



S1E20 Script

Introduction

*Hello chefs, today we talk the art of seasoning, and how to balance salt, acid, fat and heat to elevate your cooking. I am Mark Grigsby, your chef and guide through this experience, and this.. Is the *IncrEDIBLE* Discourse.*

Alright guys! How about this?! We've made it to the 20th episode of your favorite podcast! 20! That's incredible! I'm so happy that we have grown up to this point. And with so much more to cover and talk about, we can only go up from here.

By the time you are hearing this, we have successfully relocated to Houston, TX! The next chapter of life begins now! I couldn't be more excited!

As always, before we get started, if you haven't already hit the like and subscribe button wherever you're listening to this and make sure you leave a 5 star review. Cmon.. it takes 2 seconds and you'll be contributing to anyone like you who's trying to take their cooking and kitchen game to the next level. It truly helps. As a matter of fact, in literally a month's time we have doubled our subscribers. That's incredible and it's all thanks to all of you who tune in every show, watch all the shorts and like every post. I really do appreciate it!

Now.. let's get down to business. Today we're talking about seasoning. And you may say, but isn't seasoning just salt and pepper? And the answer is.. No. There's definitely a balance and science to it, and today I'm gonna break all of it down for you.

So let's start with this: *what does seasoning actually mean?* Because it's not just sprinkling some salt and pepper on food and calling it a day. Seasoning is the deliberate practice of shaping flavor so that your ingredients speak clearly. It's balance, it's depth, it's contrast, and it's respect for the food.

Now, when I break down seasoning, I like to think about it through **four main pillars**: Salt, acid, fat and heat.

Salt doesn't just make things salty. Salt enhances. It opens up your taste buds, draws out the natural flavors, and balances bitterness and sweetness. It's the great amplifier.

When we talk about acid, Think lemon juice, vinegar, tomatoes. Acid brightens a dish. It cuts through richness and makes flavors pop. A squeeze of lemon can change..... everything.

Fat is flavor's delivery system. It carries flavor compounds across your palate, it gives richness and mouthfeel, and without it, food often feels flat.

And when I say heat, I don't just mean chili spice. I mean both the spice *and* the cooking temperature. Heat changes how flavors develop and how seasoning comes across in a dish.

Now here's where a lot of folks get it twisted — *timing matters*. Seasoning isn't just about **what** you add, it's about **when** you add it.

Before cooking is where you set the stage. Salt your steak or chicken ahead of time, let that salt actually work its way in. Brining poultry? That's not just some fancy chef trick, that's science locking in moisture and flavor before the heat ever touches it. Marinades? Same deal — they don't just add flavor, they prep your ingredients for what's coming next.

During cooking is where the real layering happens. Don't just wait until the end to fix bland food. You season as you go. Throw a pinch of salt on onions while they sweat, and suddenly they're releasing flavor instead of just softening. Salt your pasta water so the noodles taste like something before they even hit the sauce. Keep tasting your soups, your sauces, as they reduce — every adjustment keeps you on track.

After cooking is the finishing touch, the part that makes food pop. A sprinkle of flaky salt on a seared steak. A squeeze of lemon on roasted vegetables. A swirl of herb oil on a bowl of soup. That last step takes a good dish and makes it great.

And here's the big mistake to avoid — treating seasoning like it's a one-shot deal at the end. If you do that, it's too late. You're either under-seasoned and flat, or over-seasoned and ruined. Seasoning is a process, not a patch.

First things first, get yourself some kosher salt. That's the workhorse. Big, consistent crystals that give you control. And toss that shaker of table salt. It's too fine, it dumps out way too fast, and that's why people oversalt. Sea salts are great for depth. And then there's finishing salts like Maldon — you know, those big, crunchy flakes you hit a steak with right before it goes out. That's texture and flavor in one bite.

Acid is your secret weapon. Vinegars, citrus, fermented stuff. If you keep a bottle of red wine vinegar and maybe rice vinegar, and you're already ahead. A squeeze of lemon or lime brings balance in seconds. Soy sauce, fish sauce, miso — those are acids and umami bombs rolled together.

