



COOKING TERMINOLOGY

Resource Guide

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Al dente [al-DEN-tay]

An Italian phrase meaning "to the tooth," used to describe pasta or other food that is cooked only until it offers a slight resistance when bitten into, but which is not soft or overdone.

Bake

To cook food in an oven, thereby surrounding it with dry heat. Baking may also be a synonym for roasting; however, roasting usually implies that you are cooking something at a higher temperature in order to create a crust on the food while it cooks.

Bake Blind

An English term for baking a pastry shell before it is filled. The shell is usually pricked all over with a fork to prevent it from blistering and rising.

Baste

To spoon or brush food as it cooks with melted butter or other fat, meat drippings or liquid such as stock. A BULB BASTER can also be used to drizzle the liquid over the food. In addition to adding flavor and color, basting keeps meats and other foods from drying out. Fatty roasts, when cooked fat side up, do not need basting.

Blackening

cooking meat in which you coat it generously with pepper and other spices. Then the meat is seared to lock in the flavor and produce a meat that is crisp on the outside, but moist and tender on the inside. This is an especially popular technique to use when cooking fish or chicken!

Blanch

To plunge food (usually vegetables and fruits) into boiling water briefly, then into cold water to stop the cooking process. Blanching is used to firm the flesh, to loosen skins (as with peaches and tomatoes) and to heighten and set color and flavor (as with vegetables before freezing) Blanching also removes the bitterness from the citrus zest.

Boil

"Bring to a boil" refers to heating a liquid until bubbles break the surface (212°F for water at sea level). The term also means to cook food in a boiling liquid. A "full rolling boil" is one that cannot be dissipated by stirring.

Braise [BRAYZ]

A cooking method by which food (usually meat or vegetables) is first browned in fat, then cooked, tightly covered, in a small amount of liquid at low heat for a lengthy period of time. The long, slow cooking develops flavor and tenderizes foods by gently breaking down their fibers. Braising can be done on top of the range or in the oven.

Broil

To cook food directly under or above the heat source. Food can be broiled in an oven, directly under the gas or electric heat source, or on a barbecue grill, directly over charcoal or other heat source. For example, garlic bread and nachos are typically made this way. You set your oven to “broil” and place the food on the top oven rack, closest to the electric coils.

Chopping

Cutting food into irregular pieces.

Chiffonade

French for 'made from rags.' In cooking it refers to a small chopped pile of thin strips of an ingredient. Usually it is raw, but sometimes sautéed. Mostly used to garnish.

Cutlet

A thin, tender cut of meat (usually from lamb, pork or veal) taken from the leg or rib section. Cutlets are best when quickly cooked, such as sautéed or grilled.

Dice

To cut food into tiny (about 1/8- to 1/4-inch) cubes.

Deglaze [dee-GLAYZ]

After food (usually meat) has been sautéed and the food and excess fat removed from the pan, deglazing is done by heating a small amount of liquid in the pan and stirring to loosen browned bits of food on the bottom. The liquid used is most often wine or stock. The resultant mixture often becomes a base for a sauce to accompany the food cooked in the pan.

Deep-fry

To cook food in hot fat deep enough to completely cover the item being fried. The oil or fat used for deep-frying should have a high smoke point (the point to which it can be heated without smoking). For that reason, butter and margarine are not good candidates for frying; shortening, lard and most oils are. Fat at the right temperature will produce a crisp exterior and succulent interior. If it's not hot enough, food will absorb fat and be greasy; too hot, and it will burn.

Grill

A heavy metal grate that is set over hot coals or other heat source and used to cook foods. To prepare food on a grill over hot coals or other heat source. The term barbecue is often used synonymously with grill.

Julienne (French)

A cut of meat, poultry, or vegetables which is 1/8 x 1/8 x 1 1/2 inches long.

Marinate

To let food stand in a mixture called a marinade (such as a liquid, dry rub, or a paste) before cooking. Some marinades are meant for lending flavor; whereas, those that include an acid (lemon, wine, vinegar, and yogurt) are meant for tenderizing. Of course, some marinades do both.

Marking

Using intense heat to simply make grill lines on the outside of a food items. Meat, chicken, seafood, fruits and vegetables can be marked. The food is raw or uncooked on the inside.

Minced / Mince

To cut food into extremely fine pieces.

Poach

To cook food gently in liquid just below the boiling point when the liquid's surface is beginning to show some quivering movement. Meats and poultry are usually simmered in stock, fish in court-bouillon. Fruit is often poached in a light sugar syrup. Poaching produces a delicate flavor in foods, while imparting some of the liquid's flavor to the ingredient being poached.

Pan Broiling

To cook in an uncovered skillet where the fat is poured off during cooking.

Papillote (French)

Cooked in foil or parchment paper to seal in flavor, then served and cut open at table.

Parboiling

To cook partially by boiling for a short period of time.

Puree

Cutting food into such small bits that it becomes a liquid, often done in a blender or food processor.

Scaloppine

An Italian cooking term referring to a thinly sliced, boneless, round cut of meat that is slightly floured (or breaded) and quickly sauteed. (also known as escalope in French).

Searing

involves browning the outside surface of a piece of meat or protein by subjecting it to intense heat for just a few seconds to seal the outside and lock in the meat's natural moisture and juices.

Shredding

Cutting food into small strips. Unlike chopping, it does not have to be precise.

Slicing

Cutting food into thin flat pieces.

Steam

A method of cooking whereby food is placed on a rack or in a special steamer basket over boiling or simmering water in a covered pan. Steaming does a better job than boiling or poaching of retaining a food's flavor, shape, texture and many of the vitamins and minerals.

Simmer

To cook food gently in liquid at a temperature (about 185°F) low enough that tiny bubbles just begin to break the surface.

Stew

The term is most often applied to dishes that contain meat, vegetables and a thick soup- like broth resulting from a combination of the stewing liquid and the natural juices of the food being stewed. Stewing not only tenderizes tough pieces of meat but also allows the flavors of the ingredients to blend deliciously.

Zest

The rind of citrus fruit (most commonly orange, grapefruit, lime, and lemon). The rind of the fruit contains oils if essence that lend a nice flavor to the final dish.

Catering Terminology courtesy of:

