

A quick lesson in cooking



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Boksidan

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Important methods of preparation

Boiling

Fish should actually not boil but only semi-boil, i.e. the liquid shall not bubble. Fish should also only semi-boil a short time. If it is left long on the stove, it becomes dry and stringy. You see when the fish meat is ready as it will be white. Check if it is white even inside. Also check if the juice is transparent (= ready) or if it is bloody (= not ready).

Shellfish, such as shrimps, should be cooked a very short time (shrimp, who are usually cooked in advance, should only be heated while fresh raw mussels shall be boiled (simmer) for about 5-8 minutes).

Pork, lamb, beef or venison can, however, boil a fairly long time. The longer the meat boils, the more it falls down, thus becomes more easily chewed. In addition, the spices penetrate further and further into the meat with increasing cooking time. For example, put the pan in the oven overnight at 80° C. Poultry, such as chicken, is usually best to split and fry on low heat in a saucepan with a lid, for 20-25 minutes along with the vegetables. Then pour in the liquid and let it boil for a short while.

Vegetables get better the faster they are heated, since a smaller portion of vitamins and flavour is destroyed. Moreover they should be added in the water when it boils vigorously. They are usually tastier if the water is salted (2 teaspoons of salt per litre of water, but the more bitter vegetable, the more salt). Most vegetables shall cook in little water and under a lid. But green vegetables, such as peas and broccoli, shall be cooked without lid, otherwise they lose some of their colour (because the lid prevents certain acids from evaporating). Most vegetables are ready when they have softened. They are usually best when they are just almost soft (try for example with a fork, if the fork easily goes through, the vegetables are ready). Unlike fish and shellfish, vegetables are not destroyed if they cook too long, they just lose flavour and become loose or broken.

Additionally they absorb more water and thus can be watery. Baby vegetables should be cooked shorter time than big or long-stored ones. And the more enjoyable the vegetables are raw, the less time they need to cook. Sweet peas and tender carrots, for example, should only be cooked for about 10 minutes. Fresh potatoes, celeriac and fresh beets need a little more time (15-20 minutes).

Winter potatoes and bigger carrots have to boil longer (18-25 minutes). Woody vegetables such as turnips and winter beets even longer time (like an hour). A consequence of that is that when making a vegetable stew one should pour the vegetables that have longer cooking time in the pan earlier than more rapidly boiled ones. To even out the cooking time of the vegetables, the ones with the longest cooking time can be cut into smaller pieces than those who are rapidly boiled.

Note if there is any milk product, like cream, in what is cooked, the risk is quite high that burning the bottom of the pan and it burnt usually taste bad. It does not matter as long as one not scrapes it up from the bottom of the pot, except that the pot becomes more difficult to wash. Thus do not stir in the bottom of the pot with sharp metal tools.

Pots

Many commodities, such as meat, get tastier if they are browned (see frying) before cooking. In particular, if together with onions. For those who do not have a real cast iron pot, it is best to brown the ingredients in a skillet before adding them to the pan. Since it is quite easy to burn the stuff in regular pans. Also note that many commodities, such as meat, emit liquid when heated. And as long as liquid remains in the pan/pot, they are cooked rather than fried (see frying below). To avoid this, the liquid should be gradually poured off and saved for the next step, which is to pour back the liquid to cover the ingredients. Remember! The less liquid, the more the flavour of the ingredients. Those who want a thicker liquid should thicken it before it is poured into the pan, because the thickener gathers in clumps when poured into hot liquid.

It's almost always worth the cost to pot some sort of broth in the water, since it brings rich aromas without taking over flavour-wise. A broth coked of leftovers of commodities¹ taste best but bouillon cubes are a good surrogate.

It is often useful to crumble the bouillon cubes before they are thrown into the pot to make sure that there remains no broth clumps when serving the dish. Just be aware that bouillon cubes are pretty salty, and the salinity increases as the water boils off. Another important thing to consider is that different materials have different cooking times (see boiling above). In summary meat wins on cooking a long time (often the longer the better) but fish, green vegetables and herbs do not. Furthermore, certain spices, such as garlic, milder when cooked. And finally, there is a great risk that milk/cream burns the bottom and there forms unpalatable bottom sediments, so anyone who does not want to stir all the time should wait with these ingredients until the boiling is almost ready.



Cabbage casserole. The cabbage is coarsely shredded and it is combined with sausage, onions, potatoes, broth and spices. I think cabbage taste best if the first browned in margarine, in addition, the raw shredded cabbage has such a volume that it fills the entire pan. If the pan is not big enough for it, brown a little at a time. Then add the remaining ingredients.

Season it as you like, but a given season is white pepper. In addition, for example, ginger and honey as well (which fits very nicely with pork). This stew was pretty good. Though it would have been even better with ham instead of sausages.

Frying in a frying pan

Make sure that what you are going to fry is dry on the surface, because it makes the browning finer (otherwise it will be boiled rather than browned, the raw materials can be dried on the surface by putting them on paper towels before frying). In addition, meat should have room temperature, otherwise much more liquid disappear from the meat, which both makes the meat more boiled than browned and also it gets unnecessarily dry. An easy way to make the fridge cold meat room tempered is to warm it slightly in the microwave before frying. It should furthermore not be so many raw materials in the pan at once because then the bottom of the pan will be covered with raw liquid, which also makes them cooked rather than fried². In the event that it happens I recommended pouring out the liquid, preferably in a cup or the like because it is an excellent base for the aspiring sauce. Note also that the thicker the bottom of the pan, the less the hot frying pan cool down when throwing down the cold ingredients.

