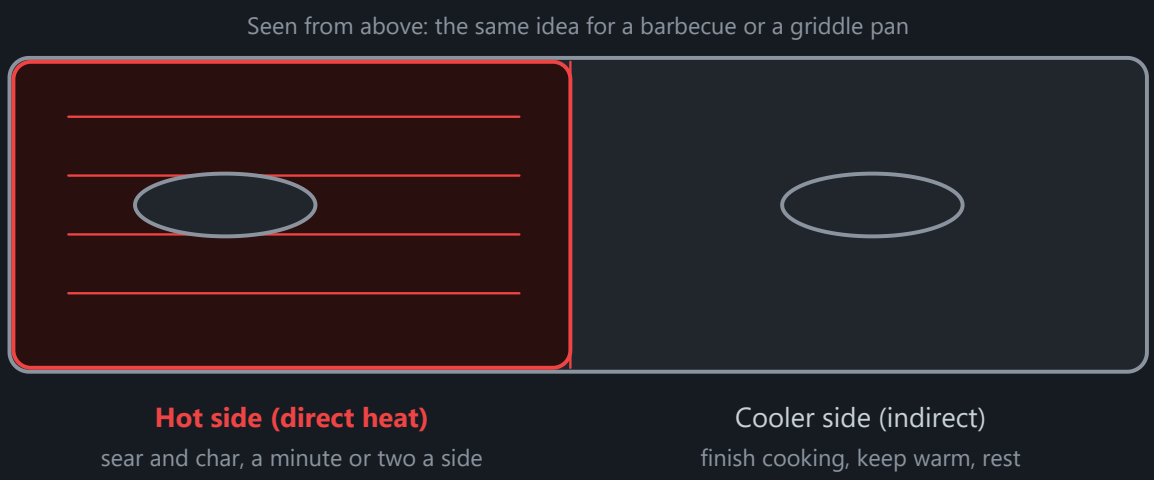


Figure 4. Two heat zones give you control. Sear over the hot side, then move food to the cooler side to cook through without burning.

The rules

- **Heat first.** A hot pan or barbecue (coals gone grey and glowing) marks food instantly; a cool one makes it stick and stew.
- **Oil the food, not the pan.** Brush vegetables lightly with oil so they don't stick, and the oil doesn't smoke on the surface.
- **Cut for the heat:** planks about 1 cm thick, large chunks on skewers, or whole (aubergines and peppers).
- **Don't move it.** Leave it for 2 to 3 minutes until it releases easily and has marks. If it sticks, it isn't ready.
- **Two zones:** sear hot, finish cooler. Move food to the cooler side if it is burning before it is tender.
- **Pre-cook dense vegetables** (corn, potatoes, carrots) briefly in water so they are tender when they come off.
- **Rest and dress at the end:** lemon, herbs and oil lift the smoky flavour.

Marinades

A quick marinade is oil, acid (lemon juice, vinegar), garlic, herbs and salt. 20 to 30 minutes is enough for vegetables, as they absorb flavour fast. Sugary marinades (honey, ketchup) burn, so add them near the end.

What is char?

A few dark marks on the surface are flavour. Black, brittle, burnt areas taste bitter and are best removed. Charred skin on peppers and aubergines is peeled off, not eaten.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Griddled courgettes and corn

25 minutes | 2 portions | marking vegetables on a hot, dry surface

The classic starter: courgette planks marked with stripes of char, and corn blistered on the cob. Heat the grill pan or barbecue until very hot.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	courgettes, sliced lengthways into 1 cm planks
1	corn on the cob, husks removed
1 tbsp	oil
1 tbsp	lemon juice
1 tbsp	chopped mint or parsley
1 pinch	salt and pepper
10 g	butter, for the corn (optional)

1. Boil the corn in water for **5 minutes** so it is nearly cooked, then drain and dry it.
2. Brush the courgette planks and corn lightly with oil (not the pan) and season.
3. Lay the courgettes on the hot pan and leave them alone for **2 to 3 minutes** until they release easily and have dark stripes. Turn and cook for 2 minutes. Turn the corn every minute or two for **6 to 8 minutes**, until blistered and golden in places.
4. Dress the courgettes with lemon juice and herbs, and brush the corn with butter.

> **HOT SURFACES**
>
> **Grill pans and hot surfaces:** a griddle or grill pan gets very hot and smoky, so open a window or use the extractor. Use dry oven gloves, long tongs and a heatproof surface, and don't lean over the pan.

LEVEL 2 · PEEL

Charred peppers

30 minutes | 3 portions | charring until the skin lifts, then peeling

Charred, peeled peppers are soft, sweet and smoky, and keep in the fridge for days in oil. Use a barbecue, a gas flame (with tongs) or the oven grill on its hottest setting.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

3	red or yellow peppers
2 tbsp	olive oil
1	garlic clove, finely sliced
1 tsp	red or white wine vinegar
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1 pinch	salt

1. Put the whole peppers directly on the heat (or under the hot grill) and turn them every few minutes for **12 to 15 minutes**, until blackened all over.
2. Put them in a bowl, cover tightly with a plate or cling film (or put them in a lidded box) for **15 minutes**. The steam loosens the skin.
3. Peel off the blackened skin with your fingers (don't rinse them, as that washes the flavour away). Remove the stalk and seeds and tear into strips.
4. Toss with the oil, garlic, vinegar, parsley and salt. Serve at room temperature.

> **CHAR AND STORAGE**
>
> **Char, not carbon:** light browning and a few dark marks give flavour. Blackened, burnt areas taste bitter and are best removed. Peel off the blackened skin of peppers and aubergines, and avoid eating heavily burnt food regularly.
>
> If you keep them, refrigerate in a covered container and eat within **2 days**. Don't leave garlic sitting in oil at room temperature, because it can grow the bacteria that cause botulism.

LEVEL 2 · SMOKE

Smoky aubergine dip (baba ganoush)

45 minutes | 4 portions | charring aubergines whole until collapsed

Aubergines charred whole over a flame or in a very hot oven collapse into a smoky, silky pulp. Prick the skin all over first so it doesn't burst. Tahini is sesame, so check for allergies.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2	large aubergines
2 tbsp	tahini
1	garlic clove, crushed
2 tbsp	lemon juice
2 tbsp	olive oil
1 tbsp	plain yoghurt (optional)
1 pinch	salt
1 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Prick the aubergines in several places. Char them directly on the flame or barbecue for **15 to 20 minutes**, turning often, until the skin is black and the flesh has collapsed. (Oven: 240°C, 220°C fan, for 40 minutes.)
2. Rest in a covered bowl for 10 minutes. Slit open, scoop out the soft flesh and discard the skin and any bitter seeds near the stalk. Drain for 5 minutes in a sieve.
3. Chop the flesh roughly and mix with the tahini, garlic, lemon juice, oil, yoghurt and salt. Taste and adjust.
4. Serve with parsley and oil, with bread or raw vegetables. Eat within **2 days**, kept covered in the fridge.

> **HOT AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Grill pans and hot surfaces:** a griddle or grill pan gets very hot and smoky, so open a window or use the extractor. Use dry oven gloves, long tongs and a heatproof surface, and don't lean over the pan.

Allergens: tahini is made from sesame, and yoghurt is dairy.

LEVEL 3 · PLATTER

Mixed grill platter with a marinade

45 minutes plus marinating | 3 portions | using two heat zones for different vegetables

Different vegetables need different times, so use the two zones: sear on the hot side, finish on the cooler side.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	red onion, in thick wedges
1	pepper, in thick strips
1	courgette, in 1 cm planks
150 g	mushrooms (large), stalks removed
1	corn on the cob, halved
2 tbsp	oil
1 tbsp	lemon juice or vinegar
1 tsp	dried oregano or smoked paprika
1	garlic clove, crushed
1 pinch	salt and pepper
100 g	halloumi, sliced (optional)

1. Mix the oil, lemon juice, herbs, garlic, salt and pepper. Toss the vegetables in it and leave for **20 to 30 minutes** (up to 2 hours, covered in the fridge). Boil the corn for 5 minutes first.
2. Heat the grill. Put the onion, pepper, corn and mushrooms on the hot side to mark, then move to the cooler side to finish (about **10 to 12 minutes** in all).
3. Grill the courgettes for 2 to 3 minutes a side, and the halloumi for 1 to 2 minutes a side until golden.
4. Pile on a platter, spoon over any remaining vegetable-only marinade, and serve.

MARINADE AND BARBECUE

Marinade: if a marinade only ever held vegetables, you can spoon what is left over the cooked food. Never reuse one that has had raw meat or fish in it.

Barbecue safety: use a barbecue outdoors only, never indoors, in a tent or in a garage, because charcoal gives off carbon monoxide, which is odourless and can kill. Light it with proper firelighters, never petrol or other flammable liquid, keep children and pets away, and never leave it unattended. Let the coals go cold completely before disposing of them, and keep a bucket of water or sand nearby. Keep raw meat and fish on a separate board from vegetables.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Oil the food or the pan

Sticking and smoke.

1. Griddle courgette planks, oiling the pan for one batch and brushing the courgettes for the other.

Look for: Oil on the pan smokes and burns before the food goes on; oil on the food gives a cleaner mark and less smoke.

EXPERIMENT

Hot or cooler zone

Direct and indirect.

1. Cook peppers on the hot side only, and on the hot side for 3 minutes and then the cooler side for 10.

Look for: The hot-only peppers blacken outside and stay firm inside; the two-zone peppers are soft and sweet with a good mark.

EXPERIMENT

Whole or sliced aubergine

Char the dip two ways.

1. Char one aubergine whole, and another cut in half lengthways, cut-side down.

Look for: The whole aubergine is smokier and silkier; the halves are quicker but less smoky.

EXPERIMENT

Marinade time

None, 30 minutes, 2 hours.

1. Marinate three small batches of courgette for 0 minutes, 30 minutes and 2 hours (covered, in the fridge). Grill them the same way.

Look for: Vegetables take up flavour quickly. Longer often gives a soggy, over-sour result: note where the sweet spot is.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Griddled courgettes and corn				
Charred peppers				
Smoky aubergine dip				
Mixed grill platter				
Oil on food vs pan				
Hot vs cooler zone				
Whole vs sliced aubergine				
Marinade time				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Sticking	Pan or grill not hot enough, or moved too soon	Preheat; wait until it releases
Burnt outside, raw inside	Too hot or pieces too thick	Move to the cooler side; cut thinner; pre-cook
No marks	Pan cool or food wet	Preheat and pat dry
Bitter	Burnt or blackened	Cut away burnt parts; peel pepper skin
Flare-ups	Dripping oil	Use less oil; move food away; never use water on a fat fire
Soggy peppers	Peeled under water	Peel dry; don't rinse

BARBECUE, HEAT AND LEFTOVERS

Barbecue safety: use a barbecue outdoors only, never indoors, in a tent or in a garage, because charcoal gives off carbon monoxide, which is odourless and can kill. Light it with proper firelighters, never petrol or other flammable liquid, keep children and pets away, and never leave it unattended. Let the coals go cold completely before disposing of them, and keep a bucket of water or sand nearby. Keep raw meat and fish on a separate board from vegetables.

Grill pans and hot surfaces: a griddle or grill pan gets very hot and smoky, so open a window or use the extractor. Use dry oven gloves, long tongs and a heatproof surface, and don't lean over the pan.

Char, not carbon: light browning and a few dark marks give flavour. Blackened, burnt areas taste bitter and are best removed. Peel off the blackened skin of peppers and aubergines, and avoid eating heavily burnt food regularly.

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 heat a grill properly and oil the food, not the pan.
- ☐ I can use a hot zone and a cooler zone.
- ☐ I can char and peel peppers and aubergines.
- ☐ I know the barbecue safety rules.
- ☐ I can tell char from burnt.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 5 is Fritters, Tempura and Crisps: batters, frying and crisp textures.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Chapter 5 · Fritters, Tempura and Crisps

SKILL GOAL

Fry and bake vegetables to crisp, golden results, safely, with the right batter and oil temperature.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Frying turns vegetables crisp and golden, but it is also the part of cooking where most accidents happen. This chapter teaches batters and frying so the result is light and crisp, not heavy and greasy, and so you stay safe doing it. It builds on the hot-oil rules in Cooking Skills: Vegetables 1, chapter 4.

Shallow or deep?

	SHALLOW FRYING	DEEP FRYING
Oil	1 to 2 cm in a frying pan	Enough to float the food: at least 5 cm deep, in a pan no more than a third full
Good for	Fritters, patties, flat things	Bhajis, tempura, anything that should float and cook all round
Risk	Spitting, burns	Much higher: oil fires and scalds
Equipment	Heavy frying pan	Deep heavy pan with a thermometer, or a thermostat-controlled fryer



Figure 5. Oil temperature decides the result. Test a cube of bread or use a thermometer; if the oil starts to smoke, it is too hot.

Getting the oil right

- **About 180°C** is a typical frying temperature for fritters and tempura (a cooking guideline). Use a thermometer if you have one.
- **The bread test:** drop in a small cube of bread. It should turn golden in 15 to 30 seconds. If it browns in 5 seconds the oil is too hot; if it just sits and bubbles gently, it is too cool.
- **Use a neutral oil** with a high smoke point (vegetable, rapeseed, sunflower, groundnut), not olive oil.
- **Fry in small batches.** Cold food drops the temperature, and a crowded pan makes soggy, oily food.
- **Drain on paper or a rack** and eat while crisp.
- **Cool used oil completely** before filtering it into a bottle. Don't pour it down the sink: put it in a sealed container in the bin or take it to a recycling point.

Batters

BATTER	TEXTURE	TIP
Thick (fritters, bhajis)	A dense coating that holds ingredients together	Squeeze out water from wet vegetables first
Tempura	Thin, lacy, crisp	Ice-cold water, mixed for seconds, lumps left in

BATTER	TEXTURE	TIP
Beer-style or fizzy-water batter	Light and puffy	Fizzy water traps bubbles; mix at the last moment

Why cold? Cold batter doesn't develop as much gluten, so it stays crisp instead of chewy, and it holds together longer in the hot oil.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Courgette and sweetcorn fritters

25 minutes | 2 portions (6 small fritters) | squeezing out water, and shallow frying

Fritters are the gentlest introduction: shallow frying in a little oil, with no deep pan. Courgettes are very watery, so squeezing them dry is the key step.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	medium courgette, grated
100 g	sweetcorn (tinned, drained, or frozen and thawed)
1	spring onion, sliced
1	egg
4 tbsp	plain flour
1 tbsp	chopped herbs (mint, parsley)
1 pinch	salt and pepper
2 tbsp	oil, for shallow frying

1. Mix the grated courgette with a pinch of salt and leave it for 5 minutes. Squeeze it hard in a clean tea towel to remove as much liquid as you can.
2. Mix the courgette with the sweetcorn, spring onion, herbs, egg, flour, pepper and a little more salt to make a thick batter that holds together on a spoon.
3. Heat the oil in a non-stick or heavy frying pan over a medium heat. Drop in heaped tablespoons of batter and flatten slightly. Fry for **2 to 3 minutes a side** until golden and cooked through.
4. Drain on kitchen paper. Eat hot, with yoghurt or a squeeze of lemon.

> **HOT OIL AND COLOUR**
>
> **Frying safety:** never leave hot oil unattended, and never fill a pan more than **one third full** of oil. Use a heavy, deep pan or a thermostat-controlled fryer, not a chip pan. Dry the food well, because water makes hot oil spit. If the oil smokes, take the pan off the heat and let it cool. If it catches fire, turn off the heat, cover the pan with a lid or damp cloth, and leave it to cool: **never use water and never carry the pan**. Don't use a fire extinguisher on a pan of oil, because its force can spread the fire. Get out and call 999 if you can't control it. Keep children and pets

away from the cooker.

Go for gold. Frying starchy vegetables at high temperature forms acrylamide. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to cook them to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.

LEVEL 2 · DEEP FRYING

Onion bhajis

40 minutes | 4 portions (about 12 bhajis) | a thick batter and deep frying in batches

The classic. Salting the onions draws out liquid so the batter doesn't need much water. This is real deep frying, so read the safety box first.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2	large onions, thinly sliced
100 g	gram (chickpea) flour
1 tsp	cumin seeds
1 tsp	ground coriander
½ tsp	turmeric
1	green chilli, chopped (optional)
1 handful	chopped coriander
½ tsp	salt
60 ml	cold water, about
500 ml	oil, for frying (a third of the pan at most)

1. Mix the onions with the salt and leave for 10 minutes. Add the flour, spices, chilli and coriander and mix with your hands. Add the water a little at a time until a thick, sticky batter coats the onions.
2. Heat the oil in a heavy, deep pan, no more than a third full, to about **180°C** (a cube of bread should turn golden in 15 to 30 seconds).
3. Carefully lower in spoonfuls of mixture, **4 or 5 at a time**, so the oil temperature doesn't drop. Fry for **4 to 5 minutes**, turning once, until deep golden and crisp.
4. Lift out with a slotted spoon, drain on kitchen paper, and check that one is cooked in the middle before serving the batch.

> **DEEP FRYING**
>
> **Frying safety:** never leave hot oil unattended, and never fill a pan more than **one third full** of oil. Use a heavy, deep pan or a thermostat-controlled fryer, not a chip pan. Dry the food well,

because water makes hot oil spit. If the oil smokes, take the pan off the heat and let it cool. If it catches fire, turn off the heat, cover the pan with a lid or damp cloth, and leave it to cool: **never use water and never carry the pan**. Don't use a fire extinguisher on a pan of oil, because its force can spread the fire. Get out and call 999 if you can't control it. Keep children and pets away from the cooker.

