

ROCK 'EM VEGGIES

A mini course to learn the secret to making veggies flavorful

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Who are you cooking for and what are the top five things that would wow them at mealtimes?
It could go something like this -

1. Myself - a. Fresh and hot (as in temperature) food, b. Colorful, c. Vegan, d. Some uncooked salad, e. Classical music softly played in the background
2. Dear one #3 - a. One sweet dish, please b. Not spicy c. Lightly-cooked d. No goopy over-cooked textures e. Nutritious but very tasty

	Like #1	Like #2	Like #3	Like #4	Like #5
Dear one #1					
Dear one #2					
Dear one #3					
Dear one #4					
Dear one #5					

Additional Notes:

Example: I've observed how Dear one #4 loves anything pink. Must try mixing a little beet in the cake batter! How about mixing some in yogurt?

Dear one #2 is happiest with a Pumpkin dish. Must encourage to try Kabocha Squash as it feels so close to Pumpkin.

What are your family's top veggies? Name 5-10 more that you are curious to try and you have always wanted to add to your repertoire. Make this a family affair, ask them too!

Favorites:

Veggies	Dear one #1	Dear one #2	Dear one #3	Dear one #4
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Additional Notes: Dear one #2 likes Roasted Okra as finger food but not Okra in gravy.

Hopeful add-ons: Name 5-10 more that you are curious to try and you have always wanted to add to your repertoire. Make this a family affair, ask them too!

Veggies	Dear one #1	Dear one #2	Dear one #3	Dear one #4
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
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7				
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9				
10				

How are they similar to what I already know and cook?

What methods or recipes may work?

Who among my friends may already know about this veggie?

Which restaurant may have something made with this?

What spices do you like and use already?

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Additional notes: Example: Cinnamon is my go-to spice for desserts and cereal. I can't think of using it in a savory dish.

What other spices interest me?

(Almost every kid I've talked to was drawn to star anise. Even some adults, myself included are drawn to its beautiful form and shape)

Basic Two step approach to making veggies flavorful:

Over all the years of helping people like you understand the intuitive process of pairing the right vegetable to a spice, this is what I've discovered. It comes down to seemingly simple and duh-it-is-so-obvious kinda two steps. They are -

1. Know and remember the taste of your vegetable
2. Know and remember the taste of your spices

Let me explain why and how it works.

WHY It works is because it stimulates our curiosity to ask questions. And with some guidance to asking the right ones, you'll find yourself thinking like a Pro in the kitchen! You may want to check with anyone that you think to be a 'fabulous chef' in your life - in all probability this is how they would have started.

Also, remember this - our culture has come to spread the myth that only 'some' of us have a talent to cook while the rest of us are better at enjoying the fare! Have you observed this? It's seen with many other things like music and dance as well. 'Some sing and others listen, some dance while others make better spectators'! MYTH.

Cooking to serve our own everyday needs and to please our family and friends is NOT some special skill that's exclusive to only some of us! Do NOT allow anybody to convince you to believe this. **ALL** of us can cook and cook well with some practice. **SOME** of us excel at it to become award-winning chefs.

Coming back, HOW it works is, it helps to identify the individual taste of a vegetable or spice within a dish even when it's made by others. For instance, when you eat at a restaurant. You'll find yourself recognising the individual ingredients within a dish. It gives you an insight to how somebody else has used it. It often triggers your imagination to come up with new ways on how you would try it.

This way, you'll never be clingy about your recipes and there will be more free play in your cooking. This ALONE can save you a ton of money that you would otherwise waste on ingredients bought JUST because a recipe 'called for it'.

It helps to carry this same approach even when you are trying a recipe out of cookbook. That way, you get to 'see' the same creative process of the chef/author who put it together.

Remembering the taste of individual spice - helpful questions to ask and take notes on:

1. What does it look like?
2. What does it smell like?
3. What food does it remind me of when I taste it ?
4. Which Plant Family does it belong to?
5. Gut feeling about a good pairing vegetable?

At this point, pair it with a vegetable that you are familiar with. Example, Potato with Cumin

Chop the Potato into quarter inch cubes (first cut them into fingers as in French Fries and then cut further into cubes).

Put a pan on heat. Once hot, add half a teaspoon of oil.

Once hot, add one-eighth teaspoon of Cumin. It will crackle and at that point, add Potato.

Take about half cup of chopped Potato and toss in with the tempered spice-oil mixture.

Put a lid on and allow the vegetable to cook in and absorb the flavors.

Taste and record your perception. Use the questions above as a guide.

Add salt to taste and check again for the difference in taste.

Do you feel urged to try pairing Cumin with another vegetable?

Check the internet if there are any recipes having this similar combo of spice and vegetable.

Then, go ahead and use half a cup of the vegetable you want to try pairing with this spice. Use the same tempering technique and see how it turns out. Do you like it?

If yes, why?

If no, what would you do differently?

Try the spice tempering method to use these same spices to see if it works with the veggies in Hopeful Add-ons list?

Tempering spices - Additional Notes

This is a deliberate step when you want activate your spices or infuse the oil with the flavors of your spices.

Traditional way of doing it is to put a wrought iron pan on heat and add some kind of vegetable or nut or seed oil.

Allow oil to heat. Take care never to let it go the smoking point - as this will char the spices and turn them bitter. If you are multitasking and this happens to you, just start afresh as it will surely ruin the whole dish otherwise.

Add the spices of your choice gently into the oil. You do not want hot oil splashing back on your hands!

You almost always want to use whole spices at this point as the powdered ones are delicate and already activated - they are ready to be used and usually towards the end of the dish.

When you add the spices to the heated oil, small ones like mustard will pop. You want to keep your kids away for sure. Also make it a point to use a dry pan for heating the oil. Any moisture/water in the pan tends make the oil splutter.

Take it away from heat once the seeds pop or aromas are wafting in your kitchen. If you need to continue, keep the next set of ingredients on hand - ready to go and add it right away and mix - this will reduce the heat within the pan and you will avoid spices from charring out in the pan.

When the spices are used raw, they are usually either soaked in water or broth with other ingredients and ground. Some spices like cinnamon, black pepper are powdered and used directly. Often, they are blended with other ingredients like salt, mango powder or pomegranate powder or sugar and powdered fine to balance the tastes.

Questions to ask Giri:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Or write in to say what you liked about the masterclass. (girija@health-initiatives.me)

Warmly,

Giri