The next tool is heat and not just chili heat. Black pepper brings warmth and aroma, freshly cracked over a dish hits totally different than that dusty pre-ground shit. Then you've got cayenne, mustard seeds, wasabi, Szechuan peppercorns — each culture has its own way of delivering “heat,” and each one lands in a different spot on your palate.

And lastly, Aromatics — herbs and spices. Here's the trick: how you use them changes the game. Toast spices in a little fat and they bloom, releasing oils and flavor. Add herbs raw at the end, and you get freshness and brightness. Same ingredients, totally different impact depending on when and how you season.

Seasoning isn't just *what* you add, it's the *form* it comes in and the way you apply it. That's the difference between “meh” and “memorable.”

Now here's the part I really love — looking at seasoning through different cultural lenses. Because the truth is, no matter where you go in the world, every cuisine has its own *language of seasoning*.

Take the French — they're all about butter, wine, and mirepoix. Carrots, onions, celery — those three humble vegetables form the backbone of a thousand sauces and soups. Layered slowly, built patiently. That's French seasoning.

Now jump to Japan — they season with balance and restraint. Dashi, soy, miso — nothing's loud, but everything is in harmony. It's subtle, but it hits you deep.

Head over to Mexico — and it's chili, lime, and salt. Layers of heat, acidity, and brightness. That squeeze of lime on tacos? That's not garnish — that's the final note that completes the dish.

And of course, India — where they take whole spices and *temper* them in hot oil, blooming out flavor before anything else even hits the pan. That one step transforms a dish from flat to fragrant.

Here's the takeaway: seasoning isn't universal, it's cultural. It's how different people, in different kitchens, express flavor. And as cooks, the more of those “languages” we learn, the more fluent we get in making food that speaks.

Now let's take it up a notch and talk **advanced seasoning**. This is where cooks really separate themselves — where you stop just “making food taste good” and start creating food people *remember*. I’m gonna give you 4 examples:

Umami and depth — this is the secret weapon. You ever had a sauce that just tasted... deeper than you expected? That’s umami at work. Toss a Parmesan rind into a pot of soup, melt a couple anchovies into a pan sauce, or hit a stock with dried mushrooms. You don’t taste the ingredient directly — but you feel that depth. That’s layering.

Sweetness as seasoning — most people don’t think of sweetness as a seasoning, but it absolutely is. A drizzle of honey in a vinaigrette balances sharp vinegar. Caramelized onions turn a burger into comfort food magic. Even roasting vegetables until their natural sugars brown — that’s seasoning through technique, not just ingredients.

Textural seasoning — flavor isn’t just about taste, it’s about *feel*. That crunch of flaky salt on a steak, fried shallots on top of noodles, or citrus zest grated over dessert. You’re hitting the tongue and the teeth at the same time — and it sticks in the memory way longer.

Temperature and perception — here’s one people overlook all the time. Food tastes different hot than it does cold. Soup that’s perfectly seasoned boiling on the stove might need a final adjustment once it cools slightly for service. Same with leftovers — they taste different straight from the fridge because seasoning reacts with temperature. Great cooks anticipate that shift.

This is the level where seasoning stops being just a “step” in cooking — it becomes a craft. You’re not just following rules; you’re playing with layers, balance, and memory.

At the end of the day, seasoning isn’t just about ingredients. It’s about intention.

In every kitchen I’ve worked in, the number one rule has always been: *taste, taste, taste*. Not once, not twice — constantly. Chefs carry spoons in their aprons for a reason. Tasting is respect. Respect for your team, respect for the guest, respect for the craft.

And there’s a fine line here: under-seasoning is lazy. Over-seasoning is arrogant. The art is balance. Hitting that sweet spot where the flavors sing, not scream.

