

MODULE 5: PREP & COOKING III | TRANSCRIPT

LESSON 2

Moist-heat Cooking Methods I

With these cooking methods, we use liquid or steam to transfer heat directly to food.

Here are the techniques to use.

Boiling

Yes, pretty much everyone can boil a pot of water, but we want to go over this easy step to share some tips you maybe haven't thought about, especially if you're new to cooking.

Simply, boiling is when liquid is brought to such a high temperature that bubbles vigorously break the surface—this movement churns the liquid. Have you ever impatiently dropped a box of pasta into water that wasn't boiling yet and it stuck together? Well, the churning helps keep noodles separate while they cook. And this churning action also helps create speedy evaporation of the liquid, which is helpful when reducing and concentrating flavor in gravies, sauces, and soups. Boiling is also a technique used with the blanching method in an effort to boost and then set flavor in vegetables.

Boiling liquids are usually plain water, salted water, or stock. Potatoes, pasta, green beans, and corn cobs all do well with this cooking method, but note that boiling is more about softening and cooking foods that will likely be flavored with sauces, seasonings, or other ingredients after cooking, more than it is about imparting flavor into a dish while cooking, the exception being salted water or stock. Poaching, stewing, or braising is a better way to go if major flavor imparted while cooking is the end result that you're looking for. Boiling is also a term used to indicate temperature when making liquid recipes like soups, stews, sauces, and compotes—often, you'll bring a liquid to a “boil” to then reduce to simmer. Note that at sea level, boiling point is 212°F. As you increase in elevation every 500ft, this threshold goes down 1–2 degrees.

When you fill a pot with water, make sure it's not filled to the top—leave 2"–3" for aggressive bubbles to churn around freely without jumping over the sides.

Braising

In general, braising is a long, slow, low-heat cook of medium to large pieces of food that are partially submerged in liquid, after they're given a quick sear to kick off the Maillard reaction. You may know it as "pot-roasting," but no matter what you call it, braising is a cooking method that works for more than just meats. Braising tenderizes and add incredible flavor and texture to vegetables, as well. This moist-heat cooking method does use a bit of dry-heat method to start (with the sear), but the overall cooking time uses liquid so it falls into this category.

Liquids used for braising can be plain water, salted water, stock, wine, juices like orange, beer, canned or fresh chopped tomatoes (which will release water as they break down). Other acidic ingredients like vinegars (try balsamic, apple cider vinegar, and red wine vinegar) can also be added to the mix for flavor, and to help certain vegetables soften and release water. For smoky, meaty flavor in a braised veggie dish, add some smoked salt, smoked paprika, or a few drops of Liquid Smoke to your braising liquid.

Onions, celery, fennel, mushrooms, green beans, carrots, beets, potatoes, turnips, radishes, winter and summer squash, dark greens like kale and collards, peppers, eggplant, cabbage, endive, bok choy, butternut squash, apples, and sweet potatoes are delicious braised or used in a combination. Try using whole, halved, long, or larger cuts of vegetables instead of small cuts so the maximum surface area can caramelize when braising, and the veggies keep their shape (smaller bits could break down). Also keep in mind that the denser and more hearty the veg (beets, mushrooms) the longer the braise time. The softer and more water-based (think yellow squash or zucchini) the shorter the braise time because you don't want these delicate veggies to turn to mush—they tend to do best halved or whole in a braise.

Steps

Heat a lidded Dutch oven or tall-sided skillet or pan to medium-high and add 1–2 tablespoons of cooking oil (or butter/ghee if you use it) and add the vegetables. Season with a pinch of salt and try not to disturb them. Maybe stir once or just shake the pan once or twice, until they begin to soften and brown.

If you don't over stir, the exterior sugars on the veggies will be able to caramelize and this adds deep flavor to the braising liquid and the final result of your dish. You don't have to let the vegetables brown at all, they can just soften. Cook's choice. Try both ways, and with a variety of vegetables, to see what you prefer.

OK. After you've seared and you see browning, add your braising liquid to the pan so it comes up halfway up the sides of the veggies. Note that certain veggies can release water and will add to the braising liquid height about ¼" so keep this in mind—you don't want to entirely submerge the veggies under liquid when braising. If you'd like to, add a bouquet garni or herbs and spices to the liquid to infuse flavor into the dish.