Spice up any time at the end or after you have fried, otherwise you risk that the spices gets burnt, it is especially true if you season with sugar/honey. It is even better, of course, to marinate the ingredients for a good while before the frying so that the spices have time to penetrate the meat. Raw materials that can easily stick to the pan, such as cheese, pancakes and breaded meat, requires quite a lot of fat in the pan otherwise the surface of the cheese, or the breading is left in the pan and dishes like pancakes will taste less good. Butter gives a nutty and caramel-like flavour that I think is better than the taste of oil and in addition the browning will look better, but on the other hand it is easier to burn the food compared to when frying in oil.

- ¹. Parts such as bones or shrimp shells are perfectly possible to make broth on. It works as follows: brown the ingredients to the broth, pour down water and any spices and let it cook for an hour and then strain.
- ². There are exceptions like sautés. When making a sauté one pours some liquid in the pan at the end of the frying. The fluid shall be almost completely evaporate. This way the flavours from the pan is transferred to the food, spices and flavours more evenly spread, penetrating the food deeper and makes it a little less dry. For example, try adding a little broth at the end of frying hash.

The thicker vegetables, fish or meat that is fried, the lower the cooking temperature has to be and the longer the cooking time. The more tender and/or thinner materials such as all kinds of fillets and/or thinner materials, the shorter time and higher temperature. For example, a steak shall be fried in like that 20 seconds/side in a hot frying pan (the butter/margarine should be dark brown). Raw meat is soft, a bloody steak is a little harder, pink steak springs back, well done meat is hard. Thus press the meat to check if it's ready. The same applies to fish.

Minced meat dishes, sausage slices, pancakes and herrings shall be fried in hot pan (medium brown butter/margarine).

Herring shall fry 4-6 minutes/side in a hot pan (the butter/margarine should be medium brown). Eggs, onions, raw potatoes, thick steaks or thick fillets should be cooked slowly on a weaker heat (pale brown butter/margarine). Generally, I recommend to rather cook at low temperature compared to high, because the margins to make errors become larger. In addition, it is important to remember that when the pan has reached a high enough temperature, it suddenly goes very fast to burn what is in it.



Pale brown margarine; Suitable for such thick fish fillets. Generally, it is easier to judge the color of the butter / margarine when light is reflected from a bright object like a spatula in stainless steel.

When frying in oil, however, you can not see how hot the pan is because oil can withstand much more heat before its colour is changed. Thus, it is important to keep track of how long the pan has been heated. The oil becomes more viscous when it is hot and a drop of water in it makes it sizzle. Alternatively, put a piece of white bread in it and see if, after a few moments, it has got a light- or dark brown colour (= good, depending on what is to be fried), black (too hot), or white (= too cold).

After frying, there are flavours left in the pan, especially if it is made in cast iron. These can be taken advantage of by pouring the used cooking fat, melt some fresh grease and then pour in a little water, wine or broth to boil for a while. Though if it is fish has been fried, however, it is not appropriate to make sauce of the flavours in the pan, because they taste bad. It is also partly therefore that fish often is breaded³ before its fried.

3. The breading may be made by putting the ingredients in flour. Raw materials should then be a little damp in order to make the flour to stick. Alternatively, they are dried and brushed with beaten egg and place in bread crumbs. The first way is suitable for frying fish for those who not really want a real breading but just wants to prevent the fish juices to drain into the pan (burnt fish juice tastes bad). The second way is used by those who want to make a regular breading.



Examples of breading on a sliced sausage. The sausage at the far right is breaded in flour alone, the middle is egg & bread crumbs breaded and the one at the far right is breaded with mustard and breadcrumbs. Only flour crumb is in this case not such a great idear, the middle was good, but the right was the very best. The unusual shape of the sausage slices are due to that I used a straight sausage and cutted it lengthwise.

Gratins

Gratins are done in the oven. Most commodities can be used in a gratin, especially vegetables, preferably with cheese. However, it is important that what is put in the gratin is not watery. In particular, if the raw materials are covered by a blanket of cheese. This is because when the cheese is melted it works as a lid which stops the water from evaporating. Thus the dish becomes watery on the plate and some of the flavour stays with the water which is left in the gratin dish.

Put the raw material in a greased baking dish and sprinkle with grated cheese, eggs whipped with milk and pour over the béchamel sauce with cheese. Some gratins, such as moussaka and lasagne, contain mixed vegetables (eggplant and potatoes) or lasagne plates with meat sauce and béchamel with cheese. Suitable oven temperature is often 200-225° C. The cooking time varies a lot depending on the contents from maybe 15 minutes for pasta gratins with cooked pasta, to maybe 90 minutes for a potato gratin with raw potatoes. As a rule, however, gratins gets tastier the longer they are in the oven, except if they become visibly burned.



A potato gratin that I did using some leftovers in the fridge. The potatoes are grated because it is the fastest way to cut it into small pieces. To further save time and work, I did not even peel them. I do not think it is needed now when they are sold washed. Unfortunately, the potatoes were of a little too hard variety. If I had used a softer variant the gratin had become tastier.

As a frying pan conducts heat better than, say, a glass form, the bottom and the edges of the gratin will get more crispy, which I think is good.



A fish gratin made with mashed potatoes, a frozen piece of fish and instant powder sauce with dill flavor. It looks in some people's eyes may be burned, but for me it is perfect. Anyone who shares my delight in browned surfaces can brighten the gratin further through stirring down the existing surface and then put the dish into the oven again.

The work required is to boil the powders according to the packaging instructions, and perhaps round out the seasoning according to the personal taste, anoint a suitably sized baking dish and fill it with the ingredients.