Go for gold. Frying starchy vegetables at high temperature forms acrylamide. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to cook them to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.

LEVEL 3 · BATTER

Vegetable tempura

35 minutes | 3 portions | a thin, cold batter that fries crisp, not heavy

Tempura batter is thin and lumpy, kept ice-cold, and mixed at the last moment. Overmixing develops gluten and makes it chewy.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

100 g	plain flour (plus a little for dusting)
100 g	cornflour
200 ml	ice-cold sparkling or still water
1	courgette, in sticks
1	pepper, in strips
100 g	mushrooms or broccoli florets
1	sweet potato, sliced 3 mm thin
500 ml	oil, for frying (a third of the pan at most)
2 tbsp	soy sauce, to dip
1 tsp	lime juice, to dip

1. Prepare and dry the vegetables thoroughly, and dust them lightly with flour. Heat the oil to about **180°C**, as in the safety box.
2. Just before frying, stir the flour and cornflour into the ice-cold water **with chopsticks or a fork, for a few seconds only**. Leave it lumpy.
3. Dip a few pieces at a time into the batter, let the excess drip off, and lower into the oil. Fry for **2 to 3 minutes** until pale golden and crisp. Don't crowd the pan.
4. Drain on a rack or kitchen paper and serve straight away with the soy and lime dip.

> **DEEP FRYING AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Frying safety:** never leave hot oil unattended, and never fill a pan more than **one third full** of oil. Use a heavy, deep pan or a thermostat-controlled fryer, not a chip pan. Dry the food well, because water makes hot oil spit. If the oil smokes, take the pan off the heat and let it cool. If it catches fire, turn off the heat, cover the pan with a lid or damp cloth, and leave it to cool: **never**

use water and never carry the pan. Don't use a fire extinguisher on a pan of oil, because its force can spread the fire. Get out and call 999 if you can't control it. Keep children and pets away from the cooker.

Allergens: batters usually contain wheat flour (gluten), and fritters often contain egg. Gram (chickpea) flour is gluten-free but is a pulse. Check labels if anyone you cook for has an allergy.

LEVEL 2 · BAKED

Kale and beetroot crisps (baked)

40 minutes | 2 portions | thin slicing and low, dry heat

No deep frying: thin slices and leaves dry and crisp in a low oven. Set it to 150°C (130°C fan). Wear gloves for beetroot, which stains.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

100 g	curly kale, stalks removed, torn
2	medium beetroots, peeled, sliced 2 mm thin
2 tbsp	oil
1 pinch	salt
½ tsp	smoked paprika (optional)

1. Wash and thoroughly dry the kale. Toss it with half the oil and a pinch of salt and spread on a tray in one layer.
2. Slice the beetroot as thin as you can (a mandolin with the guard on is best). Toss with the rest of the oil and spread in a single layer on a second tray.
3. Bake the kale for **10 to 15 minutes** and the beetroot for **25 to 35 minutes**, turning once, until crisp. Watch them near the end, because they go from crisp to burnt quickly.
4. Cool on the tray for a few minutes to crisp up, and eat the same day.

> **MANDOLIN AND COLOUR**
>
> **Mandolin:** always use the guard or a cut-resistant glove.
>
> **Go for gold.** Frying starchy vegetables at high temperature forms acrylamide. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to cook them to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Batter rest time

Fry now, or rest.

1. Make a double batch of the fritter mix. Fry half straight away. Rest the other half for 20 minutes before frying.

Look for: The rested batter is a little thicker and holds together better; the fresh one is lighter. Note which you prefer.

EXPERIMENT

Cold or room-temperature batter

Tempura.

1. Make two small batches of tempura batter, one with ice-cold water and one with water at room temperature. Fry the same vegetables.

Look for: The cold batter gives a lighter, crisper coating. The room-temperature one is heavier and chewier.

EXPERIMENT

Oil temperature

Too cool and about right.

1. Fry two bhajis in oil at a low heat (bread test slow to brown) and two at the right temperature.

Look for: The cool-oil ones soak up oil and are pale and greasy; the right-temperature ones are crisp and golden. Never try the too-hot oil: it is a fire risk.

EXPERIMENT

Batch size

A crowded pan.

1. Fry 3 bhajis at a time, then 8 at a time. Watch how the oil behaves, and compare the results.

Look for: Large batches drop the temperature, so the bhajis cook slowly and soak up oil. Fry fewer at a time.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Courgette and sweetcorn fritters				
Onion bhajis				
Vegetable tempura				
Kale and beetroot crisps				
Batter rest time				
Cold vs room-temperature batter				
Oil temperature				
Batch size				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Greasy, heavy food	Oil too cool, or a crowded pan	Heat the oil properly; fry in smaller batches
Soggy fritters	Too much water in the vegetables	Salt, squeeze and dry them before mixing

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Batter falls off	Wet vegetables, or batter too thin	Pat vegetables dry; dust with flour first
Raw inside, burnt outside	Oil too hot or pieces too thick	Lower the heat; cut thinner
Chewy tempura	Overmixed or warm batter	Mix for seconds, keep it ice cold
Soft crisps	Slices too thick or oven too cool	Slice thinner; bake longer at a low heat

HOT OIL, ALLERGENS AND LEFTOVERS

Frying safety: never leave hot oil unattended, and never fill a pan more than **one third full** of oil. Use a heavy, deep pan or a thermostat-controlled fryer, not a chip pan. Dry the food well, because water makes hot oil spit. If the oil smokes, take the pan off the heat and let it cool. If it catches fire, turn off the heat, cover the pan with a lid or damp cloth, and leave it to cool: **never use water and never carry the pan**. Don't use a fire extinguisher on a pan of oil, because its force can spread the fire. Get out and call 999 if you can't control it. Keep children and pets away from the cooker.

Allergens: batters usually contain wheat flour (gluten), and fritters often contain egg. Gram (chickpea) flour is gluten-free but is a pulse. Check labels if anyone you cook for has an allergy.

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 the difference between shallow and deep frying and the safety rules for each.
- ☐ I can test the oil temperature with a bread cube.
- ☐ I can make thick and thin batters and squeeze water from vegetables.
- ☐ I fry in small batches and drain well.
- ☐ I can bake crisps without frying.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 6 is Pickling and Fermenting: brines, vinegar pickles and a first ferment.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Chapter 6 · Pickling and Fermenting

SKILL GOAL

Pickle vegetables in vinegar and ferment cabbage safely, and know the signs of a good and a bad ferment.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Pickling and fermenting both keep vegetables for longer and give them a sharp, tangy flavour, but they work in different ways. **Pickling** uses acid (vinegar) and the fridge. **Fermenting** uses salt and time to let friendly bacteria make their own acid. The first is quick and safe for beginners. The second is slower and needs careful rules.

Pickling or fermenting?

	VINEGAR PICKLE	FERMENT (SAUERKRAUT)
Where the sourness comes from	The vinegar you add	Bacteria turning the vegetable's sugars into lactic acid
Time	An hour to a day	One to two weeks or more
Salt	A little, for flavour	Measured by weight (about 2%), essential for safety
Keeping	Fridge, about 1 week	Fridge for some weeks after fermenting (taste and smell tell you)
Risk level	Low if cleaned and refrigerated	Higher: needs measuring, submerging, and knowing when to discard
Flavour	Sharp, bright, crisp	Complex, tangy, softer

Vinegar pickles

- **The brine:** roughly equal parts vinegar and water, plus a spoon of sugar and a teaspoon of salt per 300 ml. Stronger vinegar makes a sharper, longer-lasting pickle.
- **Cut thin** so the brine reaches the middle quickly. Dense vegetables (carrot, cauliflower) can be blanched briefly first.
- **Pack tightly** and cover completely with brine.
- **Add flavour:** mustard seeds, peppercorns, garlic, dill, chilli, bay.
- **Keep cold.** These are refrigerator pickles, not shelf-stable preserves.

