

Operator's Edge

The Successful Independent Operator's Resource

Food Presentation Tips

A plate of food is like a painting, and the rim of the plate is the frame. This does not mean that you have to spend as much time arranging the plate as Rembrandt did painting a portrait, but it does mean that you need to think a little like an artist and strive for a pleasing arrangement.

1. Don't get carried away.

A plate that's too elaborate can be as bad as one that's too careless. Besides, you want that hot dinner to still be hot when it reaches the table, so you don't really have time to get too fancy. Following are a few more food presentation tips...



2. Create balance.

Select foods and garnishes that offer variety and contrast, while at the same time avoiding combinations that are awkward or jarring.

3. Consider color combinations

Two or three colors on a plate are usually more interesting than just one. Visualize the combination: poached chicken breast with supreme sauce, mashed potatoes, and steamed cauliflower. Appetizing? Or how about fried chicken, french fries, and corn? Not quite so bad, but still a little monotonous. Now picture roasted red peppers, grilled stuffed chicken breasts on herb-flecked orzo, and a drizzle of green pesto. Dazzling!

Many hot foods, especially meats, poultry, and fish, have little color other than shades of brown, gold, or white. It helps to select vegetables or accompaniments that add color interest - one reason why green vegetables are so popular.

Garnish is often unnecessary, especially if the accompaniments have color, but it is very important in some cases. The classic American combination of broiled steak (brown) and baked potato (brown and white) looks a little livelier with even the simple addition of a healthy sprig of watercress or parsley.

4. Don't overlook the combination of different shapes.

Another food presentation tip is to plan for variety of shapes and forms as well as of colors. For example, you probably do not want to serve brussels sprouts with meatballs and new potatoes. Green beans and whipped potatoes might be better choices for accompaniments.

Cutting vegetables into different shapes gives you great flexibility. Carrots, for example, which can be cut into dice, rounds, or sticks (batonnet, julienne, etc.), and can be adapted to nearly any plate.

5. Different textures delight the diner.

Though not usually included in food presentation tip lists because they are not strictly visual considerations, textures are as important in plating as in menu planning.

Good balance requires a variety of textures on the plate. Perhaps the most common error is serving too many soft or pureed foods, such as baked salmon loaf with whipped potatoes and pureed squash.

6. Flavors add interest.

You can't see flavors either, but this is one more factor you must consider when balancing colors, shapes, and textures on the plate.

Source: Sloan Trends