Embedding

Embedding means to heat treat the ingredients in a shell of dough, e.g. pizza dough (calzone) or flour & puff pastry (pie/pastry). A dough for the latter consists of flour, liquid, fat and salt. By varying these ingredients one gets various pies. Suitable proportions are a little more flour than fat and just a little liquid, e.g. 180 g margarine, 210 grams of flour (= 3 1/2 decilitres) and 7 tablespoons of cold water to a pie dish with a diameter of 25 cm. To get the best results, the dough shall not get hot before the actual heating process. Chop therefore together the flour and fat with, for example, a knife, or even better, use liquid fat because it mixes easily. Add the liquid and gather the dough into a ball and place in the fridge for like 45 minutes like that. Then you just have to dress a pie plate or roll out the dough and cut it into pies and add the filling, which can be almost any commodity whatsoever. Bake in the oven until the pie/pasties has got a suitable colour (usually 15-20 minutes in a 200-225° C oven).

Thickening/sauce making

A sauce usually consists of:

1. Fat.
2. Thickeners.
3. Liquid.
4. Flavourings.

There are two kinds of sauces: those thickened and those that are not. For example, mushroom sauce, curry sauce is thickened, while the red wine sauce is not. The difference between the types doesn't need be greater than thickener.

Thickening

Thickening of sauces can be done in, at least, five ways:

1. Bottom roux. Bottom roux is made by first melting fat in a pan and then pour in thickener⁴ and whisk it together. The mixture should be boiled for one minute before the liquid is added. It does not matter if the liquid is hot or cold. The liquid can be milk (gives béchamel sauce, suitable for stews and cheese sauce), broth or something else like crushed tomatoes.
 2. Top roux. Those who prepare a powder sauce makes a top finishes. That is, whisks down a thickener⁴ in a cold liquid. The thickening of an existing stew or sauce mixture is poured in the hot thin liquid which solidifies when it boils.
 3. Thickening with fat like sour cream or mustard (as in Swedish pea soup, which seasoned with mustard).
 4. Adding something, such as bread crumbs, that absorbs liquid into the dish.
 5. Stows that shall cook an hour or more can be thickened through adding lentils. If they cook about one hour it makes the stow thicker.
- ⁴ Wheat flour is in this case the most common thickener. The more flour in proportion to the amount of fat, the less fat gravy, but this increases the risk that the sauce becomes too thick and tastes like flour. A too thick sauce can be partially rescued with more fat and then more liquid. The traditional thickener is, as mentioned, wheat flour, but there are also expedient flours (such as arrowroot) that are designed to not clump. Use arrowroot if you want a "transparent" result, which often is the case with Chinese food and the like. Arrowroot is also a good option for people with celiac. Use 1 tablespoon arrowroot for every of 1 litre of soup, but 1-2 teaspoons to 2-3 decilitres of sauce.

Note 1! A thickened sauce very easily burns in the bottom of the pan and the burnt parts taste bad. If that happens, make sure not to scrape off the burnt layer on the bottom. This is preferably done by stirring in the sauce with a ladle which is not pointed.

Note 2! A sauce may cut, in particular if acids, such as ketchup (ketchup contains acetic acid), has been mixed down. That the sauce cuts mean that the fat does not mix with the liquid. If that happens, it might be fixed by adding an egg yolk, whisk/mix hard or by mixing in more fat.

Note 3! Sauces thicken when cooled down.

Note 4! If the sauce becomes too thick and sticky, it can be remedied by whipping it hard or by heating it and keeping it at a high temperature for a while.

Liquid

Anyone who have the energy to make their own broth using, for example, shrimp shells, bones or fish waste, of course should do that. Preferably in combination with cream or crème fraiche/Turkish yogurt. Every body else usually uses water or milk.

Seasonings

A good way to flavour a sauce is to use a hacked bouillon cube. Other good flavours are Ajvar relish (pepper paste from the Balkans), paprika puree, avocado, cheese, sherry, soy sauce, wine, garlic. Anchovy is also used as a spice in some sauces like pesto. It provides a tasty saltiness (called umami and is considered to satisfy a fifth type of taste receptors), but anchovy is quite expensive. Fish sauce is a simple alternative already used by the ancient Romans. But fish sauce nowadays is produced Thailand and it is both cheap and has a long shelf life, thus it is a must in the modern kitchen!

Commodities

Ground meat

Ground meat (pork, lamb, venison, or ground beef) can be cooked in an enormous number of ways, such as different varieties of burgers with small pieces of cheese, bacon, salami or vegetables in them. But the larger the pieces in the ground meat, the more difficult it is to maintain the shape in the pan. If so, the amount of binder should be increased. A suitable binder is minced egg and a reasonable amount is 1-2 eggs to 500 g of minced meat. Without a binder the mixture easily becomes a meat sauce, but it's also good.

Potatoes

Likewise, potatoes can be varied in many ways. Here are some suggestions.

Mashed potatoes

1. Peel the potatoes and boil them soft.
2. Drain the water.
3. Pour in milk and butter/margarine.
4. Season with salt, white pepper and maybe also nutmeg.
5. Mash with a mixer.

Mashed potatoes, in turn, can be mixed with eggs and flour and then fried (= potato dumplings) or Made in the oven (duchesse potatoes, served with steak and béarnaise = planked steak, or covered with meat sauce and cheese = shepherds pie).

Regardless of the form in which the mash is served, it goes well with most things that are good, preferably with cream, spinach and/or cheese.

Creamed potatoes

1. Peel, chop and boil the potatoes.
2. Make a béchamel.
3. Pour the cooked potatoes in the sauce.
4. Let it simmer for 5-10 minutes. Stir occasionally so that it does not burn.
5. Season with white pepper, onion, soy sauce and/or dill.

Raw fried potatoes

1. If needed, wash the potatoes and peel if desired, but none of this is necessary nowadays when the potatoes are sold washed.
2. Slice the potatoes thinly and evenly. It is easy for the user of the large groove of a grater.
3. Place the slices in cold water for 15-20 minutes (then some starch disappears and the fry surface gets better).
4. Set the oven at low heat (about 150 ° C).
5. Let the slices dry on paper towels.
6. Brown the slices in oil a frying pan (one layer at a time). The more oil the finer the finish.
7. Place the finished slices in a greased baking dish.
8. Season with, for example, salt, garlic and rosemary.
9. Leave them in the oven until they are soft.

