

Title:

YES! You Can be a Food Gourmet and a Skilled Gourmet Cook Too

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Summary:

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Ever thought that gourmet cooking is not for you, or that you do not cook well?
Then it's time to totally change your mindset from today . . .

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Article Body:

Yes, even you can cook up wonderful meals and impress your loved ones!

Ever thought that gourmet cooking is not for you, or that you do not cook well?
Then it's time to totally change your mindset from today . . .

Anyone and everyone can easily pick up cooking skills; younger or older, ladies and even the guys. It doesn't matter what your skill level is today; you can do much better and make great dishes like the chefs at your favorite restaurants. And what's more, the meals you cook will be done to perfection - your kind of perfection. And you know what the best part is? You already have the most important ingredient . . . you know what great food is!

Let's show you the way . . . Xperimental Cooking is putting YOU in charge - you're the boss of the kitchen! You choose the ingredients you like and whip up meals to suit your specific tastes. Forget about strictly following recipes that are complicated . . . that requires you to buy special ingredients you will only use once then store till they expire . . . that calls for you to measure out precise amounts of each ingredient. All that is required is for you to have fun and Xperiment with blending ingredients that you like. Let your imagination rule . . . pick the items and create your masterpiece; from types of meats and vegetables, to how they are cooked, to what beautiful arrangement on your dinner plate. Xperimental Cooking is also about you and the people you are preparing a meal for. You know that each person has their unique preferences, so Xperimental Cooking is about helping you fulfill those preferences. Sounds

complicated, you may think? But actually, it is rather simple; especially after you develop the basics that will forever change your mindset on cooking and open up a whole new dimension of creativity you never knew you already had within yourself.

Now let us share with you the little secrets of Xperimental Cooking . . . the A, B, Cs if you will . . .

A. INGREDIENTS - The first key is for you to build on your knowledge of ingredients, as they are the basic building blocks for a good meal. You already know of many ingredients, now go and take a closer look; experience each ingredient individually and Xperiment with it. Everything edible can be an ingredient in your creation, so you need to know and understand each ingredient; from how it looks and tastes, to its texture, to how it behaves when cooked in different ways, to which other ingredients it is compatible with, to what happens if you add more or less of it to your food, etc. Since individuals experience things differently, you are your own expert; find out what you like and what you can do without. As you have your meals each day, take the opportunity to study the ingredients. Involve your family & friends and make it fun as you experience & Xperiment. At restaurants, and when you travel, question the chefs if you have a chance and gain perspectives into new ingredients you come across. For the computer savvy, you can also surf the web and quickly gain insight; there is tons of information online. Try typing the ingredient you're interested in on your favorite search engine and discover a wealth of knowledge at your fingertips. As you get to know about more ingredients and become more aware of the characteristics of each ingredient, you will be able to expertly combine them to expand the number of new dishes in your cooking repertoire. There are endless combinations, so keep Xperimenting; you will discover many winners to surprise your guests. Have fun building up your own database of ingredients.

B. QUALITY - When you begin with great quality ingredients, you are certain to produce top quality meals; if you start with poor quality ingredients, it won't come as a surprise that the results will naturally be disappointing. Quality can easily be determined when you use all your senses . . . Use your sense of Sight to look carefully at the ingredients. Check the color to see if it is bright or dull, consistent or has blemishes. Is the shape evenly symmetrical or distorted. Look also at the texture of the items. Your sense of Sight is the first sense that you will usually use when checking anything; and it is a powerful tool in determining the Quality of any ingredient. Practice and see if you can tell what the Quality of an item is, just by looking at it. You will quickly be able to use your Sight to initially screen ingredients to determine if they are worth a closer inspection or to move on. Use your sense of Hearing

to listen to the tone when gently tapping or shaking an item. Does it sound hollow or solid, is there a rattling sound? Hearing is not frequently used, but can be helpful in a closer inspection of certain fruits, nuts and vegetables. Use your sense of Smell to sniff out fragrant fruits and the aroma of fresh herbs. You can also detect items to avoid when they emit off smelling odors. Train up your nose and your sense of Smell will come in handy when you search for Quality foods. If you have the opportunity, sample the items before making your decision. Besides checking that the Taste is what it should be, also observe the texture or feel it has in your mouth, when you chew on it, and when it slides down your throat. This is also your chance to confirm that you really like the Taste of the ingredient before buying. Your sense of Taste will be your most important tool when it comes to blending ingredients. With a well developed sense of Taste, you will be able to determine what ingredients, and in what quantities, will go well together. Finally is your sense of Touch. Go ahead, pick up and handle the ingredients you are inspecting. How does it feel in your hands? Is it heavy or light, hard or soft, firm or supple, smooth or rough, dry or moist? You can tell a good deal about the Quality of an ingredient by how it feels; you just need a little practice to fine tune and "get the feel" of things. Practice using all your senses to fully examine ingredients and learn how to pick Top Quality items for your specific needs. It is now time for you to exercise your senses whenever you go shopping for food. Have a good time tuning up your skills in search of Quality at the markets and stores.