And sometimes, the best seasoning is restraint. Knowing when to step back and let the ingredient do the talking. You don’t need ten spices when one pinch of salt and a squeeze of lemon will do the job.

That’s what makes seasoning an art — it’s communication. Every adjustment, every taste, every finishing touch is you telling a story on the plate. And the better you season, the clearer your voice comes through.

So when we talk about “seasoning,” it’s not just salt and pepper. It’s timing, it’s tools, it’s culture, it’s advanced tricks, and it’s philosophy. It’s the backbone of cooking. Whether you’re in a

Michelin-starred kitchen or making Tuesday night dinner, seasoning is what separates food that fills your stomach from food that moves you.

And now that we've learned what seasoning is, it's time to season our minds a little bit.. And you know what that means...

It's time for... food for thought. Or what I like to call.. Pro tips from a chef's lips.

Alright, so we've broken down the science, the tools, the culture, even the philosophy of seasoning. That's all great — but let's bring it back home for a minute. Because not everybody listening is running a restaurant kitchen, right? Most of you are cooking at home — for your family, for your friends, or maybe just for yourself after a long day.

And here's the truth: everything we just talked about in the first segment still applies in your kitchen. The difference is, you don't need a brigade of cooks or a walk-in cooler full of mise en place to do it. You just need awareness, intention, and a few good habits.

So let's talk about what seasoning looks like in the home kitchen — and how those same principles can make your everyday cooking go from "pretty good" to "restaurant quality."

Here's the first big one: timing matters at home just as much as it does in a professional kitchen.

Before cooking is your head start, and we've talked about this before. Don't just rip open the package and throw the chicken straight in the pan. Salt it 30–40 minutes before you cook it and let the seasoning work its way in. Making pork chops? Hit them with salt ahead of time and you'll see the difference in juiciness and flavor. If you've got the time, brining or marinating overnight will completely change the game.

During cooking is where most home cooks slip up. Don't wait until the food is done to realize it's bland. Season as you go. Put a pinch of salt on your onions while they're sweating — it helps draw out flavor, not just moisture. Season your pasta water like the ocean, because those noodles should taste like something before they ever see a drop of sauce. And always taste your soup or sauce at different stages. Flavors evolve as they reduce — and if you're not checking along the way, you're cooking blind.

After cooking is where you turn good food into great food. A sprinkle of flaky salt on roasted chicken, a squeeze of lemon over grilled veggies, or a drizzle of olive oil on pasta right before serving. These finishing touches make a dish pop, and they're the kind of details that make people ask, "*what's your secret?*"

And just like I said in the first segment — the biggest mistake is treating seasoning like it's one step you do at the very end. If you do that, you're already behind. Seasoning is a process, not a patch job.

Now let's talk about what's already sitting in your kitchen, because you don't need a Michelin pantry to season like a pro.

First up — **salt**. If you’re still shaking out that fine table salt, stop. That stuff’s too fine, it dumps out too fast, and it’s the fastest way to oversalt your food. Get yourself a box of kosher salt. It’s cheap, it’s consistent, and it gives you control. It’s what every pro kitchen uses.

Next — **acid**. I’m telling you right now, if you keep just one or two vinegars and a couple lemons or limes around, you’ll instantly elevate your cooking. A splash of red wine vinegar in a pan, a squeeze of lime over tacos, a hit of lemon in a salad dressing — acid is balance, whether in a bottle or a rind, it’s a must have.

Then there’s **heat**. And again, I’m not just talking chili heat. Freshly cracked black pepper is night and day compared to that dusty shaker on the table. Invest in a pepper grinder, keep it filled, and thank me later.

And don’t sleep on **aromatics**. Fresh herbs like parsley, cilantro, or basil — they can wake up a dish in seconds. Dried herbs have their place, but they’ll never bring that punch of freshness you get from chopping something right before it hits the plate.

These are simple tools, but when you use them with intention, they’ll completely change the way your food tastes — without spending a dime on “fancy” seasonings.