Rice

Rice can actually also be varied. Here are some suggestions.

Yellow rice Indian style

4 dl of rice
3 tablespoon of cooking oil
2 yellow onions
3 bay leaves (to crumble)
one teaspoon whole cumin seeds
6 whole black peppercorns
6 dl water
salt
a little turmeric.

Bay leaves, cumin and black pepper can be exchanged with, for instance, a cinnamon stick and cardamom.

1. Rinse the rice and let it soak for a while (type 20 minutes).
2. Peel and chop the onion.
3. Heat the oil in a saucepan.
4. Add the onion and fry it until it is light brown.
5. Pour the remaining ingredients.
6. Bring to a boil.
7. Reduce heat and cook under a tight-fitting lid until the water is boiled away and/or the rice tastes as it is ready (like, 10 minutes).

Rice with cheese

rice
salt
cheese
cayenne pepper.

1. Boil the rice to taste or package directions.
2. When the rice is ready, add the cheese and cayenne pepper.
3. Heat until the cheese is melted. Note stir, like, all the time so that the cheese does not burn in the bottom of the pan.

Nasi goreng, paella or similar

rice
salt
meat/pork/vegetables/seafood
beef stock/fish stock/soy/wine/pepper sauce or other seasoning.

1. Boil the rice to taste or package directions.
2. Roast beef/pork/vegetable/seafood appropriately.
3. Pour the rice into the pan and fry it a little.
4. Add seasoning and stir it well.

Fat



The most common types of fat are sour cream, cream, margarine, oil and butter. But there are also, for example, lard and peanut butter. Fat is used for three different reasons:

1. As a lubricant, butter/margarine or oil mostly. The choice of frying fat often has quite a large impact on the taste of what is fried. Generally, the milder dish, the greater the reason for choosing butter/margarine. When frying at high temperatures, oil is advantageous because it does not burn like butter/margarine easily does. In between, it may be appropriate to blend butter/margarine with oil. One advantage of this is that the butter does not get as easily burned.
2. As seasoning. Fat mitigates strong flavours and it makes the taste "smoother". Moreover, it can highlight certain flavours. Cream and butter/margarine gives the smoothest taste, while sour cream and yoghurt gives a tarter taste. Oil also provides a rather special taste that sometimes is good. There are also a lot of other fats with special taste, which can contribute very positively to some dishes. For example, a few drops of hickory oil give a barbecue marinade, a delicious smoked flavour. And peanut butter lifts dishes with curry flavour.
3. As thickener. Sauces can be thickened by pouring fats like sour cream or Turkish yoghurt in them. But plain yogurt is too thin, and thus it destroys the sauce. Those who want to use plain yogurt must first mix it with grease before it is poured into the sauce. See the chapter about sauces.

Seasonings

Some argue that the key to good cooking is good ingredients. However, it is not true, for example, even the best of the meat gets pretty boring without spices. While even the dullest piece of meat can form the basis of a good meal with the right choice of spices and heat treatment. The real key is therefore a good supply of spices and knowledge about which spices that fit into what, combined with knowledge about your dinner guests taste preferences. Regarding the latter people can probably be divided into three groups:

1. It does not matter how it tastes just its healthy, inexpensive and satisfying.
2. The food should be tasty. The food should contain many spices and often there is no particular spice that dominates. This approach dominates, for example in the Indian and Creole cuisine.
3. The food must have a certain taste, dominated by a particular season (see table 1) or a commodity. This approach characterizes traditional Swedish cuisine as well as the Persian and Italian cuisine.

Which of these three groups your guests belong to is crucial in your choice of spices? If they belongs to the first group, do what you feel like. If they belong to the second one it is a good rule of thumb to balance the four basic tastes: salty, sweet, sour and bitter (all other flavours, in addition to possibly umami, are combinations of these basic tastes and odours). But it is often wise to exclude the bitter taste, because many people do not think that is so good. In addition, it is important to remember that meat stews are the least sensitive to errors in the seasoning, while mild dishes, such as pancakes are very sensitive. If your guests are from group three, however, you decide on a theme, such as herbs, and pick out what you have of such spices. If you feel uncertain about if a certain spice would add something positive to a dish, take a spoonful of it to try the spice on.

Table 1. What spices fits what? * = fits in a few dishes with the listed main ingredient, ** = fits in quite many, *** = fits most.

	Pork	Lamb	Cow	Birds	Fish	Seafood	Wild meat	Vegetables	Comments
Anise						*			Pronounced liquorice flavour, used in breads, sweets and alcohol, but it is not recommended in cooking.
Basil	*	**		*	*		*	**	Should crumble in your hand to bring out the entire flavour, given ingredient if you want to give the food a taste of herbs. Should be added when the food is taken off the stove.
Fenugreek									Bitter taste, unusual in cooking.
Cayenne pepper ^A	**		*	*	**	**	*	*	Common in many countries, strong flavour if it is not too old.
Chilli	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Chilli pepper is quite mild, fresh chillies, however, are strong. They are widely used in for example Asia, Mexico and Africa. Can dampen other flavours.
Lemon pepper					***				Very good with fish.
Lemon grass	**		*	*	*	*	*		Common in Thailand, can be replaced with lemon oil or lemon zest. Should be balanced with hot spices like chilli.
Cocos	*				*	*		*	Sweet taste, common in Thailand, cocos looks pretty unappetizing in casseroles, use rather coconut milk or coconut fat.
Curry	**	*	*	**	*	*	*	*	Spice mixture, can be strong, but in Sweden it is usually weak, the curry should be browned on low heat in the butter / margarine before adding the food (applies also to the ingredients in curry).
Dill			*		***	***			Delicious in many fish and seafood dishes. Should often be added when the food is taken off the stove.