Fermenting

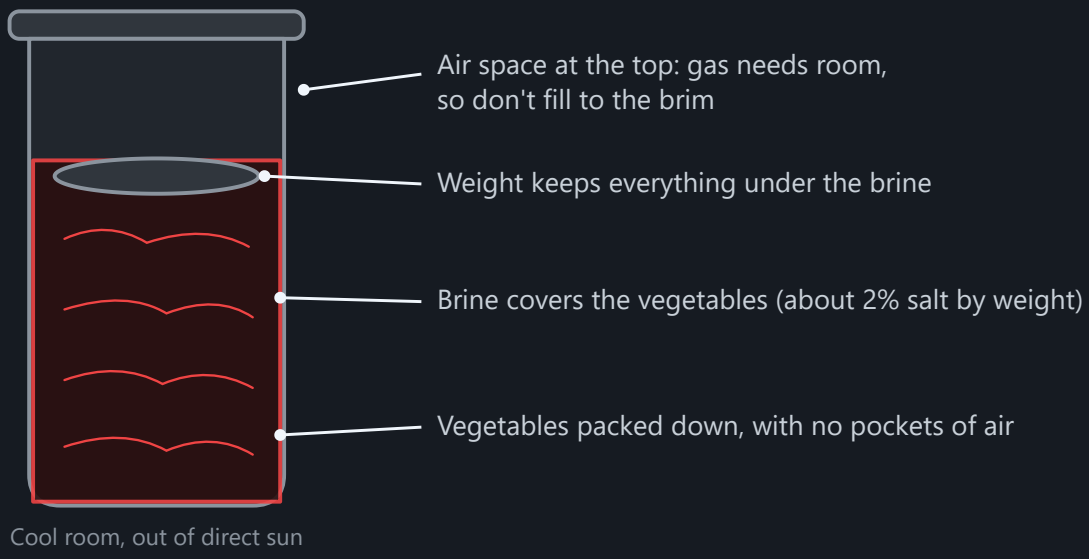


Figure 6. The rules of a safe ferment: salt weighed out, vegetables packed down, everything under the brine, and room at the top for gas.

- **Weigh the salt:** about 2% of the weight of the vegetables. Too little and unwelcome microbes can grow; too much and the ferment stalls.
- **Keep it under the brine.** Anything above the surface can grow mould.
- **Leave room for gas** and don't seal tightly.
- **Keep it cool and out of the sun,** at about 18 to 21°C. Warmer is faster, but less predictable.
- **Taste after a week.** It should smell pleasantly sour, like a fresh pickle. It is done when you like it.
- **Know when to bin it:** fuzzy or coloured mould, a rotten smell or a slimy texture. When in doubt, throw it out.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Refrigerator pickled vegetables

15 minutes plus 1 hour | 4 portions | a vinegar brine that suits any vegetable

The easiest pickle: raw vegetables in a hot brine. It is ready in an hour and improves over a day or two.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

200 g	mixed vegetables (carrot, cucumber, radish, cauliflower, green beans), cut thin
150 ml	white wine or cider vinegar
150 ml	water
1 tbsp	sugar
1 tsp	salt
1 tsp	mustard seeds or peppercorns
1	garlic clove, sliced (optional)

1. Wash the vegetables and cut into thin sticks, slices or small florets so they pickle quickly. Pack them tightly into a clean jar with the spices and garlic.
2. Heat the vinegar, water, sugar and salt in a small pan until the sugar and salt dissolve. Pour the hot brine over the vegetables, covering them completely.
3. Cool to room temperature, then close the jar and refrigerate. Eat after **1 hour**, though they taste better after a day.
4. Keep in the fridge and eat within about **1 week**.

> **JARS AND KEEPING**
>
> **Clean jars:** wash jars, lids and utensils in hot soapy water and rinse well; for vinegar pickles you can also run them through a dishwasher hot cycle. Use non-reactive containers (glass or food-grade plastic or ceramic), because acid and salt corrode some metals.
>
> **Quick pickles are not preserved:** keep them in the fridge in a covered jar and eat within about **1 week**. They are safe because of the acid and the cold, not because they have been canned. Don't leave them on the worktop for days.

LEVEL 1 · PRACTICE

Quick pickled red onions

10 minutes plus 30 minutes | 6 portions (a garnish) | taming a strong vegetable with acid

Pink pickled onions lift tacos, salads, curries and sandwiches. The acid turns them a bright magenta in minutes.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

2	red onions, thinly sliced
100 ml	red wine vinegar or cider vinegar
100 ml	water
1 tbsp	sugar
1 tsp	salt
1	bay leaf (optional)

1. Pack the onion slices into a clean jar.
2. Warm the vinegar, water, sugar and salt until dissolved. Pour over the onions so they are submerged.
3. Leave for **30 minutes** at room temperature, then refrigerate. They are good within the hour and best after a day.

> **KEEPING**
>
> **Quick pickles are not preserved:** keep them in the fridge in a covered jar and eat within about **1 week**. They are safe because of the acid and the cold, not because they have been canned. Don't leave them on the worktop for days.

LEVEL 2 · QUICK SLAW

Kimchi-style slaw (quick, not fermented)

25 minutes plus 1 hour | 4 portions | salting to draw out water, then flavouring

Real kimchi is fermented for days and usually contains fish sauce. This is a quick vegetarian version with the same flavours, no fermenting and no fish.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

½	Chinese leaf or white cabbage, shredded
1	carrot, in matchsticks
3	spring onions, sliced
1 tbsp	salt
1 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
2	garlic cloves, grated
1 tbsp	chilli flakes (gochugaru, if you can find it)
1 tbsp	soy sauce
1 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	rice vinegar

1. Toss the cabbage with the salt and leave for **30 minutes**. It will release a lot of water. Rinse briefly, then squeeze it dry.
2. Mix the ginger, garlic, chilli flakes, soy sauce, sugar and rice vinegar into a paste.
3. Mix the paste with the cabbage, carrot and spring onions (wear gloves for the chilli).
4. Leave for at least **1 hour**, then keep in the fridge in a covered container and eat within **3 days**.

> **A REAL FERMENT LATER**
>
> Once the sauerkraut method below makes sense, you can ferment kimchi: that needs more careful safety rules than this recipe.

LEVEL 3 · FIRST FERMENT

Sauerkraut

30 minutes plus 1 to 2 weeks | 10 portions (a condiment)

salting, packing, keeping under the brine, and tasting as it develops

Cabbage, salt and time. The salt draws out water to make a brine, and the good bacteria already on the cabbage turn it sour. Weigh the cabbage and the salt: guessing is how ferments go wrong.

INGREDIENTS (10 PORTIONS)

800 g	small white cabbage (about 800 g after removing the outer leaves and core)
16 g	salt (about 2% of the cabbage weight)
1 tsp	caraway seeds (optional)

1. Remove the outer leaves and the core. Shred the cabbage finely, weigh it, and weigh out **2% of its weight** in salt (800 g of cabbage needs 16 g).
2. In a large bowl, massage the salt into the cabbage for **5 to 10 minutes**, until it goes limp and releases a lot of liquid. Mix in the caraway.
3. Pack the cabbage firmly into a clean jar, pressing down so the brine rises over the cabbage. Leave a gap of 3 to 4 cm at the top. Put a weight on top (a small clean jar filled with water, or a fermenting weight) so that everything stays **under the brine**.
4. Cover loosely and leave at 18 to 21°C, out of the sun, for **1 to 2 weeks**. Press it down daily and taste after a week. When it is tangy enough, close the lid and keep it in the fridge.

> **FERMENTING**
>
> **Fermenting safety:** the guidance I found (mostly from US university extension services and fermenting guides, not from the UK Food Standards Agency) is consistent on these points. Use about **2% salt by weight** (a range of 1.5% to 3% is quoted), weigh the salt, and keep every piece of vegetable **under the brine**, especially in the first 7 to 10 days, because surface mould grows where vegetables touch the air. Ferment at about 18 to 21°C. **Throw the whole batch away** if you see fuzzy or coloured mould, or if it smells rotten or feels slimy. Don't taste anything you are unsure of. A sour, tangy smell and bubbles are normal. If anyone eating it is pregnant, elderly, very young or has a weakened immune system, check current official advice on unpasteurised fermented foods first.

Gas pressure: fermenting makes gas. Never screw a lid on tight and leave it: use an airlock lid, or leave the lid loose, or open it briefly once a day. Don't fill a jar to the brim.

Clean jars: wash jars, lids and utensils in hot soapy water and rinse well; for vinegar pickles you can also run them through a dishwasher hot cycle. Use non-reactive containers (glass or food-grade plastic or ceramic), because acid and salt corrode some metals.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Salt level in a quick pickle

Less, a lot, none.

1. Make three small jars of pickled carrots with no salt, 1 teaspoon of salt, and 2 teaspoons per 300 ml of brine. Taste after a day.

Look for: Without salt the pickle tastes flat; the right amount seasons it; too much is harsh. This is for flavour: vinegar pickles are kept safe by the cold and the acid.

EXPERIMENT

Vinegar strength

More vinegar, less vinegar.

1. Make two jars of pickled onions: one with equal vinegar and water, and one with twice as much water as vinegar. Taste after a day.

Look for: The stronger brine is sharper and crisper; the weaker one is milder and softer. Neither is wrong: write down which you prefer.

EXPERIMENT

Jar size

Air at the top.