C. DESIGNING - Now comes the fun part of Designing your meals. The first consideration is who you are cooking for and what are their likes and dislikes. Do take some time to ask your family, friends, or guests about their eating preferences, especially if they require special diets for health reasons, or are allergic to certain foods. From this mini survey, you can plan a meal that will delight everyone. You can now begin to narrow down your choices; consider if you want to do appetizers and/or soup, what are the best choice for your main courses, and if you wish to make desert? Design a simple meal or an elaborate feast: it's all up to you. Use your knowledge of ingredients to decide on what blend of ingredients will achieve the unique flavors you want. Also consider how the ingredients will look together, and how you can make your dishes visually appealing. At the beginning, you may feel more comfortable sticking to traditional flavors and cooking tried and tested recipes. But as you gain confidence after Xperimenting with traditional foods by altering their taste to suit your preferences better, then its time to be bold and creative; try to design something totally new once in a while. It is also fairly easy for you to design meals to take into account differing preferences among your guests; simply separate your ingredients and add or withhold them into individual portions of your dishes. In the Design phase, you may wish to consider the

cooking style as well, since the way food is cooked will make a difference in the outcome in terms of taste and texture.

D. COOKING STYLES - Mastering many Cooking Styles is another way to increase the diversity of your meals. Brush up on your cooking skills by not only practicing the various Styles of Cooking, but also by paying close attention to the details of the cooking process, what each Cooking Style does to your food and the resulting appearance, taste & texture. Experiment with variations to the standard method (different temperature, time, sequence, combinations, etc.) and observe the results. Learn new Styles as you come across them, and also try your hand at inventing new ways to cook. There are many methods of cooking your food; some more conventional like Baking, Barbecuing, Braising, Roasting, Stewing and Steaming. Some are more exotic like cooking meat on a slab of hot stone. So do try out the various cooking styles on your favorite foods and discover which are to your liking. Also Experiment with combinations; for example you can first steam a lobster, then cut it open and put some cheese in before grilling for a short while to melt and brown the cheese sauce. Think of new ways to cook, after all its just applying heat to food. You can also broaden your knowledge and skills by observing how people of various lands cook their meals in special ways when you travel.

E. PRESENTATION - The final element is how you serve up the feast that you have prepared. Food Presentation is the art of making your meals visually appealing. Since the objective is to serve up something that will look good, Experiment with what you think will look nice when assembled together. If you want to keep it simple, just focus on the dish and what is to be put on it. If you want to pull out all the stops, then go with a theme of your choice and dress up everything, including the dining room. Let's run through some ideas to move you along . . . On the simple end of the scale, all you need to do is select a suitable bowl or plate and arrange your food on it, then add something to garnish. The easiest is to place all your food onto serving plates for your guest to help themselves. Select large enough bowls and plates, matching if desired, that can hold the amount of food you have prepared. You can fill a serving bowl with soup and sprinkle some chopped spring onions on top to garnish. Fish can be served on an oval plate, or one of those fish shaped dishes, and you can arrange some lettuce and round slices of lemon to decorate. For prawns, try arranging them in a circle on a round plate, and put sauce for dipping right in the center. You can be more creative when you do individual servings. For the main course, you can simply lay out the meat, potatoes and vegetables on different sectors of the plate in a traditional manner; just remember to include ingredients with nice colors and arrange them in your chosen pattern. Try using carrots or tomatoes to add bright orange or red to your dish. Use corn, pasta or potatoes for a dose of yellow. How about tri-color pasta to really mix up the colors?

Appetizers and deserts are my favorites as you can really let your imagination go . . . and come up with really delightful creations. Try using a Burgundy wine glass for your shrimp cocktail, then plant a stick of celery with the leafy end up on one side and garnish the lip of the glass with a circular slice of lemon for a lovely presentation of this favorite appetizer. Now go forth and create visual masterpieces to serve your guests; they will surely be astonished at your work of art. If you need more ideas, you can always look at how the chefs at your local restaurants present their dishes, or you can flip thru food magazines, or surf the internet for tons of ideas to get you on your way.

Now that you know the Secrets to Xperimental Cooking, all you need to do is to start cooking; after all, as the saying goes . . . "Practice Makes Perfect".