	Pork	Lamb	Cow	Birds	Fish	Seafood	Wild meat	Vegetables	Comments
Dragon		*	*	*			*		Use with caution because quite pronounced flavour (tastes like hay), important spice in béarnaise sauce, myself, I would never use it.
Juniper	*	*	*				***	*	Nice with wild meat, gives gin its taste, should usually be crushed.
Fennel	*		*		**	*	*	**	Liquorice flavour, fits well in, above all, tomato-based fish stews, but also in vegetable stews.
Turmeric									Almost tasteless, used as a yellow dye.
Garam masala	*	**	*	*	*			*	Indian flavour, like curry but not as versatile.
Sea salt	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	Tastier than rock salt, I think.
Honey	**	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Can be used instead of sugar, but it should be done with caution.
Ginger	**		*	**			*		Fresh ginger gives a fairly sharp flavour, is widely used in Asia, and fits well in little sweeter dishes such as honey marinated pork.
Cinnamon	*	*	**		**		*	*	Underrated spice, fit into minced beef dishes along with cardamom.
Cardamom	*	*	**				*	*	Common in the oriental cuisine, fits in meat dishes, delicious in coffee.
Coriander	*	*			*			**	Should be combined with other spices. Widely used in India and in South America.
Allspice	*	*	**		*		*	*	A little 'Christmassy' flavour, used for example in Swedish stews. It can easily dominate over other spices.
Caraway	*	*	**	*			*	*	Not so common in cooking, but can fit in stews.
Cloves	*								Strong 'Christmassy' flavour used in ketchup and curry.
Savoury					*			*	Mild flavour can be used in fish soups and vegetable soups.
Chervil					*			*	Sometimes with tarragon in meat stews, should be added at the last minute.
Bay leaves	*	*	*		*		*	*	Used whole or crushed in pots in many countries. Often combined with allspice.
Onion powder	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		Can be used instead of onions, but it's usually not very successful.
Marjoram	*		*		*			*	Use with caution because quite distinct taste, but it fits in tomato dishes such as pizza.
Nutmeg	*	**	**	*			*	**	Provides a mild flavour used for spinach dishes and mashed potatoes, but you can try to have it in stews and minced meat, common in the Middle East, loses the flavour quickly when it is grounded.
Mint		*							(Peppermint) is widely used in India (such as in salad dressing) and in the middle east, not so successful for use in food, I think.
Oregano		**		*				*	Use with caution because it has quite pronounced flavour, fits (according to some) in some tomato dishes such as pizza. It is added after cooking.

	Pork	Lamb	Cow	Birds	Fish	Seafood	Wild meat	Vegetables	Comments
Pepper ^A	*		**	**	*	**	*	**	Fairly mild taste to be a pepper, often used in the Balkans, should not be browned.
Parsley		**	**	*	**	*	*	*	Good for example in soups, sauces and in some minced meat mixtures.
Horseradish	*	*	*		*	*			Very sharp flavour, often served alongside the main course.
Piri-piri ^A	*		*	*	*	*		*	Very strong, used in Mexican and African food, can be replaced with cayenne.
Rose pepper	*		*						Use with caution, because quite pronounced, little sweet but tart flavour, I do not like it.
Rosemary	**	***	*	*	*		**	*	Pretty penetrating flavour, fits well with lamb and also potatoes. Might be good to ground it before using.
Saffron			*	*	**	**		*	Add saffron strands in a little hot water until the water had a strong yellow colour and smells of saffron then pour water in the dish.
Salt	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	Used in most dishes, brings out the flavours. Suppresses bitter flavours.
Sage	**	*		*	*		*	*	Use with caution because quite distinct strong flavour. Goes with rosemary well with pork.
Mustard seeds	*		*		*			*	Can be used when you want some "Indian" flavour. Can be replaced with mustard.
Sesame seeds	*		*	*	*			*	Can be used for breading on meat or fish, or you can sprinkle roasted sesame seeds over your Asian dish, noting, however, that the seeds are very fatty.
Sugar	**	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	It can spice up many dishes to add some sugar or raw sugar may give more "foreign" flavour, keep in mind that everything tastes sweeter when it is hot than when it is cold.
Cumin	*	**	**	*	*	*	*	*	Use with caution since it is taking over pretty easy, common in Indian and Mexican dishes, included in curry.
Black pepper	**	*	**	*	*		*	*	Stronger and more distinctive flavour than white pepper, should be used much more conservative than white pepper.
Celery salt					*	*		**	Fits in vegetable stews and some tomato dishes.
Soy	*	*	*	*	*		*		Can be used instead of salt and as a dye, but you should pour in gently because the taste can take over, I think that Japanese soy sauce is much tastier than the Chinese.
Thyme	*	*	*		*			*	Sweet taste, can be used in fish and meat stews and tomato dishes, fresh thyme can be used in everything. Like many herbs it quickly loses taste when heat treated.
Garlic	**	***	**	**	**	**	**	**	Improves many dishes, gives an "oriental" flavour, remember that the strength and sharpness decreases with the heat treatment time.
White pepper	***	***	***	***	***	*	***	**	Can be used in many dishes, often when it tastes as if something is missing, it helps with white pepper, but use with caution together with potatoes.

^A Cayenne pepper, paprika and piri-piri are three examples of spices that are based on chillies. However, they have different strengths (see table 2).

Table 2. The hotness of different chilli fruits,
level 10 is the strongest.