Once the liquid is in the pan, increase the heat and bring to a boil. Once boiling, reduce heat to the gentlest, lowest simmer and cover the pot or pan with a lid. The covering traps steam and flavors to infuse the food.

If your pot and lid (check that handle) is oven safe, you can finish the braise in the oven at 300°F–350°F, but the stovetop works fine too, and keeping it there is one less step. Now, allow the vegetables to cook covered until tender and the liquid has reduced to at least ¼". This can range from 10–25 minutes (or longer, even an hour) depending on the vegetable density and thickness of the cut. Test doneness by gently placing the tip of a knife into the vegetable. It should be firm yet soft, not mushy or so hard that you have to add pressure to pierce the veg with the knife.

Once cooked well, remove from heat and enjoy with some cooked grains, rice, noodles, or solo. Sprinkle with fresh herbs too.

Note that if you're using a mixture of vegetables, some may take longer to sear (carrots and potatoes) than others (zucchini), so add the denser veggies to the pan first to get a head start, then add the softer vegetables to sear. You can also parboil the denser vegetables before adding them in with softer veggies OR you can add softer veggies like zucchini at the very end of braise time for dense veggies to soak up some of the flavor without compromising their texture. Keep track of certain veggies and various approaches in your cooking journal.

Let's quickly talk about braising liquid: have fun with it and add a bundle of herbs, spices, and/or a variety of liquids. Think of the Five Tastes when you choose to create a flavorful balance. You can also add some aromatics to the vegetables being braised. Onion, leek, celery, and garlic, especially when seared and caramelized at first, add mouth-watering flavor to a finished braised recipe. Add some sliced orange, lemon, or lime to cook down in the mix. For pot-roast-like smokiness, add a pinch of smoked paprika or a few drops of liquid smoke. The more ingredients you add, the more complex the flavor. The less you add, the more light and simple. Both are delicious ways to go.

Zero-food-waste tips

Use that braising liquid to make a glaze or sauce—the more a liquid reduces, the more concentrated the flavor! Once the vegetables are removed from heat, you can further simmer the liquid until it reduces down to a thickened sauce. Add a pinch of sweetener or a splash of balsamic vinegar to create a glaze. Season with sea salt and pepper to taste if needed. Use that magic to drizzle on the braised veggies or cooked rice or grains before serving. Chill it and use to dress a salad.

You can also refrigerate and freeze the liquid to use as a stock base, or to cook/ flavor grains, rice, pulses, or to simply use in future braises.

Poaching

A gentle process that fully cooks food by submerging it in liquid that barely reaches a simmer. This submersion allows the food to retain its moisture. Instead of using oil and dry-heat cooking at the beginning to carry heat into the food to sear it, liquids cook for us the entire time, infusing non-caramelized flavor into the food and/or gently ushering out their special, inherent flavors.

Poaching liquid barely simmers if at all and it shouldn't ever boil, it should stay in the 140°F–180°F range the entire time.

Liquids used for poaching can be water, stock, wine, juice, ginger beer, cider, milks (try coconut), beer, or a combination of them—which we recommend for layered flavor.

To get a good handle on how poaching transforms certain foods, start with simple poaching liquids and taste what it does to bring incredible flavor out of foods. Have fun with poaching though: try wines, champagne, or liquors like brandy or rum in a mix to impart flavor to both sweet and savory poached foods. Also add aromatics, bouquet garni, and/or citrus slices to infuse the liquid for poached foods. Or vinegars, fresh ginger, cinnamon, vanilla bean, cardamom pods, and natural sweeteners like honey or maple syrup for firm fruits like peaches, apples and pears. But don't stop there, try those ingredients with beets or carrots, too. Thyme, basil, rosemary, and mint can work very well with poached fruit and with dense veggies—be creative.

You can use the poaching method to rehydrate and infuse flavor into any number of dried fruits like plums, apricots, mango, even dates. Other creative poaching liquids to try? Coffee and tea! Steep earl grey, rooibos, chamomile, or chai tea for the specified steeping time, remove the bag(s) and then use the liquid (maybe with some spices) for poaching sweet foods.

The density of the fruit or veggie determines the cooking time—the thicker the food, the longer it takes the heat to penetrate and cook. The thinner the food, the shorter the cook time.

