

Food presentation
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Grown up in a family where both parents were utilitarian, I was not very interested in making things visually attractive. My priority when choosing something to buy was whether it serves its purpose well, rather than the beauty of it. The same applied to food. As long as the food was delicious, I didn't care much about its appearance. One day a friend of mine, Fang-I Chu, cooked a dish for me (can't remember exactly what it was) and it had various colors of vegetables. She told me that using multiple colors of vegetables is healthier. I thought it was nonsense. What does the color of food has to do with healthiness? Then I searched online. Oh, my! It turned out that different-colored vegetables contain different kinds of nutrition. This experience slightly opened my mind to food presentation, which is the art of modifying, processing, arranging, or decorating food to enhance its aesthetic appeal.



It was through another friend, Nataly Moreno, that I have started participating in the process and learned the importance of food presentation. In 2016, she was preparing valentine cookies for her potential boyfriend. When she showed me the video of the baking process of rainbow heart cookies (figure on the left), I didn't have any motivation to make them together. I knew that rainbow colors wouldn't make the taste different. In addition, the nutrition would be the same as plain cookies since the colors were to be generated by (artificial) food colors this time.

Leaving my doubts behind, I started assisting Nataly. From buying the ingredients to baking them, it took us a whole day to finish them. When I saw the finished product, I felt that there is something about the visual presentation of food. Visually appealing food made with a considerable amount of time and effort can touch people's heart even before they taste it in their mouths. Her potential boyfriend didn't become her boyfriend, but she told me that she had never seen him so happy as the time when he received the cookies. In the perspective of food presentation, a medium was limited in colors, because flour is used for baking cookies, which has usually white colors. Therefore, ingredients such as food colors and sprinkles were essential for the cookies.

Another day, a friend named Ayumi Hoshi joined us for baking a cake (figure on the right). It was called a Matcha Tea, Yuzu, and Azuki Cake. We started at 2pm and were done by 11pm the same day. This time we didn't exactly replicate the same shape that was shown in the recipe. We made it as a simple, round shape cake and put a decoration of heart on top. Nataly was managing all the required steps since she had the longest experience of cooking. Ayumi and I worked together to make decisions for design and to present the cake neatly. Our boundary object was the cookbook that we referenced. I remember this was a very fun experience, because we had similar motivations and working toward the same goal.



Thanks to all these friends who cooked together with me, nowadays I became more careful about food presentation. The examples include using the chopsticks to twirl my spaghetti to put it on a plate, cutting onions into round slices, or putting fried rice in a bowl and inverting the bowl onto a plate. Below is an example of the food display that I have done. I used some principles that I have gained from my past experience such as utilizing more color contrast, layering foods to add height and using sauce wisely.



Many times cooking is seen as similar to painting. Josef Albers, an artist and educator whose work formed the basis of modern art education programs of the twentieth century, even compared himself to a cook. He said, "Color is like cooking. The cook puts in more or less salt, that's the difference!" I am still learning how to cook and what makes food visually appealing. As cooking regularly is my new year resolution, I am looking forward to trying more fun stuff with food presentation.