Level	Fruit
10	Indian tezpur
9	Habanero
8	Thai chilli
7	Cayenne pepper
6	Piri-piri
5	Serrano
4	Jalapeno
3	Cascabel
2	Poblano
1	New Mexico
0	Paprika

Spicy sauces

There are now a large variety of spicy sauces with different flavours. The most commonly known ones are ketchup, mustard and soy. These can embellish a variety of dishes. Ketchup gives a little sweetness and fits well in many dishes (but watch up if you pour ketchup in milk-/cream based sauces because it can make the sauce cut). Swedish mustard gives a pretty strong sweetness that not all are so fond of, but in certain combinations it fits very well, as in game sauce with cream and juniper. In addition, I recommend to try French mustard (horseradish-like flavour), preferably with herbs.

Soy provides a little broth-like flavour and is very salty (so if you want to use soy in the dish should use less common salt). The best tasting soy is in my opinion the Japanese type, please try to compare Japanese and Chinese soy. It can also enable an excellent taste, on for example pork. Soy is also used to give the sauce a darker colour and as an ingredient in barbecue oil (along with oil, sweeteners and spices).

In addition to these sauces, I recommend to try the "sweet chilli sauce", fish sauce (see chapter for flavouring sauces) and balsamic vinegar.

Basic equipment

Anyone who likes to improvise when cooking should, of course, have a basic range of ingredients, tentatively at least the ones listed in table 3. Among the tools there should be a couple of gratin dishes, a chef's knife, a cutting board made of plastic, a large skillet, an iron pot, a large, medium and a small pot, blender, whisk, ladle, spatula, peeler, potato press, grater, garlic press, can opener and a rice cooker (ensure that the rice is always good and the preparation takes care of itself).

Table 3. My suggestion on the basic range to always have at home, for many varied and tasty meals, without too much waste material due to that the ingredients are too old.

In the freezer	Why?	In the larder	Why?
Ground meat	Very useful, can become sauce, gratin, burgers et cetera. Goes well with rice/potatoes/pasta.	Wheat flour	Included in white béchamel. Together with baking soda it becomes pizza and with liquid margarine it becomes pie.
Chopped onions & ditto dill	Onions improve most dishes. Dill does the same with almost all dishes with fish and seafood.	Ideal flour & baking soda	Ideal flour is useful to thicken sauces. Baking soda, see above.
Cevapici-sausages	Good to combine with other things to make sauces or casseroles. Goes well with rice/potatoes/pasta.	Rice	Good and very useful, easy to store.
Haricot vertes	Easy to prepare through frying in a frying pan or in the oven. Gets very tasty with a little browning.	Pasta	Good, fits pretty much, easy to store.
White fish filet	A simple base for fish au gratin with potatoes mash and a powder sauce. Also a suitable base for a fish stew with tomato puree and fish broth.	Powder mash	"

In the fridge		Among the spices	
Tomato pure	Fits well into many dishes, easy to use.	Cumin	A little cumin compliments many stews, much cumin gives character.
Liquid margarine	Easier to use than solid fat.	Cayenne pepper	Basic spice.
Bouillon	One of the best spices. Since bouillon cubes are inexpensive, small and easy to store, have all kinds at home.	Allspice	A little allspice magnifies the taste experience. A lot gives character.
Fish sauce	Enhances the taste of most things except pancakes.	White pepper	Basic spice.
Japanese soy	Tastes good, also gives the food a richer colour.	Black pepper	Provides character, thus it should not be used routinely.
Concentrated lemon	Adds the dimension of acid that enhances the whole composition of many dishes. Reduces the taste of frying.	Curry	In larger quantities it gives character. Suitable in many "Asian" style dishes.
Milk	Base in béchamel sauce which of course is very useful. In addition, an important part of baked eggs.	Ginger	"
Eggs	Baked eggs + meat / vegetables / rice / pasta / potatoes together make good gratins. Eggs in a broth / tomato based sauce makes it more "Indian".	Juniper	Gives the sauce a wild character, which is nice sometimes.
Bacon	Good spice to anything even pancakes.	Cardamom	In small quantities it can increase the overall flavour. In particular, ground beef with a little cinnamon. See cardamom.
Cheese	Equally good spice in any dish except maybe those consisting fish.	Cinnamon	
Cheap sausage	Sausages are easy to use. A little sausage can brighten many sauces, gratins, mixes and meat dishes.	Nutmeg	Can increase the overall taste in a lot of dishes.
Garlic	Fresh, dried, or "liquid" garlic raises most dishes except maybe Swedish ones.	Salt	Basic spice. Fits well in plenty dishes.
Potatoes	One can do lot with potatoes and it fits great with many commodities. Easy to vary by pressing, roasting, microwave cooking and more.	Piffi allspice	Might as well add a bit of this spice in your food for safety.
Sweet mustard	In quite a few dishes a good alternative to regular sugar.	Dried garlic	Easy to use.
Sweet chilli sauce	"	Sugar	Every dish should contain a certain amount of sweetness.
Peanut butter	Easy to store. Suitable for many "Asian" sauces.	Paprika powder	Can increase the overall taste in a lot of dishes.

Food from around the world

African food

Common commodities in Africa are, for example, bananas, beans, couscous, goats, millet, peanuts, rabbit, cassava, lamb, corn flour, yam and white yam. Common spices are beriberi pepper, chillies (red or green fresh), lemon, coconut, curry powder, garam masala, turmeric (gives food yellow colour, but adds no flavour), cinnamon, coriander, nutmeg, piri-piri, cumin and garlic. The bread diet for many includes some form of couscous (in North Africa) or a porridge made of bananas, millet, cassava, corn meal, sweet potatoes or white yams. The bread diets are often eaten with saucy stews.

Ethiopian stew with rice

400 grams of beef, such as stew chunks

750 g onion

100 g butter/margarine

Teaspoon ½ lemon peppers

1 teaspoon chillies

1 teaspoon curry

1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

½ teaspoon cardamom

1 teaspoon cilantro

1 teaspoon paprika

Salt

2 teaspoon white pepper

1 decilitres of water.