One of the coolest things about seasoning is how different cultures use it... we just talked about this in the last segment — and you can steal those tricks right at home without needing a passport.

Take the **French**, for example. They build depth with butter, wine, and aromatics. You don’t need a five-hour sauce to get that — just deglaze your pan with a splash of wine after searing chicken, scrape up those browned bits, and boom — instant restaurant-level flavor.

From **Japan**, you’ve got balance and restraint. Drop a spoonful of miso paste into a soup or a sauce, and suddenly you’ve got salt, depth, and umami all rolled into one. It’s subtle, but it changes everything.

Over in **Mexico**, it’s chili, lime, and salt. That squeeze of lime on tacos or grilled corn? That’s not garnish — that’s balance. Bright, sharp, fresh — and it cuts through richness every single time.

And from **India**, you’ve got tempering spices. Toasting cumin, mustard seed, or coriander in a little bit of oil before adding anything else unlocks flavor you just can’t get if you throw them in raw. It’s a small step, but it makes a massive difference.

These cultural shortcuts aren’t complicated. They’re seasoning philosophies you can borrow and apply to your everyday cooking. And the more of these “languages” you learn, the more fluent you get in making food that speaks. Mostly everything about food today is about fusion.

And yes ingredients play a hand in that, but also techniques are a huge part of it. I think the combination of different ingredients AND different techniques is what's at the heart of fusion cuisine.

Now, let's take it just a step further. These aren't complicated restaurant tricks — they're things you can do in your own kitchen that make food *sing*.

Umami bombs. A splash of soy sauce in a beef stew, a dash of Worcestershire in a pan sauce, or a sprinkle of Parmesan in your soup — these aren't "extra ingredients," they're depth in a bottle. They round out flavors in a way plain salt never will.

Sweetness as balance. Ever made a vinaigrette that felt too sharp? A drizzle of honey fixes that instantly. Same with caramelized onions on a burger — you're not just adding sweetness, you're smoothing out the edges.

Textural seasoning. Flavor isn't only about taste — it's about feel. That little crunch of flaky salt on a cookie, the bite of toasted nuts on a salad, or even citrus zest grated over pasta — those textures change the whole eating experience.

Temperature perception. Here's one most people don't think about: food tastes different hot versus cold. Leftovers straight from the fridge won't taste the same as when they were hot off the stove. Always check your seasoning at serving temperature — that's the only way to know it's balanced for your guests.

These are easy adjustments, but they'll instantly take your cooking from "this is good" to "wow, what did you do different?"

Here's the thing — at home, seasoning is less about perfection and more about awareness. It's about caring enough to taste, adjust, and respect what you're cooking.

First rule: **taste as you go.** Don't wait until the food's on the table to find out it's bland. Keep a spoon nearby and check it along the way.

Second: **build gradually.** Seasoning isn't something you dump on at the end to fix a mistake. If you try to "patch" a dish at the finish line, you're already too late.

Third: **keep it simple.** You don't need twelve different spices in every dish. Sometimes it's restraint that makes the food shine — letting a roasted carrot taste like a carrot, or letting a perfectly cooked piece of fish carry the plate.

And lastly: **remember why you season in the first place.** It's not just for flavor — it's respect. Respect for the ingredient, and respect for the people you're feeding. Seasoning says: *I cared enough to make sure this tastes right for you.*

So when you're at home, don't overthink it. Use the right salt, keep a little acid handy, taste as you go, and finish with intention. Borrow seasoning tricks from different cultures, lean on umami and texture, and season with respect.

Do those things, and your home cooking will stop being just "good enough" — it'll start tasting like something you'd pay for in a restaurant.

Alright, so we've looked at seasoning from the science side, and we've talked about how it plays out in the home kitchen. But now let's step into the professional kitchen — because this is where seasoning isn't just about flavor, it's about discipline, consistency, and trust.

In a restaurant, seasoning isn't optional. It's not a "nice to have." It's the difference between a guest walking out impressed, or walking out disappointed. And when you're cranking out 200 covers on a Saturday night, you can't afford to miss.