Pretty much all ripe, firm fruits and veggies can be poached.

Steps

Fill a lidded Dutch oven or tall-sided skillet or pan to medium- to medium-low with poaching liquid so your food will be covered under about ½" liquid. Note that it's important to use the right-sized pan for the job. Even though you'll add your food to the warm poaching liquid instead of starting it directly in the pan, it's best if all the food could fit comfortably in one layer in the bottom of this pan before liquid is added. No overcrowding please.

Now, you can add a little oil, butter, or salt to your poaching liquid if you like. Bring the liquid to an almost simmer—it should be a temperature where you see waves of heat on the surface of the water but not bubbles, but don't panic if you see bubbles, just back off of the heat if you see the bubbles. Add the foods you want to poach, making sure they're covered ½" by the poaching liquid. If you'd like to, add a bouquet garni or other aromatics to the liquid to infuse flavor into the food.

At this point, you can cover or not cover the pot or pan, but know that covering will increase the heat of the liquid, so keep an eye on things—you may have to reduce the temperature if covering. Covering helps trap steam and moisture in the pan which helps with even cooking. Overall, it's best to keep the food submerged for even cooking, so if your foods want to bob to the surface, you may want to cut a round piece of parchment paper about ½ –1" smaller than the size of your pan and lay it on top of the liquid to help keep food submerged as it cooks. You don't have to take this extra step though, a simple flip of the food halfway through cook time can do the trick. Remember, no boiling, and keep the foods submerged in the liquid the entire cook time. Sometimes a lid half-on, with an opening is a good option, too. Test all the options and write down what works best for you.

Poach the food until fork tender—this can range from 15–60 minutes depending on the food density and thickness of the cut. You know it done when you can gently place the tip of a knife into the fruit or vegetable and it's firm yet soft, not mushy or so hard that you have to add pressure to pierce with the knife.

Once cooked well, remove from the liquid and enjoy.

Zero-food-waste tips

Use the poaching liquid to make a glaze or sauce like you could with braising liquid. Simmer the poaching liquid until it reduces down to a thickened sauce. Add a pinch of sweetener or a splash of balsamic vinegar to create a glaze. Season with sea salt and pepper to taste if needed. Use that magic to drizzle on the poached fruits or veggies before serving. If you poached fruit, serve with ice cream and the liquid reduction. If you poached veggies, serve with cooked grains or rice and the liquid reduction. Chill a reduced poaching liquid and use to dress a salad.

You can also refrigerate and freeze the liquid to use as a stock base, or to cook or flavor grains, rice, pulses, or to simply use in future poaches.

Simmering

similar to boiling, but we're churning the liquid in a pot in a gentler manner, over a lower temperature between 185°F–200°F. Simmering can occur in an uncovered pot, or a covered pot. Covered, a simmering pot will trap steam which will condense and drip back into the liquid. Covering also increases the heat of the liquid, so adjust temperature accordingly and watch covered simmering foods so it doesn't reach a boil. Uncovering the pot while cooking will allow steam to evaporate more quickly, resulting in the liquid reducing down—this concentrates liquid flavor.

Simmering liquids can be plain water, salted water, stock, wine, juice like orange, milks, creams, beer, canned or fresh chopped tomatoes (which will release water as they break down). Other acidic ingredients like vinegars (try balsamic, apple

cider vinegar, and red wine vinegar) can also be added to the mix for flavor. If it's liquid, it can simmer.

There are different levels of simmering to try:

“Low,” “slow,” “fine,” or “gentle” simmer: this is the gentlest simmer, one that's maintained over low heat. You'll see very little bubble action on a low simmer, just one or two will surface occasionally, and you may see a bit of steam above the simmering foods. If poaching liquid is almost simmering, a “gentle simmer” is the next step up from that.

Simmer: this is the simmer to use when in doubt, it's maintained over medium-low heat, where there's steady, but still gentle bubble activity in the pot.

“Rapid,” “fast,” “vigorous,” or “strong” simmer: the most vigorous bubbling action possible before you reach boiling point (as you know, 212°F at sea level). Mainly used for reducing liquids to concentrate flavor and thicken.

