

Module 2

ESSENTIALS

2.1 Tips on Plating & Food Photography

Presentation & Plating

Perception of taste is a controversial issue. Figuring out the variables that affect food perception and how they interact with each other can help us unlock how to make certain ingredients more palatable, or better understand satiety mechanisms.

In addition to such factors such as aroma or texture, appearance also plays a key role. Not just the appearance of the food (colors, composition of the elements on the plate or portion size), but also factors like the color of the dishes or the weight of the cutlery: all seem to affect our perception of the way food tastes.

It is important that you find a style and a manner of presenting your creations that feel right to you. I encourage you to experiment, and during this process of discovery I recommend that you consider the following ideas and tips:

- **Choose a plate** - Think of the plate as your canvas! I have a special predilection for artisan ceramics in natural colors with matte glazes. They allow my desserts to stand out and, since these plates are non-reflective, I can avoid shadows and reflections in my photos.
- **Portion** - As a rule of thumb, and especially with desserts, I never recommend plating big portions. It's much better to start with a small portion and start to build the plate from there.
- **Colors** - Consider all the colors: from the decorative elements (fruits, flowers or herbs) to the color of the plate on which you are serving your dessert. Try to create contrast, but be mindful: sometimes monochromatic presentations are more attractive than those with too many colors.
- **Asymmetry** - Plates are usually more attractive when they follow natural lines than when they are presented in a symmetrical way. My advice is to avoid piling up elements or overloading the plate. Similarly, a dish is more visually appealing when it contains an odd number of elements (e.g. 5 or 7 truffles rather than 4 or 6).
- **Create height** - Instead of presenting each component side by side on a flat dish, plate your creation with height. Start with your main element (e.g. a cake portion) and start building volume and height from there.
- **Textures** - Look for varied textures in the different elements of your plate to enhance the eating experience. A soft texture by itself can be dull and unpromising, but if you add a crunchy touch with another ingredient, the experience can suddenly become more balanced, rich and complex.
- **Decoration** - It's good to have at least one fresh element on your plate, such as fruit, herbs or edible flowers.
- **100 % edible** - Don't forget that everything on the plate should be edible, including garnishes and decorative elements.

Photography

Here are some simple guidelines to help you achieve better results with your food photography:

- **Camera** - You don't need a high-end professional camera for this course! Your smartphone can go a long way to help you capture quality pictures.
- * Just FYI, I personally use a **Canon 5D Mark IV** and a 100 mm 2.8 macro lens in most of my pictures.
- **Editing** - There are many great free apps for food photography that you can download to your smartphone, but if you are looking for professional software to edit your pictures, I recommend that you use **LightRoom** and **Photoshop** on your computer.

- **Background** - It's crucial to take your time in choosing the background for your picture. Whether dark or light, in my opinion neutral backgrounds generally work best. Marble and wooden backgrounds are always my favorites.
- **Lighting** - The most important thing is to avoid taking pictures at night or under strong artificial kitchen lights, as this will make your food look less natural and appetizing. Always try to shoot close to a window, using natural light. Overcast days are best for capturing food outside as bright sunlight can cause dark shadows and bright highlights.
- **Props** - I love using vintage cutlery and other old treasures that can be found at flea markets or in second-hand shops. Props like tablecloths or tea towels can come in handy when trying to compose a picture. Nevertheless, you can also create beautiful pictures without adding extra elements, just keeping it minimal with your dessert on a white marble surface. Explore and find the style that resonates with you!
- **Hands** - This is a personal choice. In some pictures I like to show my hands, because in my opinion it adds a human element that gives personality to a picture.
- **Lines** - Play with lines, shapes and the geometry of the elements in the picture to compose the photograph.
- **Angles** - If a dish is layered and has height, try to take the photo from the side, not from above. In any case, it's always best to try shooting from a few angles to showcase your plate from different perspectives.
- **Negative space** - Once again: less is more. Do not pile up elements and make sure you leave enough white space around them.

2.2 Storage & Shelf Life

Plant-based Creamery

If stored in air-tight glass containers in the fridge, nut and seed milks or creams last for 3 days. If you add half a teaspoon of lemon juice, you can extend their shelf life up to 5 days.

