

Frying and Braising Basics

CULINARY CONNECTION



Every good chef has many skillsets, and aspiring chefs must master these skills to advance as professionals. These include knife skills, menu and recipe development, good sanitation practices, flavor building, labor and food cost control, management skills, and the application of heat. By “application of heat,” I mean how to cook various foods in specific ways so the end result is consistently great food.

There are a limited number of traditional cooking techniques, each of which is considered either a dry-heat or moist-heat cooking method. In the dry-heat camp are grilling, broiling, deep-frying, pan-frying, sautéing, smoking, roasting, and baking. Moist-heat methods include boiling, poaching, steaming, and braising.

All these techniques have been around a very long time and each has its own moment to shine. Certain products thrive more with one technique over another. A juicy, tender strip steak will be great after spending a couple of minutes on a hot grill or sauté pan, but would be chewy and dry if braised for several hours. A chuck roast—on the other hand—will be flavorful and melt in your mouth after a long braising, but would be comparatively tough and stringy if cooked quickly on a grill. Besides getting the most out of each product you cook, another advantage to having all these techniques in your arsenal is that you can get many different, excellent dishes from the same product. For instance, shrimp can be boiled, fried, grilled, or sautéed—all with great results.

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As a bonus, if you put a little effort into learning the basics of how these various techniques work, you'll do a much better job of getting the most out of any recipe you follow.

Let's take a look at two of the most popular methods, one dry and one moist: frying and braising.

FRYING

Frying is a dry-heat method of cooking. ("Dry," in this context, is about the absence of water, not the absence of liquid.) The goal is a crisp, golden-brown crust with a moist, almost "steamed" interior. The three most common ways to form the crust are: 1) a quick dredging in seasoned flour and/or cornmeal, 2) a batter, such as tempura, and 3) dipping the product in flour, then a liquid (some combination of buttermilk, milk, and beaten eggs) and then breadcrumbs. It's very important to always fully pre-heat the oil to between 325°F and 375°F before adding any product, and then to maintain that temperature. Also, don't overcrowd the pan or fryer, and change the oil when necessary.

Oil is a very good medium for cooking because it is such an efficient conductor of heat and naturally makes complete contact with irregularly-shaped foods. Because of this, less experienced cooks can

get more consistent results when frying than with other cooking methods, assuming an experienced chef sets the temperature of the oil and determines the product size. For the most part, all the cook has to do is wait for a nice, golden brown color and it's done. Of course, an insta-read thermometer should always be used to check for proper internal temperatures.

There are two styles of frying: pan-frying and deep-frying. Pan-frying is done in a skillet (cast iron is a good choice) with just enough oil to come about half way up the side of the product. When the first side is golden brown, turn it over and cook until the two sides match. Check the internal temperature and—if necessary—finish, uncovered, in a 350°F oven. In deep-frying, the product is totally immersed, usually in a deep fryer or rondeau. Deep-frying is similar to boiling with a big difference: the temperature. In frying, the normal temperature range is 325 -375°F. Water doesn't get hotter than 212°F. Because browning doesn't occur below 285°F (even if you boil something all day long, it won't brown), when the objective is golden-brown, frying beats boiling.

Fried items are best right out of the oil. If necessary, just-fried items can be held at temperature in a 225°F oven

for brief periods, or chilled and then reheated in a 350°F oven at service. Always reheat uncovered on a rack to preserve as much crispness as possible.

Because many residents love fried foods, despite calorie and cholesterol issues, these items deserve an occasional appearance on any menu. As it's been said, "Anything good is better fried."

A classic recipe for fried chicken is provided for your consideration.

BRAISING

While frying accentuates the positives of inherently moist, tender items such as seafood, chicken, and delicate vegetables through the use of high heat and short cooking times, braising is just the opposite. Braising—a moist-heat method of cooking—lends depth of flavor, juiciness, and amazing tenderness to the toughest cuts of meat through long, slow cooking. The gist of braising is to cook the product in a flavorful liquid for a long time at low heat, slowly and gently making it tender and releasing its flavor into the liquid. Frequently, the liquid is later reduced to make a concentrated, wonderful sauce. Meats are often seared first, creating an attractive "crust" and adding flavor. Stews and pot roast are typical examples of braising.