Steps

Fill a lidded Dutch oven or pot to medium-high with liquid and add your vegetables so they are submerged under at least ½" of this liquid. Bring the liquid to a boil to jumpstart the simmer, and then quickly reduce heat to simmer. You can also slowly bring liquid to a simmer over lower temperatures. Adjust the heat to find the type of simmer the recipe calls for, or the one that you like best.

At this point, you can cover or not cover the pot or pan, but remember, covering will increase the heat of the liquid, so keep an eye on things so it doesn't boil. Covering traps moisture in the pot, while uncovering will allow the liquid to reduce down. Keep the foods submerged in the liquid the entire cook time. If you'd like to, add a bouquet garni to the liquid to infuse herbal flavor into the dish.

Simmer the food until fork tender—this can range from 15–60 minutes depending on the food density and thickness of the cut. Test doneness by gently placing the tip of a knife into the food. It should be firm yet soft, not mushy or so hard that you have to add pressure to pierce the food with the knife. Once cooked well, enjoy.

Stewing

Almost identical to braising and simmering, except the foods used for stewing are likely chopped into smaller pieces. They're also fully submerged in liquid for a slow, low-heat cook after given a quick sear to kick off the Maillard reaction. Like braising, this moist-heat cooking method does use a bit of dry-heat method to start, but the overall cooking time uses liquid so it falls into this category.

Liquids used for stewing can be just as creative as with braising. Try water, salted water, stock, wine, juices like orange, beer, and/or canned or fresh chopped tomatoes (which will release water as they break down). Other acidic ingredients like vinegars (try balsamic, apple cider vinegar, and red wine vinegar) can also be added to the mix for flavor, and to help certain vegetables soften and release water. For smoky, meaty flavor in a dish, add some smoked salt, smoked paprika, or a few drops of Liquid Smoke to your stewing liquid.

Onions, celery, fennel, mushrooms, green beans, carrots, beets, potatoes, turnips, radishes, winter and summer squash, dark greens like kale and collards, peppers, eggplant, cabbage, endive, bok choy, apples, and sweet potatoes are delicious stewed solo or in a combination.

Steps

Heat a lidded Dutch oven, pot, or tall-sided skillet or pan to medium-high and add 1–2 tablespoons of cooking oil (or butter/ghee if you use it) and then add vegetables. Season with a pinch of sea salt if you like and try not to disturb them. Maybe stir once or just shake the pan once or twice, until they begin to soften and brown. If you don't over stir, the exterior sugars on the veggies will be able to caramelize and this adds deep flavor to the stewing liquid and the final result of

your dish. You don't have to let the vegetables brown at all, they can just soften. Cook's choice. Try both ways, and with a variety of vegetables, to see what you prefer. Note that if you're using a mixture of vegetables, some may take longer to sear (carrots) than others (zucchini), so add the denser veggies to the pan first to get a 1- to 3-minute head start, then add the softer vegetables to sear. OR parboil the denser vegetables before adding them.

At this point, deglaze the pot or pan by adding your stewing liquid. Make sure it completely covers the vegetables.

Have fun with the stewing liquid—add a bouquet garni, spices, and a variety of liquids. Think of the Five Tastes when you choose to create a flavorful balance. Also add some aromatics to the vegetables. Onion, leek, celery, garlic especially when seared and caramelized at first add mouth-watering flavor. Add some sliced orange, lemon, or lime to cook down in the mix. For smokiness, add a pinch of smoked paprika or a few drops of liquid smoke. The more ingredients you add, the more complex the flavor. The less you add, the more light and simple.

Once the liquid is in the pan, increase the heat and bring to a boil. Once boiling, reduce heat to the gentlest, lowest simmer and cover pot or pan with a lid. The covering traps steam and flavors to infuse the food. Leave the lid off if you're trying to reduce some of the liquid.

If your pot and lid (check that handle) is oven safe, you can finish the stew in the oven at 300°F–350°F, but the stovetop works fine, and keeping it there is one less step. Now, allow the vegetables to cook until tender, and according to any recipe. This can range from 10–45 minutes (or longer, even an hour) depending on the vegetable density and thickness of the cut. Test doneness by removing a spoonful of stewed veggies. Taste. They should be firm yet soft, not mushy. The stewing liquid should be flavorful and delicious.

Once cooked well, remove from heat and enjoy in a bowl with a spoon, or served over some cooked grains, rice, or noodles. Sprinkle with fresh herbs too.