Plant-based Mill

Nut and seed flours and freshly made butters must be stored in cool, dark places in air-tight glass containers. They can be kept at room temperature for 2 months, although they will last longer in the fridge, especially in summer.

Tempered Chocolate

If correctly tempered, dark chocolate can last for a year. It's important to keep it in a cool, dry place, at a temperature below 18 °C (64 °F). It's also essential to keep the chocolate well wrapped, out of direct sunlight and protected from humidity and moisture.

Be aware that chocolate can lose aromas if stored at low temperatures, while at high temperatures its texture and appearance may change. For that reason, when in doubt, keep chocolate in the fridge, especially in summer.

Keep in mind that chocolate is absorbent. It should be stored in the fridge in an air-tight container to prevent it from getting wet. Before eating, it's a good idea to leave it a few minutes at room temperature.

Milk chocolate and white chocolate do not last quite as long; they must be refrigerated owing to the presence of nut butters. Keep them in the fridge in an air-tight container.



Industrial chocolate often contains chemical preservatives and large amounts of sugar. That's why it has such a long shelf life.

Bonbons

The shelf life of bonbons will vary depending on the ingredients used in the ganache and fillings. If the ganache is made with fresh nut milk or fresh fruit – it will only be optimal for a maximum of 5 days. If the filling does not contain fresh ingredients (e.g. a caramel made from dates) bonbons can last up to several weeks.

Special Ingredients

The following ingredients should always be kept in the fridge once opened:

- Dates
- Superfoods
- Vanilla extract
- Maple syrup
- Miso
- Tamari

2.3 Zero Waste

According to FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) of the United Nations, more than 1300 million tons of food are wasted annually worldwide. It is a figure almost impossible to imagine.

When we talk about gastronomy we are also talking about culture and art, as well as economy, ecology and society. We have a huge responsibility as consumers and managers of what is bought and cooked in our homes.

Menu planning and good food-purchasing habits, along with learning how to make the most of the ingredients we buy, are essential ways to reduce food waste and unnecessary packaging.

To avoid waste production during this course, I invite you to pay close attention to these recommendations:

- **Bulk shopping** - To save time and money, always try to buy large amounts of dry ingredients. Bring your own containers to avoid using plastic bags and store containers.
- **Crusts & fillings** - Use leftovers from bonbon fillings or creams to create small parfaits.
- **Nut & seed pulp** - You can create many recipes from the leftover pulp (cookies, truffles, energy balls...) but the simplest way to reuse it is to dehydrate it straight away and turn it into flour.
- **Vanilla beans** - Once you have scraped out the seeds, store your used vanilla pods in a glass jar with coconut sugar to make delicious vanilla-infused coconut sugar.
- **Tempered chocolate pieces and scraps** - Save all your chocolate leftovers after finishing each recipe. Just re-melt the scraps, pour them into a silicone mold and store it, well wrapped, in the fridge until you can use the chocolate again. At the end of the course, I propose a chocolate mousse recipe, which is a great way to use all your chocolate leftovers.
- **Reduce single-use plastic** - Avoid using plastic wrap to cover the molds before storing them in the fridge or freezer. Store them instead in a closed box (ideally air-tight).
- **Glass containers** - Many ingredients we buy already come in glass jars. Once you use them, simply wash them well and refill them with your next bulk-shopping purchases.
- **Share your experience** - Even as I developed recipes as tempting as the ones you'll be making throughout this course, I know from personal experience that after eating 5 truffles at one sitting, you'll be done with chocolate 😊. I encourage you to tell your friends and family that you are taking this course and let them know that for the next few days your fridge will be full of chocolate treats. Often we are not 100 % satisfied with our creations (they don't always come out perfectly the first time!). We may believe they're not ready to be "presented." But I assure you, inviting friends over and sharing your creations with them will help you relish the experience! You will also get valuable feedback and ensure that none of your hard work goes to waste.



In addition to these alternatives, what other ideas do you have to reduce waste in the kitchen? Share your strategies for reducing packaging and food waste.