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Recipes courtesy of Recipes & Rotations

FRIED CHICKEN

Yield: 48 Pieces | Portion Size: 2 Pieces



INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. All Purpose Flour
- 1 Tbsp. Kosher Salt
- 2 tsp. Ground Black Pepper
- 6 each Chickens, fryers, cut into 8 pieces

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine the flour, salt, and pepper.
2. Dredge the chicken in the flour mixture. Let dry for 10 minutes, then dredge again. Discard the excess flour mixture.
3. Wait 10 more minutes, then fry in 350°F oil until golden brown and an internal temperature of >165°F is reached.
4. Make sure the chicken is cooked to an internal temperature of >165°F before serving.
5. Hold at >140°F.
6. Each portion will consist of either 1 breast and 1 wing or 1 leg and 1 thigh.

TEXAS CHILI

Yield: 24, 3/4 Cup Servings



INGREDIENTS

- 7-1/2 lbs. Beef Chuck, coarse ground
- 1/4 cup Olive Oil
- 3 lbs. Yellow Onions, small dice
- 1-1/2 oz. Garlic, fresh, peeled, chopped fine
- 1 tsp. Ancho Chile Powder
- 1/2 tsp. Ground Cumin
- 1/2 tsp. Ground Coriander
- 1/2 tsp. Ground Black Pepper
- 3 quarts Chicken Stock
- 3 oz. Masa Harina
- 1 tsp. Kosher Salt
- 1/2 tsp. Tabasco Sauce
- 12 oz. Sour Cream
- 3 each Limes, cut into 8 wedges each

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Lightly brown the meat in the oil.
2. Add the onions, garlic, chile powder, cumin, coriander, and pepper. Cook over medium-low heat for 10 minutes. Be careful not to burn the chili powder.
3. Add the chicken stock. Scrape the bottom of the pan. Whisk in the masa harina.
4. Simmer until the meat is very tender, about 2 hours.
5. Add the salt and Tabasco Sauce.
6. Hold at >140°F.
7. Serve each 3/4 cup portion with 1 Tbsp. of sour cream and a lime wedge.

Tough cuts of meat from the shoulders and legs of animals, like chuck and shanks, are tough because they get a lot of exercise and contain a lot of connective tissue, called collagen. In braising, over time and at a low temperature (185-195°F), this collagen is

broken down into gelatin, which retains moisture and flavor, acts as a thickener, and adds succulence and richness to the dish. To get the full effect of braising on this connective tissue, care must be taken to keep the temperature of the braising liquid at a very low

simmer, and to allow sufficient cooking time—from two to six hours, depending on the item. The low cooking temperature also prevents unwanted fat from being permanently incorporated into the sauce.

SUMMING IT UP

Choosing the right cooking technique for your meat can mean the difference between a tender, juicy product or a dry, tough end result. Put some thought into the cuts of meat you are choosing, paired with the ideal cooking method, to achieve the best possible result.

CE Questions: Culinary Connection



This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.

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- Every good chef possesses
 - Knife skills and sound sanitation practices
 - Various comfortable, decorative pants
 - A commanding voice and firm handshake
- Dry heat cooking methods include
 - Grilling and sautéing
 - Frying and roasting
 - All of the above
- Each of the traditional cooking techniques
 - Is too old-fashioned to be of any use
 - Is impractical in its own way
 - Has its own moment to shine
- Being proficient with the traditional cooking techniques
 - Takes more effort than it's worth
 - Helps get the best results from every product
 - Is only for master chefs
- “Dry” in dry-heat cooking refers to
 - The absence of water
 - The absence of liquid
 - The absence of residual sugar
- One of the most important factors in frying is to
 - Keep the oil at a simmer
 - Keep the temperature of the oil between 325°F and 375°F
 - Use long tongs and wear insulated gloves
- Cuts of meat from the legs and shoulders of animals are tough because
 - They get more exercise
 - They are less expensive
 - They have always been misunderstood