1. Cook the rice to taste.
2. Peel and chop the onion and place them in a casserole.
3. Brown the onion over low heat for about 30 minutes without fat. Stir fairly often.
4. Add the butter/margarine and spices (except salt).
5. Chop the meat into pieces and pour it into the pot.
6. Brown the meat.
7. Pour in the water.
8. Add salt according to taste.
9. Boil it all on low heat until the meat is done.

Indian food

Common commodities in India are basmati rice, onions, lentils, oil, potatoes, cheese, butter, spinach, tomatoes, yogurt, and whipped cream. Common spices are chilli powder, chilli peppers (red or green fresh), lemon, coconut, curry powder, garam masala, turmeric, fresh coriander (often as a garnish), ginger (fresh or dried and grounded), cinnamon, bay leaves, nutmeg, saffron, salt, cumin seeds (whole or grounded) black mustard seeds and garlic. In India, most are vegetarians and they have many good vegetarian dishes. But any kind of meat can be cooked in Indian style and it usually gets very good. Many dishes consist of some form of stew and in India it is often eaten with bread or steamed basmati rice.

Lamb balls with coriander

400 grams of grounded lamb

½ -1 teaspoon of salt

1 teaspoon cumin (preferably fresh grounded)

1 teaspoon coriander (preferably fresh grounded)

½ dl of chopped parsley

3 tablespoons of plain yogurt.

For the sauce

3 tablespoons oil

1 cinnamon stick

1 teaspoon cardamom

1 large yellow onion

1 teaspoon ginger (or rather a piece of fresh ditto)

1 teaspoon coriander (preferably fresh grounded)

1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1 teaspoon cumin (preferably fresh grounded)

3 tablespoons tomato paste

4-6 cloves of garlic

3 tablespoons plain yogurt

2 dl water

½ teaspoon salt.

1. Cook the rice to taste.
2. Mix all the ingredients in the lamb balls.
3. Roll the balls that are a bit larger than ordinary meatballs.
4. Squeeze the garlic.
5. Heat the oil in a pan (the oil may not be hot enough to burn the spices).
6. Add in cinnamon cardamom and chopped onion and fry for 5 minutes, stir occasionally.
7. Add the ginger, cayenne pepper, coriander, cumin, tomato paste, garlic, yogurt, and finally water.
8. Place the balls in the pot when it has started to boil.
9. Turn down the heat and let the pot simmer, uncovered, for 25 minutes.

Chinese food

Some common raw materials in China are, bamboo shoots, broccoli, bean sprouts, pork, Chinese cabbage, chicken, baby corn, pork, rice (preferably long grain) rice noodles, sesame oil, spinach, sweet peas, tofu (cheese made from soybeans), and water chestnuts. Common spices are fresh red or green chillies, hoisin sauce, ginger (fresh or dried minced), coriander (preferably fresh), soy sauce and garlic. Many dishes are quick fried (woked) with a thin sauce. Since they eat with chopsticks in China the rice is sticky and all ingredients are cut into pieces. It is also common with soups of broth and various ingredients such as chicken and noodles.

Beef with peas and rice

500 g beef

500 g sugar peas

3 tablespoons oil

2 teaspoons oyster sauce

2 cloves of garlic

1 teaspoon ginger

Soy.

1. Cook the rice to taste.
2. Shred the meat and crush the garlic
4. Heat a tablespoon oil in a wok or conventional pan (relatively high temperature).
5. Cook the sugar peas in one minute under stirring.
6. Pour in oyster sauce.
7. Take the sugar peas.
8. Pour in the remaining oil.
9. Add the meat, garlic and ginger, dash out soy sauce in batches.
10. Fry for about five minutes, stir occasionally.

Oriental food

Common commodities in the Middle East are apricots, basmati rice, bulgur (crushed wheat), chickpeas, chicken, lamb (often in the form of ground beef), onions (yellow onions and shallots), nuts (such as almonds, hazelnuts and pine nuts), oil, butter, vine leaves and yogurt. Common spices are lemon, dill, chives, honey, cinnamon, cardamom, mint (preferably fresh), nutmeg, coriander, cumin, paprika spice, parsley, pepper, saffron, salt, tahini paste and garlic.

Common dishes are lamb balls, kebabs or stews that simmer a long time (30-40 minutes) on very low heat which are served with rice or bulgur.

Kibbeh

1 kg finely minced lamb (or ground beef)

300 grams of bulgur

1 large onion

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon nutmeg

1/2 teaspoon allspice

olive oil

Salt.

Seasoning can also be supplemented with, for example, lemon, parsley, pine nuts and/or garlic.

1. Place the bulgur in a bowl and cover it with cold water and let it absorb for 10 minutes.
2. Drain and squeeze out the remaining water.
3. Mix in the other ingredients.
4. Knead the mass.
5. Shape the balls so that they are a little smaller than tennis balls.
6. Add the balls in a form with quite some olive oil in the bottom.
7. Fry them in a medium hot oven (about 190 ° C) and roll them occasionally, until they are golden brown and crispy.

Sauce

1 cube of chicken bouillon

parsley

2 tablespoons tomato paste

0.5 litres of water

1 clove of garlic

1 tablespoon of oil

salt and white pepper.

1. Chop the parsley and the bouillon cube.
2. Pour all the ingredients in a saucepan.
3. Cook for a few minutes.

Russian food

Common ingredients in the Russian kitchen are buckwheat, sour cream, onions, carrots, potatoes, beets, pickles, cabbage. Common spices are dill, honey, bay leaves, horseradish, parsley, salt, black pepper, garlic, vinegar. The Russian cuisine is dominated by soups and many eat soup at least once a day.