1. Make two ferments of the same amount of cabbage, one in a jar that is nearly full and one in a larger jar with plenty of headspace. Keep both under the brine.

Look for: A fuller jar means less air above and less risk of surface mould, but less space for gas and brine to rise. A lot of headspace is a place for trouble: choose a jar that is about three-quarters full.

EXPERIMENT

Fermenting time

Taste at 3, 5, 7 and 10 days.

1. Take a clean spoonful from the sauerkraut at each time and taste it, then press the cabbage back under the brine.

Look for: At 3 days it is only slightly sour; at 7 to 10 days it is properly tangy. Fermenting longer gives a stronger flavour. Stop when you like it, then refrigerate.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Refrigerator pickled vegetables				
Quick pickled red onions				
Kimchi-style slaw				
Sauerkraut				
Salt level				
Vinegar strength				
Jar size				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Fermenting time				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Limp pickles	Cut too thick, or brine not hot	Cut thinner; pour on the brine hot; use fresh crisp vegetables
Cloudy brine	Normal in a ferment; cloudy quick pickles can mean spoilage	In a ferment, cloudy is normal; in a vinegar pickle that has been kept too long, throw it away
Sauerkraut not bubbling	Too cold, or too little salt or time	Move somewhere warmer (about 20°C) and wait a few days
White film on top	Possibly harmless yeast, or mould	If fuzzy, coloured or doubtful, throw the whole batch away
Mushy sauerkraut	Too warm or too much time	Use a cooler place; refrigerate sooner next time
Too salty	Too much salt or no rinsing	Rinse before eating; weigh salt precisely next time

PICKLING AND FERMENTING SAFETY

Clean jars: wash jars, lids and utensils in hot soapy water and rinse well; for vinegar pickles you can also run them through a dishwasher hot cycle. Use non-reactive containers (glass or food-grade plastic or ceramic), because acid and salt corrode some metals.

Quick pickles are not preserved: keep them in the fridge in a covered jar and eat within about **1 week**. They are safe because of the acid and the cold, not because they have been canned. Don't leave them on the worktop for days.

Fermenting safety: the guidance I found (mostly from US university extension services and fermenting guides, not from the UK Food Standards Agency) is consistent on these points. Use about **2% salt by weight** (a range of 1.5% to 3% is quoted), weigh the salt, and keep every piece of vegetable **under the brine**, especially in the first 7 to 10 days, because surface mould grows where vegetables touch the air. Ferment at about 18 to 21°C. **Throw the whole batch away** if you see fuzzy or coloured mould, or if it smells rotten or feels slimy. Don't taste anything you are unsure of. A sour,

tangy smell and bubbles are normal. If anyone eating it is pregnant, elderly, very young or has a weakened immune system, check current official advice on unpasteurised fermented foods first.

Gas pressure: fermenting makes gas. Never screw a lid on tight and leave it: use an airlock lid, or leave the lid loose, or open it briefly once a day. Don't fill a jar to the brim.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a vinegar pickle and I know it must stay in the fridge.
- ☐ I know why I weigh salt for a ferment and keep everything under the brine.
- ☐ I can tell safe signs (sour smell, bubbles) from unsafe ones (mould, slime, rot).
- ☐ I know not to seal a ferment tightly.
- ☐ I know when to throw a batch away.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 7 is Dips, Purées and Sauces: smooth textures and sauces from scratch.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Chapter 7 · Dips, Purées and Sauces

SKILL GOAL

Make smooth and rough dips, purées and sauces from vegetables, and balance and store them properly.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Dips, purées and sauces turn vegetables into something you can spoon, spread or pour. They are also the best way to use up soft, ripe or surplus vegetables, and they freeze well. The skills are the same each time: **get the flavour right, choose a texture, and adjust at the end**.



Figure 7. Choose your texture. The longer you blend, the smoother it gets, so stop when it is as smooth as you want.

Choosing a texture

TEXTURE	HOW	GOOD FOR
Chunky	Chop by hand, or mash with a fork	Salsa, rough tomato sauce, tapenade
Rough	Pulse a few times in a food processor	Pesto, romesco, hummus-style dips
Smooth	Blend for a minute, scraping down the sides	Baba ganoush, soups, most purées

TEXTURE	HOW	GOOD FOR
Silky	Blend for longer, add a little liquid, then push through a sieve	Smooth purées and sauces for plating

Balance

- **Salt** wakes up every flavour. Add a little at a time.
- **Acid** (lemon, vinegar, tomato) brightens heavy things like nuts, oil and root vegetable purées.
- **Fat** (oil, butter, nuts, cheese) rounds off sharpness and gives a smooth, rich feel.
- **Sweetness** (a pinch of sugar, roasted vegetables) balances acid, as in tomato sauce.
- **Garlic:** raw is sharp and punchy, roasted is mellow and sweet. Use a little raw garlic in sauces that aren't cooked, and add it late.

Using a food processor, blender or stick blender

- **Food processor:** best for thick, rough mixtures (pesto, romesco). Scrape down the sides.
- **Jug blender:** smoothest for thin purées and soups; needs liquid and care with hot food.
- **Stick blender:** convenient and keeps hot food in its pan. Keep the head under the surface to avoid splashing.
- **Mortar and pestle:** the traditional tool for pesto and garlic sauces, with a better texture.

Storage

Cover and refrigerate, and eat within **2 days**. Cooked purées and tomato sauce freeze well in portions. Sauces with raw garlic or herbs in oil go in the fridge, never on the worktop.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Romesco (red pepper and almond sauce)

25 minutes | 4 portions | blending nuts, bread and roasted vegetables into a sauce

A Catalan classic that goes with grilled vegetables, roast potatoes, eggs and bread. The nuts and bread give body, and the vinegar lifts it.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2	roasted red peppers (from a jar, drained, or charred as in Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 4)
2	ripe tomatoes, halved
50 g	blanched or toasted almonds
1	slice of day-old bread, torn
1	garlic clove
1 tbsp	red wine vinegar
1 tsp	smoked paprika
4 tbsp	olive oil
1 pinch	salt

1. Roast the tomatoes (halved, cut side up, with a little oil) at 200°C (180°C fan) for **20 minutes** until soft and collapsing. Toast the almonds in a dry pan for 2 minutes until golden.
2. Put the peppers, tomatoes, almonds, bread, garlic, vinegar and paprika in a food processor. Pulse to a rough paste.
3. With the motor running, add the oil in a thin stream. Season and adjust: more vinegar if flat, more salt if bland.
4. Serve at room temperature. Keep covered in the fridge for up to **2 days**.

> NUTS
>
> **Allergens:** romesco and pesto contain nuts, and pesto contains cheese. Check for nut allergies before serving, and use seeds (sunflower or pumpkin) as a substitute.

> **Garlic and herbs in oil:** keep pesto and any garlic-in-oil mixtures in the fridge and use within **2 days**. Don't keep them at room temperature, because garlic in oil can grow the bacteria that cause botulism.

LEVEL 2 · RAW

Pesto (and variations)

15 minutes | 4 portions | a raw herb sauce, and how to keep it green

Pesto is a template: soft herb or leaf, nut, garlic, cheese, oil. Make basil pesto first, then try parsley, rocket, spinach or wild garlic.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

50 g	basil leaves, stalks removed
25 g	pine nuts or walnuts, lightly toasted
1	garlic clove
30 g	hard cheese, grated
80 ml	extra virgin olive oil
1 tsp	lemon juice
1 pinch	salt

1. Toast the nuts in a dry pan for 2 minutes until golden, and let them cool.
2. Put the herbs, nuts, garlic and cheese in a food processor and pulse until coarse. (Or pound in a mortar for a better texture.)
3. With the motor on low, add the oil in a stream. Add the lemon juice and salt, and taste.
4. Use immediately, or cover the surface with a layer of oil and refrigerate for up to **2 days**.

> **NUTS AND KEEPING**
>
> **Allergens:** romesco and pesto contain nuts, and pesto contains cheese. Check for nut allergies before serving, and use seeds (sunflower or pumpkin) as a substitute.
>
> **Garlic and herbs in oil:** keep pesto and any garlic-in-oil mixtures in the fridge and use within **2 days**. Don't keep them at room temperature, because garlic in oil can grow the bacteria that cause botulism.

LEVEL 2 · SILKY

Celeriac or parsnip purée

35 minutes | 4 portions | simmering until very soft, then blending to silk

A purée is a vegetable cooked to a soft mash and blended until smooth. Celeriac tastes like a gentle, nutty celery; parsnips are sweeter.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

500 g	celeriac, peeled and cut into 3 cm chunks (or parsnips)
1	medium potato, peeled and chunked (optional, for body)
300 ml	milk
300 ml	water
25 g	butter
1 pinch	nutmeg
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Put the celeriac (and potato) in a pan with the milk and water. The vegetables should be just covered. Bring to a simmer and cook for **20 to 25 minutes**, until very soft.
2. Drain, keeping the cooking liquid. Put the vegetables in a food processor with the butter, nutmeg, salt and pepper, and blend, adding a little liquid until smooth.
3. Taste and adjust. For a silky finish, push the purée through a sieve with a spoon.
4. Reheat gently before serving, stirring.

