

by changing our expectations, they can effectively influence the taste when we have this pre-knowledge.

These techniques are especially useful when you are inviting people for dinner—or persuading children to try new dishes. By the same token, it might help the taste of the meal if you omit the fact that a certain cake is made from a commercial mix or that you used generic rather than brand-name orange juice in a cocktail, or, especially for children, that Jell-O comes from cow hooves. I am not endorsing the morality of such actions, just pointing to the expected outcomes.

Finally, don't underestimate the power of presentation. There's a reason that learning to present food artfully on the plate is as important in culinary school as learning to grill and fry. Even when you buy take-out, try removing the Styrofoam packaging and placing the food on some nice dishes and garnishing it (especially if you have company); this can make all the difference.

One more piece of advice: If you want to enhance the experience of your guests, invest in a nice set of wineglasses.

Moreover, if you're really serious about your wine, you may want to go all out and purchase the glasses that are specific to burgundies, chardonnays, champagne, etc. Each type of glass is supposed to provide the appropriate environment, which should bring out the best in these wines (even though controlled studies find that the shape of the glass makes no difference at all in an objective blind taste test, that doesn't stop people from perceiving a significant difference when they are handed the "correct glass"). Moreover, if you forget that the shape of the glass really has no effect on the taste of the wine, you yourself may be able to better enjoy the wine you consume in the appropriately shaped fancy glasses.