So let's talk about how seasoning works on the line, in the heat of service, and why it's one of the biggest markers of professionalism in a kitchen.

Timing is everything in a professional kitchen, and seasoning is no different.

Before service is all about prep and mise en place. Proteins get salted ahead of time so they're ready to sear, chickens are brined in batches for consistency, marinades are set up for tomorrow's short ribs. If you don't season correctly in prep, you're setting yourself up for failure when the tickets start flying.

During service is where discipline shows. Every line cook should be tasting constantly. That pan sauce reducing on sauté? Taste it before it goes on the plate. Pasta water? It gets checked every night, no exceptions. Stocks, soups, sauces — they're all evolving as they reduce, and if you're not tasting along the way, you're gambling with consistency.

After plating is where the details matter most. Maldon flakes hitting a steak right before it goes out, a microplane of lemon zest over a crudo, a drizzle of herb oil on a soup at the pass — these aren't "fancy chef tricks," they're the finishing touches that balance the plate.

And here's the bottom line: in a pro kitchen, seasoning is a process woven through prep, service, and plating. If you treat it like a one-step fix, the guest is the one who pays the price.

Now let's talk about the tools — because in a professional kitchen, consistency is everything. You can't have one cook seasoning with table salt, another with flaky sea salt, and expect the same results.

That's why **kosher salt** is king. Big, consistent crystals, easy to pinch, easy to control. Every station on the line is working with the same salt, which means every plate leaving the pass tastes the same.

Acid is always locked and loaded — squeeze bottles of lemon juice, reductions in quart containers, vinegars ready to go. These aren't "extra garnishes," they're finishing tools that give the chef precision in the middle of service.

Heat is applied with intention. It's not about blasting everything with cayenne. Sometimes it's white pepper in a velouté, a dash of cayenne in a rub, or Szechuan peppercorns in a special. Every spice has a purpose, and it's used deliberately.

And then you've got **aromatics**. Fresh herbs chopped at the last second, not sitting in a cambro wilting all night. Chives cut fine for garnish, basil chiffonade to order. Those details don't just add flavor, they add color, freshness, and that "chef's touch" that guests expect when they're paying for dinner. And make sure you use a really sharp knife for this. It allows the herbs to keep their sharpness versus turning as dull as the knife you used because you bruised them rather than cut them.

The tools of seasoning in a pro kitchen aren't random. They're standardized, controlled, and used with discipline — because one plate off balance can throw off the entire service.

One of the things that makes professional kitchens exciting is how they borrow seasoning philosophies from all over the world. A French base might start the dish — mirepoix, stock, wine — but the final seasoning could lean Japanese with miso or soy. A Mexican chili might sneak into a marinade, or Indian spices might get bloomed in oil to build depth.

That's the beauty of a modern kitchen — it's global. And each brigade develops its own "accent." You walk into one restaurant and the chef leans heavy French. Another might lean Latin. Another might pull Southeast Asian flavors into everything.

But here's the key: none of that works without respect. You don't just throw miso, chilies, or garam masala at a dish for shock value. In a pro kitchen, seasoning from other cultures is used with intention, with knowledge, and with balance. It's about fluency, not fusion for the sake of it.

And that's why seasoning in a restaurant isn't just flavor — it's language. Every brigade speaks it differently, but the goal is always the same: the guest understands exactly what you're trying to say when that plate hits the table.

Alright, Let's talk about advanced seasoning during service because this is where pro kitchens really start to separate themselves — in the layers that guests can't always point out, but they *feel* when they take that first bite.

Umami depth. That might be anchovy butter melted over a steak, kombu simmered in a stock base, or mushroom duxelles folded into a sauce. Guests won't say, "oh, I taste anchovy," but they'll know it's richer, deeper, and more satisfying.