> **BLENDING HOT FOOD**
>
> **Blending hot food:** hot purées expand and can blow the lid off a jug blender and scald you. Use a stick blender in the pan, or let the food cool for 10 minutes, fill the jug no more than half, and cover the lid with a tea towel, starting on low.

LEVEL 3 · FROM SCRATCH

Tomato sauce from scratch

50 minutes | 6 portions | simmering and reducing for concentrated flavour, and adjusting acidity

The basic sauce behind countless dishes. A long simmer concentrates the flavour; a little sugar and olive oil at the end soften the acidity.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

1	onion, finely chopped
2	garlic cloves, sliced
2 tbsp	olive oil
2 tins	400 g tins of chopped tomatoes (or 800 g fresh ripe tomatoes, chopped)
1 tsp	sugar (optional)
1 handful	basil leaves
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Sweat the onion in the oil over a low heat for **10 minutes**. Add the garlic for 1 minute.
2. Add the tomatoes, a pinch of salt and the sugar. Bring to a simmer and cook, uncovered, for **30 to 40 minutes**, stirring now and then, until thick and glossy.
3. Add the basil, and blend or mash to your taste (chunky, or smooth with a stick blender: see the safety box).
4. Taste for salt, sugar and acid. Cool quickly. Keep in the fridge for up to **2 days**, or freeze in portions.

> HOT SAUCE
>
> **Blending hot food:** hot purées expand and can blow the lid off a jug blender and scald you. Use a stick blender in the pan, or let the food cool for 10 minutes, fill the jug no more than half, and cover the lid with a tea towel, starting on low.
>
> **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.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Roasted or raw garlic

Two romescos.

1. Make half the romesco twice: once with a raw clove, and once with a clove that has been roasted in its skin for 20 minutes.

Look for: Raw garlic is sharp and hot; roasted garlic is sweet and mellow. Many people prefer roasted in a sauce they will eat in quantity.

EXPERIMENT

Toasted or raw nuts

Pesto.

1. Make two small pestos, one with toasted pine nuts or walnuts and one with raw ones.

Look for: Toasted nuts taste deeper and richer; raw ones are milky and mild. Note which suits you.

EXPERIMENT

Blending time

Rough, smooth and silky.

1. Take three spoonfuls of the celeriac purée at different stages: mashed with a fork, blended for 30 seconds, and blended for 2 minutes then sieved.

Look for: Compare the mouthfeel and see how much smoother the sieved purée is. Decide how smooth you want things.

EXPERIMENT

Adjusting at the end

Salt, acid and sugar.

1. Take a small bowl of tomato sauce and taste it plain. Add a pinch of salt, taste, then a few drops of vinegar, taste, then a pinch of sugar, taste.

Look for: Notice what each addition does. Salt lifts, acid brightens, sugar softens. This habit of tasting and adjusting turns average food into good food.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Romesco				
Pesto				
Celeriac or parsnip purée				
Tomato sauce from scratch				
Roasted vs raw garlic				
Toasted vs raw nuts				
Blending time				
Adjusting at the end				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Bitter pesto	Over-blended, or old nuts or oil	Pulse briefly; use fresh nuts and a milder oil; add cheese

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Pesto turns brown	Air	Cover with a layer of oil; use lemon juice; eat fresh
Gritty purée	Under-cooked or not blended long enough	Cook until very soft; blend longer and sieve
Watery purée or sauce	Too much liquid	Simmer uncovered; blend with less liquid
Sauce tastes sharp or flat	Unbalanced	Add salt, a pinch of sugar or a little more oil
Split sauce	Added oil too fast	Add slowly with the motor running

BLENDING, ALLERGENS AND STORAGE

Blending hot food: hot purées expand and can blow the lid off a jug blender and scald you. Use a stick blender in the pan, or let the food cool for 10 minutes, fill the jug no more than half, and cover the lid with a tea towel, starting on low.

Allergens: romesco and pesto contain nuts, and pesto contains cheese. Check for nut allergies before serving, and use seeds (sunflower or pumpkin) as a substitute.

Garlic and herbs in oil: keep pesto and any garlic-in-oil mixtures in the fridge and use within **2 days**. Don't keep them at room temperature, because garlic in oil can grow the bacteria that cause botulism.

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 choose and reach a texture.
- ☐ I can balance salt, acid, fat and sweetness.
- ☐ I can make pesto and romesco with my own variations.
- ☐ I can blend hot food safely.
- ☐ I store sauces safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 8 is Awkward Vegetables: preparing artichokes, asparagus, fennel, celeriac and beetroot.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Chapter 8 · Awkward Vegetables

SKILL GOAL

Prepare and cook awkward vegetables with confidence: asparagus, fennel, celeriac, beetroot and globe artichokes.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Some vegetables look intimidating: spiky artichokes, knobbly celeriac, bleeding beetroot, thin asparagus spears with woody ends. None of them is hard once you know the one trick for each. This chapter is a set of **preparation skills**, with each vegetable cooked simply so you can taste what it is.

The trick for each

VEGETABLE	THE CHALLENGE	THE TRICK
Asparagus	Woody ends	Snap where it breaks naturally; peel thick spears
Fennel	Tough core and outer layers	Trim, cut in wedges through the root, roast or braise
Celeriac	Knobbly, thick skin; browns when cut	Cut the skin off with a knife; rub with lemon
Beetroot	Stains everything	Gloves, apron; cook whole and peel after
Globe artichoke	Spiky, with an inedible choke	Trim, boil, eat the leaf bases and the heart

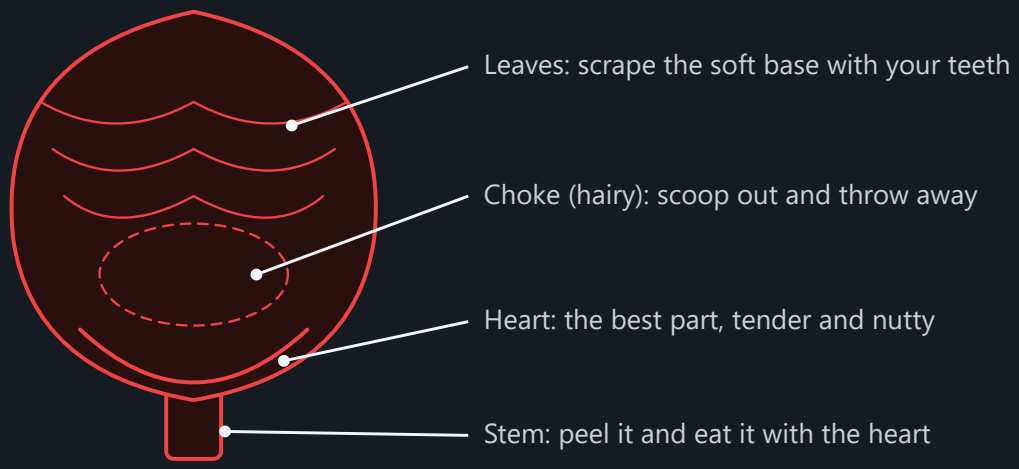


Figure 8. The anatomy of a globe artichoke. Only the soft base of each leaf and the heart are eaten; the hairy choke is thrown away.

Stopping browning

Celeriac, artichokes, apples and potatoes turn brown when cut, because enzymes in the cut surface react with air. Rub them with lemon juice or keep them in a bowl of water with a squeeze of lemon (called **acidulated water**) until they are cooked.

Buying and storing

- **Asparagus:** firm, bright spears with tight tips. Stand them in an inch of water in the fridge, or wrap the ends in damp kitchen paper. Use within a few days.
- **Fennel:** firm, white bulbs with fresh fronds; keeps for about a week in the fridge.
- **Celeriac:** heavy for its size, firm, with few small roots. It keeps for weeks in a cool place.
- **Beetroot:** firm, with no soft spots. Cut off the leaves (they can be cooked as greens) and leave a bit of stem so it doesn't bleed.
- **Artichokes:** heavy, tight leaves, with no brown or dry tips. Use within a few days.

Peel or scrub?

