

The image is a collage of fresh vegetables. At the top, there are whole tomatoes, orange and yellow bell peppers, and a sliced red pepper on a wooden cutting board. The bottom half shows a knife, a sliced tomato, and a sliced red pepper on the same cutting board. The background is a textured, light-colored surface.

VEGETABLE COOKING METHODS

Real School's Be Healthy, Happy & Fit

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STEAMING

Steaming is one way to prepare simple, clean-tasting vegetables without salt, oil, or seasoning. It is especially helpful to get to know how vegetables taste in their most simple, pure form. Steaming takes about 5-10 minutes for green leafy vegetables and 10-25 minutes for root veggies. All you need is a steaming basket and a pot with a lid filled with about two inches of water.

Steamers come in a variety of forms. The stainless steel, fold-up variety fits inside of a pot to keep the vegetables above water. Some pots are specifically made with holes in the bottom for steaming over another pot of water.

- Wash the vegetables.
- Chop. The smaller the size, the faster they will cook.
- Bring water to a boil.
- Cover the pot, and steam vegetables in the steaming basket over the water for several minutes until they become bright in color
- Taste, and decide if it is cooked enough for you. Cook longer, if you prefer.
- Be sure to take the vegetables out of the pot, and splash cool water over them, or they will continue to cook and lose color.

HOW TO MAKE PLAIN STEAMED VEGETABLES MORE EXCITING

These can be applied to all vegetables that you wish to use for steaming:

- Add 1 tablespoon olive oil or toasted sesame oil to every 2 cups of greens
- Add 2 bay leaves or 1 teaspoon cumin seeds to the water
- Sprinkle greens with toasted pumpkin, sesame, flax, or sunflower seeds, almonds, or walnuts
- Sprinkle greens with fresh herbs, such as mint, dill, basil, parsley, cilantro, or scallions
- Use tamari, soy sauce, or Umeboshi vinegar to add extra flavor
- Squeeze fresh lemon juice over them
- After steaming them, quickly stir-fry in olive oil with a pinch of sea salt and garlic

BALANCHING

Blanching, or quick boiling, is another way to prepare vegetables quickly and "cleanly". Blanching helps to quickly break down the fiber of raw vegetables, more than steaming does, which aids digestion. Blanching vegetables also removes the raw flavor and brightens up their color.

- Bring water to a boil.
- Add a pinch of salt
- Wash and chop the vegetables
- Drop the vegetables into the water and lower the heat
- Cook until they become bright
- If you prefer softer vegetables, let them cook longer
- When finished, rinse the vegetables in cool water to stop the cooking process

REMEMBER, FOR BOTH STEAMING AND BLANCHING: Different vegetables take different amounts of time to cook. Harder vegetables, like roots, take the longest. Green leafy vegetables, such as collards and bok choy, take less time. Any vegetables can be steamed or blanched. These two cooking methods are especially good when you want to "get to know" a new vegetable by tasting its essential flavor.

You can serve steamed or blanched vegetables plain, with a dressing, or with a wedge of lemon. Try adding roasted nuts or seeds as a topping or some freshly ground pepper. Experiment with different combinations of vegetables. Pay attention to colors, textures, and flavors!

STIR-FRYING

Stir-frying is another quick and nutritious way to prepare vegetables. You can stir-fry in oil or in water. Stir-frying in oil makes a tastier dish, since the hot oil seals in the flavor. You can use any kind of vegetable. The softer vegetables, like Chinese cabbage, bok choy, thinly sliced carrots, mushrooms, and onions, will only take a few minutes to cook.

Before you start, have all of the vegetables cut into pieces. Thinner slices and smaller pieces will cook faster and more evenly.

If you choose to use oil, heat a wok or a frying pan, and add a small amount of oil, such as peanut, sesame, or coconut oil. If you are making a small amount of vegetables, brushing the wok or pan with oil is usually enough. Start with the harder vegetables, like roots. Add one variety at a time, and cook them until they become shiny before adding the next bunch. Sprinkling a pinch of sea salt over the vegetables draws just enough moisture to prevent sticking and makes them taste sweeter. You can also sprinkle water over your vegetables to gain extra steam and heat.

If you choose to sauté with water, add 1 inch of water to your wok or pan, and bring to boil. Add thinly sliced vegetables, cover, and simmer for 5-10 minutes.

At the end of cooking, you can make a nice sauce, thickened with arrowroot or kudzu, and seasoned with soy sauce, ginger, or garlic.

HERE ARE SOME GREAT COLORFUL TASTY COMBINATIONS FOR STIR-FRYING:

- Onions, carrots, and snow peas
- Chinese cabbage, mung bean sprouts, and scallions
- Leeks, carrots, and red peppers
- Onions, mushrooms, and zucchini with dried basil
- Yellow squash and collard greens with garlic

Variations: Add tofu or tempeh slices for added protein. Add cooked grains to the vegetables toward the end for impromptu "fried rice".

BAKING

Many vegetables taste best baked. Baking brings out the very essence of the vegetables, especially squash and root veggies. Place vegetables in a baking pan, and roast for 45-60 minutes at about 400 degrees Fahrenheit.

VEGETABLES YOU CAN TRY BAKING:

- GREEN LEAFY VEGETABLES
- COLLARD GREENS
- KALE: DINOSAUR KALE, PURPLE KALE, AND LACINATO KALE
- DANDELION GREENS
- MUSTARD GREENS
- CHARDS: SWISS CHARD, RED CHARD, AND RAINBOW CHARD
- BEET GREENS
- WATERCRESS
- PARSLEY
- DARK LETTUCE
- ROOTS AND SQUASH
- CARROT
- PARSNIP
- TURNIP
- RUTABAGA
- BURDOCK
- CELERY ROOT
- ACORN SQUASH
- KABOCHA SQUASH
- BUTTERNUT SQUASH

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THE FAT BURNER

- DAIKON
- RADISH
- LEEK
- SCALLION
- TURNIP
- ONION
- CELERY
- CABBAGE FAMILY
- BROCCOLI
- CAULIFLOWER
- BRUSSELS SPROUTS

HERBS AND SPICES THAT ARE GOOD TO HAVE:

- BASIL
- BAY LEAF
- CARAWAY
- CUMIN
- DILL
- FENNEL
- GARLIC
- MARJORAM
- MUSTARD SEEDS
- OREGANO
- ROSEMARY
- SAGE
- THYME

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