Russian stew

500 g pot pieces of beef
3 medium yellow onions
5 medium potatoes
2 carrots
2 parsnips
2 tablespoons butter/margarine
2 decilitres water
1/2 beef bouillon cube
2 decilitres sour cream
2 cloves of garlic
2 bay leaves
1 teaspoon black pepper.

1. Chop the vegetables.
2. Put the butter/margarine in a saucepan and let it get warm (rather dark brown butter).
3. Add the meat and the chopped onions and fry it.
4. Add the carrots, potatoes, parsnip, water and bouillon cube.
5. Crush the bay leaves, crush the garlic and add them.
6. Add the black pepper.
7. Let the stew simmer on low heat until the meat is done.
8. Add the sour cream and let it boil.

Swedish food

Common ingredients in traditional Swedish dishes are pork, onions, cream, flour, milk, carrots, potatoes, herring, butter, and eggs. The traditional spices are mostly salt and white pepper, but also, to some extent, for example, cinnamon, juniper, allspice, sugar/sweeteners and lingonberry jam (often as an accessory). Many dishes consist of boiled potatoes with fish or pork fried in butter/margarine and a sauce. The sauce is often a white béchamel sauce with some seasonings such as onions, carrots or spinach (the first is called onion sauce, while the latter two are called stewed carrots/spinach).

Herring burgers with currants and boiled potatoes
potatoes

1 red onion

3 salted herring fillets

300 g minced meat

butter/margarine for frying.

For the sauce

currants or raisins

syrup

vinegar

water

1-2 teaspoons arrowroot

salt.

1. Let the herring fillets lay in water for a few hours so that a portion of the salt is leached out.
2. Peel and boil the potatoes.
3. Chop the onions finely.
4. Mash the herring fillets.
5. Mash or squeeze three boiled potatoes.
6. Mix the minced meat, herring, the mashed potatoes and the onion.
7. Make burgers.
8. Fry the burgers in butter/margarine.

Sauce

1. Boil currants/raisins in about 3 decilitres of water until they are tender.
2. Add a little syrup, and an even smaller dash of vinegar and a little salt.
3. Taste: if it is too hard increase the amount of syrup, if it is too sweet increase the amount of vinegar.
4. Thicken the sauce with arrowroot.

Serve with the cooked or pressed potatoes.

Thai food

Common commodities in Thailand are, for example, bamboo shoots, rice, onions and water chestnuts. Common spices are fresh cilantro, chilli peppers or chilli powder, fish sauce, mint, lemongrass (can be replaced with lemon zest), garlic, pepper, coconut milk, shrimp paste, curry paste, oyster sauce, salt, sugar, turmeric, grounded cumin, ginger, peanuts/peanut butter, lemon.

Meatballs with peanut sauce and rice

500g minced beef (or a package of ready made meatballs)

3 tablespoons oil

2 tablespoons curry paste

4 dl coconut milk

1 ½ tablespoon fish sauce

2 tablespoons of peanut butter.

1. Cook the rice to taste.
2. Shape the mince into ordinary meatballs.
3. Pour 1 tablespoon oil in a frying pan or wok.
4. Fry the meatballs until they are brown.
5. Place them on kitchen paper to remove the oil.
6. Lower the pan temperature.
7. Pour 2 tablespoons oil in the pan.
8. Add the curry paste and mix oil and curry paste.
9. Fry the curry paste in two-three minutes on low heat while stirring.
10. Add the remaining ingredients and stir.
11. Add the meatballs and let it simmer for 5 minutes.

Exercises

Exercise 1, spice testing

Set up all your spices on the table. Close your eyes and take some seasoning in the dark or let someone hold a season at a time under your nose. Try to guess which season it is. Repeat the test, but then taste each season.

Exercise 2, vary the seasoning

Try to vary the seasoning on any dish. Cook it as usual but set up a number of condiments on the table. Season each bite with a new spice and try to judge which one is the best. Consider, however, that apart from herbs, many spices gain a lot on if they are added before the heating of the food.

Exercise 3, "Swedish", "oriental" and "French" mincemeat

500 g minced

1 egg

salt

allspice

white pepper

cardamom

cinnamon

dragon

rosemary

butter/margarine

oil.

1. Mix the minced meat with egg.
2. Divide the batter into three piles.
3. Mix in salt, allspice and white pepper in the first pile.
4. Mix down the salt, cinnamon and cardamom in pile two.
5. Mix salt, dragon and rosemary in the pile three.
6. Shape the ground beef into small patties, fry them and compare the flavours.

Exercise 4, "Indian", "Thai" and "Mexican" sausage

1 big sausage

butter/margarine

garam masala

tomato paste

peanut butter

curry

sweet chilli sauce

cayenne pepper

cumin

chilli sauce

one or two large cans of crème fraiche or boilable yoghurt.

1. Shred the sausage and divide the strips into three piles.
2. Add a relatively decent knob of butter/margarine in a large frying pan.
3. Pour a pile of sausages.
4. When the sausage pieces are just enough coloured: pour in garam masala.
5. Pour a third of the crème fraiche and tomato paste.
6. Let it boil for a while and then pour the sauce into a serving dish.
7. Wipe any fat from the pan with a paper or if it burnt slightly, you can rinse it out with water and brush a bit with dish brush.
8. Take one of the other piles of sausages and heat it over low heat in a little butter/margarine.
9. Pour the curry.
10. Add in peanut butter.
11. Pour a third of the crème fraiche and sweet chilli sauce.
12. Let it boil for a while
13. Clean the pan.
14. Take the third pile and fry in a little butter/margarine.
15. Add the cayenne pepper and cumin.
16. Pour in the rest of the crème fraiche and last chilli sauce.
17. Serve with rice, taste and compare.