Young beetroot and fennel only need a scrub. Celeriac, big beetroot and artichoke stalks need peeling or cutting away. Asparagus needs the lower half peeled if the spears are thick.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Asparagus with lemon

15 minutes | 2 portions | trimming the woody ends and cooking just enough

Asparagus is an expensive treat in season (in the UK, roughly late April to June), so it is worth cooking carefully. Snap off the woody ends, then boil, steam or roast.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

250 g	asparagus spears
1 tbsp	olive oil or butter
½	lemon, zest and juice
1 tbsp	grated hard cheese (optional)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Hold a spear at both ends and bend it gently: it snaps where the tender part meets the woody base. Snap one, then cut the others to the same length. Peel the lower half of thick spears.
2. **Boil or steam** for **3 to 5 minutes**, until bright green and just tender. (Roast: toss in oil, 200°C or 180°C fan, 10 to 12 minutes.)
3. Drain and toss with the oil or butter, lemon zest and juice, salt and pepper. Top with cheese.

> **THIN OR THICK**
>
> Thick spears are often more tender than thin ones, but need the lower half peeled. Judge the cooking time by thickness.

LEVEL 2 · ROAST

Roast fennel

40 minutes | 2 portions | turning a raw vegetable into something sweet and soft

Raw fennel crunches like celery with an aniseed flavour; roasted, it turns sweet, soft and golden. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	medium fennel bulbs, trimmed and cut into 1 cm wedges
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	fennel seeds (optional)
½	lemon, juice
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Trim the stalks and base. Cut each bulb into wedges through the root so the layers stay together.
2. Toss with the oil, seeds, salt and pepper and lay them on a tray in a single layer.
3. Roast for **25 to 30 minutes**, turning once, until the edges caramelise and a knife slides in.
4. Squeeze over lemon juice and serve.

LEVEL 2 · PEEL

Celeriac steaks

50 minutes | 3 portions | peeling a knobbly root and stopping it browning

Celeriac is knobbly and ugly but delicious. Peel it generously with a knife, not a peeler, and rub the cut surfaces with lemon so they don't turn brown.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

1	celeriac (about 600 g)
2 tbsp	olive oil
1	lemon, cut in half
1 tsp	thyme leaves or dried thyme
1 tbsp	grated cheese or toasted seeds (optional)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Slice off the top and bottom. Stand it on a flat end and cut the skin off in strips with a sharp knife, following the curve. Rub with lemon.
2. Cut into slices about 2 cm thick (the 'steaks'). Brush both sides with oil and season with thyme, salt and pepper.
3. Roast on a tray at 200°C (180°C fan) for **30 to 40 minutes**, turning once, until golden and tender.
4. Finish with a squeeze of lemon and the cheese or seeds.

> KNIFE 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.

LEVEL 3 · THREE WAYS

Beetroot three ways: boiled, roasted, raw

1 hour 15 minutes | 3 portions | comparing methods on the same vegetable

One vegetable, three treatments: **boiled** (soft and mild), **roasted** (concentrated and sweet) and **raw** (crisp and earthy). Wear gloves.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

3	beetroots, scrubbed (about 500 g)
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tbsp	red wine vinegar or lemon juice
1 tbsp	orange juice
1 tbsp	plain yoghurt
1 tbsp	chopped dill or mint
1 tbsp	walnuts, chopped (optional)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. **Boiled:** put one whole, unpeeled beetroot in a pan of water and simmer for **40 to 50 minutes**, until a knife slides in. Cool, then rub off the skin.
2. **Roasted:** wrap one beetroot in foil with a little oil. Roast at 200°C (180°C fan) for **50 to 60 minutes**. Cool and peel.
3. **Raw:** peel one beetroot and slice or grate it very thin.
4. Cut the cooked beetroots into wedges. Dress all three with the oil, vinegar, orange juice, salt and pepper. Serve on a plate with the yoghurt, dill and walnuts.

> **STAINING**
>
> **Beetroot stains:** it dyes hands, boards and clothes. Wear gloves and an apron, use a plastic or well-washed board, and rinse stains with cold water at once. A pink wee after eating beetroot is harmless.

LEVEL 3 · THE AWKWARD ONE

A whole artichoke

1 hour | 2 portions | trimming, boiling and eating a whole globe artichoke

A globe artichoke is a flower bud. You eat the soft base of each leaf and the heart. It takes a little practice, and the experience of eating it is half the fun.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	globe artichokes
1	lemon, cut in half
1 tbsp	salt for the water
3 tbsp	melted butter or a vinaigrette, to dip

1. Cut off the stem (leave a few cm if you want to peel and eat it) and slice about 2 cm off the top. Snip the sharp tips off the outer leaves with scissors. Rub every cut surface with lemon straight away, because it browns fast.
2. Boil in plenty of salted water with half a lemon for **30 to 45 minutes**, weighed down with a plate so it stays under. It is done when an outer leaf pulls away easily and the base is tender when pierced.
3. Drain upside down. To eat, pull off each leaf, dip the base in butter, and scrape the soft flesh off with your teeth. Discard the rest of the leaf.
4. When you reach the centre, scoop out and discard the hairy **choke**, then eat the heart with a knife and fork.

> **NEVER EAT THE CHOKE**
>
> The hairy choke is not harmful but is unpleasant and fibrous. Discard it, and the tough outer parts of the leaves, as shown in the diagram.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Peel or scrub

Beetroot.

1. Roast two beetroots in foil, one peeled first and one with its skin on. Peel the second after cooking.

Look for: The skin comes away easily after cooking, and the beetroot keeps more flavour and colour than one peeled raw. Compare the taste and the mess.

EXPERIMENT

Boiled, roasted or raw

Three ways.

1. Taste the three beetroots from the recipe side by side with no dressing.

Look for: Boiled is mild and wet; roasted is sweet and concentrated; raw is crunchy and earthy. Write down which you would choose for which dish.

EXPERIMENT

Woody asparagus ends

Snap or cut.

1. Snap one asparagus spear where it breaks naturally, and cut another about 3 cm from the base with a knife. Cook both ends and compare.

Look for: The snap point is where the woody part ends; cut a woody end and you'll chew a stringy mouthful. Snapping guides you to where the tender part begins.

EXPERIMENT

Stopping the browning

With and without lemon.

1. Cut two slices of celeriac. Rub one with lemon and leave the other plain. Wait 15 minutes.

Look for: The plain slice turns brown while the lemon one stays pale. The browning is harmless but unappealing.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Asparagus with lemon				
Roast fennel				
Celeriac steaks				
Beetroot three ways				
A whole artichoke				
Peel vs scrub beetroot				
Woody asparagus ends				
Lemon vs plain celeriac				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Stringy asparagus	Woody end left on	Snap properly; peel thick spears

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Grey, brown celeriac	Oxidised	Rub with lemon; keep in acidulated water
Tough artichoke	Not cooked long enough	Keep boiling until a leaf pulls out easily
Bland roast fennel	Underseasoned or steamed	Dry the wedges, space them out, add lemon at the end
Pink everything	Beetroot juice	Gloves, cold water straight away, and cut it last
Mushy asparagus	Overcooked	Cook 3 to 5 minutes and plunge into cold water if cooking ahead

KNIVES, STAINING AND STORAGE

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.

Beetroot stains: it dyes hands, boards and clothes. Wear gloves and an apron, use a plastic or well-washed board, and rinse stains with cold water at once. A pink wee after eating beetroot is harmless.

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 trim asparagus, fennel and celeriac.
- ☐ I can stop cut vegetables browning.
- ☐ I can cook beetroot and peel it afterwards.
- ☐ I can prepare and eat a whole artichoke.
- ☐ I know how to buy and store each of them.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 9 is A Vegetable Feast: planning and timing a large vegetarian meal.

Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2

Chapter 9 · A Vegetable Feast

SKILL GOAL

Plan, time and serve a vegetarian feast, a mezze table and a week of meal-prep vegetables.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

The last chapter is about **planning**. You now have a large set of dishes. Cooking a feast is mostly deciding what to make, in what order, and how much can be done ahead, so that you aren't cooking six things at once when the guests arrive.

Planning a menu

- **Balance the flavours and textures:** something creamy (a dip, a purée), something crunchy (raw vegetables, crisps), something sharp (pickles, a dressing), something rich (a curry, a gratin) and something fresh (a salad).
- **Use different methods:** one roasted, one simmered, one raw, one fried or grilled, so they don't compete for the same oven or hob.
- **Make ahead:** dips, pickles, caponata, curry base and sauces are all better the next day.
- **Choose one showpiece** and keep the rest simple.
- **Ask about diets and allergies** in advance.

The running order

A running order is a list of times, worked backwards from when you want to eat. Start with the slowest dish, then fit the others around it. Write down when each dish goes in and comes out, and what you will do while it cooks.

