

# Tasting: the Basics

Adapted from *Taste: What You're Missing* by Barb Stuckey.

## A Template for Tasting

- Look
- Listen
- Smell
- Take a bite/sip (not too much!) and chew and swish
- Taste
- Swallow (or spit if needed)
- Repeat a few times

## Tasting Like the Pros

- Pay attention and treat eating/drinking as a sensory event.
- Smell everything.
- Smell deeply (*but carefully!*).
- Don't eat/drink too much at a time.
- Introduce air by chewing and swirling food in your mouth.
- Swallow and pay attention to your experience afterward.
- Throughout think about the flavor experience both *analytically* (e.g., what aromas can be detected and how strong are they) and *holistically* (e.g., Did you like it? What's your gut reaction?).
- Acknowledge that because of the neuro-psychological component of flavor, the measurable qualities may differ from the experiential qualities of food.

## Tasting in Order

- Flavors interact with each other and can alter our perception.
- Our sensitivity to flavors is reduced with repeated exposure.
- If possible, taste milder, less flavorful food/drink first (e.g., white before red wine).

## Adjusting as Needed

- Taste small amounts of something several times, pausing briefly between tastes to get the full experience several times, paying attention to parts you might have missed previously.
- Temperature has a large effect on flavor, especially aroma, so you may need to change the temperature of a food/drink to assess it (e.g., cold wine is less aromatic and often

needs to be brought to a higher temperature for tasting).

- Concentration also matters. If something is too strong, dilute to be able to taste it appropriately (e.g., whiskey is often too alcoholic and needs to be slightly diluted).
- Adjust (aka. "cleanse") your palate as needed. *Unflavored* sparkling (or even still) water and/or a neutral/bland cracker can help.
- *And spit if necessary!* Although not polite in most contexts, especially with wine, ingesting food can lead to decreased perceptive abilities.

### Tasting with Your Mouth Shut

- Be considerate/conscious of how others' reactions and thoughts influence you and visa-versa.
- Especially in the context of structured tastings or meals, it's helpful to reserve initial reactions until you and others have gotten a chance to have their own experiences.

### Flavor Checklist

#### ☐ **Sight**

- ☐ What colors do you observe?
- ☐ What textural qualities can you perceive?

#### ☐ **Sound**

- ☐ What sounds can you hear?
  - ☐ Is there sizzling?
  - ☐ Does it crunch?
  - ☐ Does it sound bubbly, like soda?

#### ☐ **Smell**

- ☐ What aromas can be detected?
- ☐ Another way to ask this is, what aromas are you reminded of?

#### ☐ **Taste**

- ☐ The five tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, savory?
- ☐ How strong are they?
- ☐ Do they compliment each other in an appealing way (i.e. balanced)?
- ☐ Are there tastes that seem missing or off?

#### ☐ **Touch**

- ☐ What textures do you sense with your tongue?
- ☐ Is it homogenous (i.e. the same) throughout?
- ☐ What is the temperature?

#### ☐ **Smell (again)**

- ☐ After swallowing, what aromas can be perceived?
- ☐ Are they different from before swallowing?

☐ How long do they persist?

## Fifteen Ways to Get More from Every Bite

1. Chew (or swish) well
2. Pay attention
3. Avoid sensory satiety (aka. adaptation)
4. Practice food appreciation at home
5. Go over the basic tastes (which are present or absent)
6. Taste at the right temp
7. Hydrate and breathe
8. Taste first thing in the morning
9. Use common sense with scents
10. Quit smoking (or at least wait until you're done eating)
11. Don't accept that aging means less enjoyment from food
12. Know what drugs (see Stuckey p352) affect taste and smell
13. Protect your head (nose, ears and brain included)
14. Be adventurous and patient (5-10 new trials for adults, >30 for kids)
15. If it doesn't taste delicious... spit!