Sweetness. We don't dump sugar on plates in fine dining — sweetness shows up in balance. A caramelized shallot in a sauce, a gastrique on duck, roasted garlic purée under vegetables. It rounds out acidity, it softens bitterness, it ties the whole bite together.

Textural seasoning. Guests don't just taste food — they feel it. That pinch of finishing salt that crunches as you bite, crispy leeks over a piece of fish, or toasted seeds on a salad — those textures add memory to the bite.

Temperature. This is a detail that separates the pros: food tastes different at serving temp than it does in the pan. That soup that's perfect when it's boiling might need a final adjustment once it cools in the pass. That crudo you season ice cold is going to read sharper than when it's room temp. Pros learn to season with temperature in mind, not just on the stove.

These aren't accidents — they're deliberate moves that give a dish depth, balance, and personality. The kind of touches that make a plate go from good to unforgettable.

In a pro kitchen, seasoning isn't a suggestion — it's a standard. Every cook keeps a spoon in their apron, because tasting is mandatory. Stocks, sauces, garnishes — nothing should hit the pass without being checked. That's not ego, that's discipline.

And here's the fine line: under-seasoned food should *never* leave the kitchen. Over-seasoned food? That doesn't come back to you, but it costs you something much bigger — trust. A guest may not complain, but they won't return.

Restraint is part of professionalism. Just because you have 20 spices on the shelf doesn't mean they all belong on one plate. Knowing when to stop is as important as knowing what to add.

At the end of the day, seasoning is the chef's voice. Every pinch of salt, every squeeze of lemon, every splash of vinegar — that's how we communicate with the guest. And in a professional kitchen, consistency is everything. Because when you season with intention, you're not just cooking food — you're earning loyalty.

And let me tell you something that really bothers me that I have heard time and again in pro kitchens.. "I don't season a lot because then the guest thinks it's salty" or "If the guest wants more they can season it themselves." There can't be a more ignorant and unprofessional attitude. You season, you taste it. Being a professional means you know the difference between salty and just right. Now are there exceptions? Of course there is, but the exceptions are few and far between. To say that you're not going to season 200 plates because 1 person may say it's salty is fucking stupid. And in most high end restaurants that I've worked, salt isn't even on the table for them to season themselves. YOUR job is to make sure that the dish is seasoned the way it's supposed to be, with balance and intention.

So in the pro kitchen, seasoning is a system. It's built into prep, it's enforced during service, and it's perfected at the pass. It's discipline, respect, and communication — the hallmarks of any chef worth their jacket.

Today's final thought leads us to this: seasoning is more than salt, pepper, or a shake of spice. It's the respect you show your ingredients and your guests. Anyone can cook food — but those who season with intention cook meals that stay in memory.

Seasoning isn't about tricks, it isn't about shortcuts — it's about balance, awareness, and care. It's about tasting as you go, layering as you build, and finishing with purpose. That's what separates a full stomach from a memorable meal.

And that wraps up Episode 20 of *The IncrEDIBLE Discourse*. Twenty episodes in, and we're only getting started. If you haven't already, hit that subscribe button and leave a 5-star review. It only takes a few seconds, but it helps more cooks and food lovers discover the show.

I also want to hear from you — follow me on X and share your creations with the hashtag **#IncrEDIBLEDiscourse**. Show me how you're using the seasoning tips from today, and I might feature your dish in an upcoming episode.

Make sure to check out the website as well — that's where you'll find the blog, *The Monthly Mise* newsletter, and exclusive downloadable resources like my guides on butter basting, frying, and essential kitchen tools. You'll also find links to affiliate partners that help keep this show moving forward.

And here's a taste of what's coming next: *Episode 21 — Pickling Power: Preserving and Amplifying Flavors*. We'll dive into pickling not just as a way to preserve food, but as a way to amplify flavors, add punch, and unlock a whole new dimension in your cooking. You don't want to miss it.

Until next time, keep cooking, keep tasting, and keep seasoning with intention. I'm Mark Grigsby, and this has been another amazing episode of *The IncrEDIBLE Discourse*.