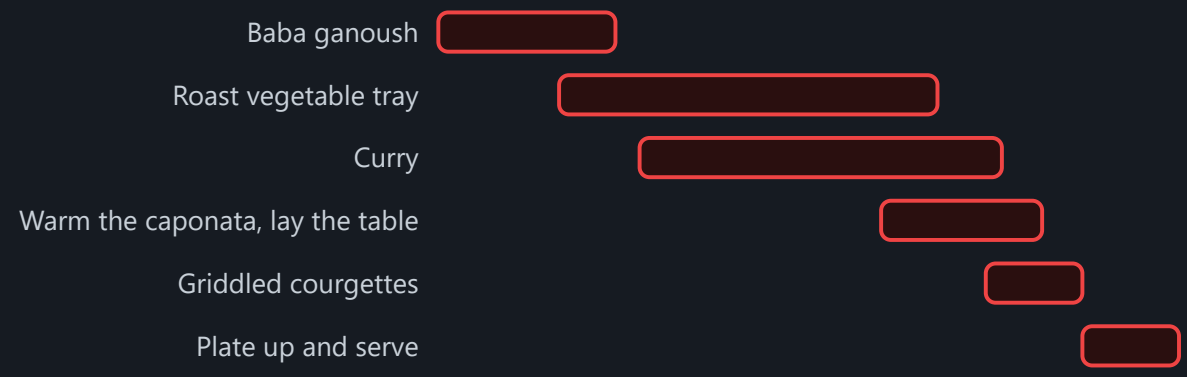


Figure 9. A running order for six dishes. The slowest dishes start first, the dips and pickles are done ahead, and the last 15 minutes are for the quick dishes and plating.

Your skills table

SKILL	CHAPTER	BEST FOR	MY TOP TIP
Toasting and tempering spices	Vegetables 2, chapter 1	Curries, dals, vegetables with a spice lift	Watch it: seconds matter
Curry and stew building	Vegetables 2, chapter 2	Using up vegetables; big batches	Balance salt, sweet, sour and heat at the end
Braising	Vegetables 2, chapter 3	Fennel, red cabbage, leeks, aubergine	Lid on, low heat, glaze at the end
Grilling and charring	Vegetables 2, chapter 4	Summer vegetables, peppers, aubergines	Two zones: sear, then finish
Fritters and tempura	Vegetables 2, chapter 5	Snacks and starters	Dry the food, fry in small batches
Pickling and fermenting	Vegetables 2, chapter 6	Condiments and preserving surplus	Weigh the salt; keep it under the brine
Dips, purées and sauces	Vegetables 2, chapter 7	Using up surplus; freezing	Taste and adjust at the end
Awkward vegetables	Vegetables 2, chapter 8	Making seasonal treats feel easy	Know the one trick for each

Fill in your own tips in the table below, in your own words.

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Spices: my favourite combination				
Curry: my house curry				
Braise: my best vegetable				
Grill: my best marinade				
Frying: my crispest batter				
Preserving: my best pickle				
Sauce: my signature sauce				
My signature vegetable dish				

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

A vegetarian feast for 6

Plan a day ahead; cook for about 1 hour 30 minutes | 6 portions | a running order for six dishes

No new recipes here: you cook what you have learned. Write a running order first, work backwards from when you want to eat, and make everything possible the day before.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

1 batch	caponata, made the day before (Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 3)
1 batch	quick pickled red onions, made the day before (chapter 6)
1 batch	baba ganoush (chapter 4)
1 batch	roast vegetable tray, with squash, peppers and fennel (Vegetables 1, chapter 3, and Vegetables 2, chapter 8)
1 batch	coconut vegetable curry (chapter 2)
1 batch	griddled courgettes (chapter 4)
300 g	rice, cooked as in Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 2, or flatbreads
1 handful	chopped herbs and a lemon, for finishing

1. **The day before:** make the caponata and the pickled onions (both improve overnight) and refrigerate them.
2. **2 hours before:** char the aubergines and make the baba ganoush. Prepare and cut the roast vegetables and the curry vegetables. Set the table.
3. **1 hour 15 minutes before:** put the roast tray in the oven. Start the curry base and simmer the curry. Take the caponata out of the fridge to warm to room temperature.
4. **15 minutes before:** cook the rice, griddle the courgettes, warm the curry and plate everything up with herbs and lemon. Put hot dishes in a low oven if you need to wait.

FEEDING A CROWD

Serving a crowd: keep hot food above about 63°C (in a low oven) and cold food in the fridge until needed. Don't leave dishes out for more than 2 hours, and cool and chill leftovers

> promptly. Ask guests about allergies and diets before you plan the menu: nuts, sesame, gluten, dairy and egg all appear in this course.

LEVEL 2 · ASSEMBLY

A mezze table

30 minutes if everything is prepared | 4 portions | choosing, balancing and arranging a spread

A mezze table is a feast that needs almost no cooking at the last minute: dips, pickles, roasted vegetables, raw vegetables, bread. Balance the colours, flavours and textures.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1 batch	baba ganoush
1 batch	romesco, or hummus from the shop
1 batch	pickled vegetables
1 batch	roast peppers or charred peppers
200 g	cucumber, carrot and radish, cut in sticks
100 g	olives and feta
4	flatbreads or pitta
1 tbsp	olive oil, for drizzling

1. Make the dips and pickles ahead (see chapters 4, 6 and 7). Keep them in the fridge.
2. Take the dips out of the fridge 20 minutes before serving. Serve in shallow bowls, drizzled with oil and scattered with herbs.
3. Arrange the raw sticks, olives, feta and peppers on a large platter or board. Warm the bread.
4. Aim for a balance: something creamy, something crunchy, something sharp, something smoky, something sweet.

> **COUNTING PORTIONS**
>
> A mezze with plenty of vegetable sides is an easy way to reach several of your five a day in one meal.

LEVEL 2 · MEAL PREP

A week of meal-prep vegetables

1 hour 30 minutes on one day | 4 to 6 portions | cooking once and eating well for the next few days

A prep session gives you building blocks: roast vegetables, a sauce, a grain and a soup. Mix and match them through the week.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

1 batch	roast vegetable tray (squash, peppers, courgettes, onion)
1 batch	tomato sauce from scratch (chapter 7)
1 batch	pesto or romesco (chapter 7)
200 g	dried rice, couscous or pasta, cooked in batches
1 batch	pickled vegetables (chapter 6)
1 batch	a pot of vegetable soup (Vegetables 1, chapter 6)

1. Put the vegetable tray in the oven first (it needs the most time). Start the soup on the hob and the tomato sauce on a low heat.
2. While they cook, cook the grain (cool it quickly) and make the pesto or romesco. Make the pickles.
3. Cool everything quickly, within 1 to 2 hours, and divide into boxes. Label them with the date.
4. Eat the roast vegetables, sauces and soup within **2 days**, and freeze the rest in portions. Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Keep rice for no more than 1 day in the fridge.

> **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.
>
> **Rice:** cool within 1 hour, refrigerate, eat within 1 day, and reheat only once until steaming hot, because cooked rice can carry bacteria that survive cooking.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

A timed feast

Six dishes, one deadline.

1. Write your own running order for a feast or a mezze table. Cook it, noting when each dish was actually ready.
2. Compare your plan with what happened and rewrite the plan.

Look for: The usual mistakes are starting the slow dish too late and leaving too many last-minute jobs. Adjust the plan and keep it for next time.

EXPERIMENT

Swap one dish

Same menu, different recipe.

1. Take a menu you have cooked and swap one dish for another from the course (for example the curry for the braised fennel, or the baba ganoush for the romesco).

Look for: A good menu has a structure (creamy, crunchy, sharp, rich, fresh) that survives swaps. Note which swap worked and why.

EXPERIMENT

Your signature dish

Make it yours.

1. Choose one vegetable you love and decide the method, the seasoning, and one contrasting texture. Cook it, taste it, change one thing, cook it again.

Look for: Write the finished recipe down, with quantities and times, in your own words. That is your first house recipe.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Vegetarian feast				
Mezze table				
Meal-prep session				
Timed feast				
Swapped dish				
Signature dish				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Everything ready at once, or nothing ready	No running order	Write one: slowest first, working backwards from serving time
Too many last-minute jobs	Not enough made ahead	Choose dishes that improve overnight; set the table early
Hot food gone cold	Dishes ready too soon	Use a low oven (about 70°C, fan lower) to hold; warm plates
Meal feels heavy	Too much fried or rich food	Balance with a salad, pickles and something fresh
Guest can't eat a dish	Didn't ask	Ask first; label dishes; keep a simple safe option
Meal-prep food goes off	Stored too long	Eat within 2 days; freeze the rest in portions

FOOD SAFETY FOR A FEAST

Serving a crowd: keep hot food above about 63°C (in a low oven) and cold food in the fridge until needed. Don't leave dishes out for more than 2 hours, and cool and chill leftovers promptly. Ask guests about allergies and diets before you plan the menu: nuts, sesame, gluten, dairy and egg all appear in this course.

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 plan a menu with balance and different methods.
- ☐ I can write a running order and cook to it.
- ☐ I can make a mezze table.
- ☐ I can do a meal-prep session and store food safely.
- ☐ I have a signature vegetable dish.

NEXT CHAPTER

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