2.4 Troubleshooting (FAQ)



Below you'll find a compilation of the most common issues you may encounter when preparing the recipes for this course. Besides explaining their causes, I also provide recommendations on how to prevent them from happening in the first place and how to handle them if they've already occurred.

You don't have to read them now. Just remember to have this table at hand if you encounter any difficulties. In any case, your instructor will be available to help you solve any unforeseen issues.

Problem	Cause	Solution
Chocolate melts in your fingers	Your chocolate is not tempered properly.	Make sure you temper the chocolate according to directions and follow the temperatures indicated in the recipe. Once your chocolate has set, if it's not tempered properly, you will have to re-melt it and start over.
Mixture separates	A single drop of water or humidity can prevent chocolate from tempering.	Make sure to dry all utensils thoroughly before they come in contact with chocolate.
Blender gets stuck and does not blend the ingredients properly	1. You may have started blending at a high speed and air pockets may have formed in the mixture.	1. Add liquid ingredients to the blender first before adding solids (such as nuts), then start blending at low speed. From there, increase speed gradually.
	2. The mixture is too thick.	2. Stop the blender and scrape down the sides of the jar regularly. If the mixture still does not blend, start adding more liquid gradually and in small quantities.
The mixture separates and oil appears on the surface	1. You have blended the mixture too much and it overheated.	1. Monitor the temperature of your jar by placing your hands on it while blending. If the jar gets too hot, stop the blender and let the mixture rest for a few minutes.
	2. The ingredients were at different temperatures, so the oil cannot emulsify.	2. Take your ingredients out of the fridge at least 30 minutes before starting your <i>mise en place</i> , to make sure they are at room temperature before adding them to the jar.
	3. The oil was added too quickly.	3. Stream in oils and fats (coconut oil, cacao butter...) at the end of the blending process, gradually and with the blender running on low speed. * If the mixture has already separated, try gradually adding 1-2 teaspoons of water. * Although I try to avoid them, emulsifiers such as soy or sunflower lecithin can be used to prevent the mixture from separating.

Problem	Cause	Solution
Blooming: chocolate may develop a grayish-white surface, losing its shine	1. Fat-bloom: occurs when cacao-butter crystals rise and recrystallize on the surface. It's due to an incorrect tempering process.	1. Never heat your chocolate above 50 °C (122 °F). * Fat-bloom does not affect the flavor or quality of your chocolate, but it changes the texture and appearance. You can safely eat it, re-temper it or use it in other recipes.
	2. Sugar-bloom: occurs when moisture collects on the surface, resulting in gritty chocolate. It can occur when chocolate is stored in the fridge improperly wrapped or if it is exposed to temperatures over 20 °C (68 °F) or humidity over 60 %.	2. Make sure you wrap and cover your chocolates very well and keep them in a cool, dry place. If you store them in the fridge, use an air-tight container. * Sugar-bloom cannot be improved by tempering.
Food processor blades get stuck	1. You may have added ingredients that are either too big or very hard to blend (e.g. big pieces of dry dates).	1. Always add ingredients roughly chopped, and spread them around the bowl to process them evenly (with dates, unless they are already soft, it's useful to soak them 10 minutes in warm water before processing). Stop the food processor from time to time to scrape down the sides of the bowl so that all ingredients are well incorporated.
	2. Some foreign ingredient entered the jar (e.g. a date pit).	2. Remove seeds and pits before adding ingredients to the food processor.
Humidity or water condensation on chocolate's surface	The chocolate wasn't well covered and protected against moisture.	Avoid direct contact of your chocolate with air and humidity. If stored refrigerated, wrap it well and keep it in an air-tight container. * Reduce the use of single-use plastic by covering your chocolate with parchment paper in air-tight containers.
Air bubbles inside the mixture or in the chocolate	1. High-speed blenders incorporate air when they blend.	1. Tap the molds on the table 2-3 times to remove air before placing them in the fridge or freezer. You can also tap the jar before pouring its content over the molds.
	2. You've used a whisk to temper the chocolate.	2. Never use a whisk to temper chocolate; use a rubber spatula instead.