

Chef secrets to making food delicious

GREAT FLAVOUR ISN'T ABOUT ADDING MORE INGREDIENTS. IT'S ABOUT MASTERING TECHNIQUE, TIMING, HEAT AND BALANCE



Chef Hemant Singh Bohra

Have you ever prepared a meal exactly like the recipe says only to savor the first bite and wonder why it tastes so bland? Usually, the answer is not to throw in an additional spoonful of seasoning or sauce. Good flavour stems from technique. Expert chefs understand that what usually distinguishes an average meal from one that becomes addictively delicious is often the combination of seemingly trivial factors such as the cooking time of the onions, salt addition time, temperature of the pan, or acidity of the food being cooked. Chef Hemant Singh Bohra shared how to build flavour in your food with the following points.

- **Start by building a proper flavour base:** The base of a dish is more important than you'd think. Your various aromatics need time to build up their flavours before your main ingredients are added. Ingredients such as onions, garlic, ginger, celery, carrots and chilli, can contribute a lot of flavour to the dish as long as you cook them carefully. For instance, in Indian cuisine, cooking the onions slowly together with ginger and garlic will give a dish much more flavour than simply throwing all the ingredients in the pan at the same time. The same can be applied to French cuisine with mirepoix and Italian sauces which are also made by cooking onions and garlic first. If you skip cooking the base, the rest of the dish will suffer from being rushed, too.
- **Don't throw all your spices in at once:** Spices are unique in nature and they influence the final outcome in the food. While whole spices like cumin, mustard seeds, cardamom, and cinnamon will start releasing their oils when they are warmed in oil or ghee, powdered spices will require proper timing to cook them in the right way. That's why well-made Indian tadka can add great dimensions to something simple like khichdi or dal. Instead of making it a checklist, think about what each ingredient needs to bring out its full flavour.
- **Don't be afraid of proper browning:** The golden crust on chicken, the blackened edges of cauliflower, and the dark caramelization of onions indicate the presence of flavor. Browning means flavor because the process generates various types of flavor. Don't forget to heat the right amount and organize space before putting ingredients in the pan. Too little space will make the vegetables steam rather than brown. If the products are constantly moved, there won't be any chance to form a brown crust, either.
- **Season throughout not just at the end:** Salt should not be regarded as a means to fix everything just before serving. Adding seasoning throughout the whole process ensures that flavours are incorporated better. Salt should



- be added to various stages of cooking, such as during the cooking of vegetables, during the simmering of sauce and when the finished dish is being tasted. This is especially important for slow-cooked meals such as dals, casseroles and curries because it allows ingredients to combine and build flavour over time. The main thing is not to make the dish taste salty, but instead to allow all the elements to taste more like themselves.
- **Use acid when a dish tastes "flat":** At times, you may experience a particular taste of food knowing that there is something lacking that is difficult to name. Before adding in salt, consider switching to acidity. Adding lemon juice, vinegar, tamarind, tomatoes or yogurt can make the taste profile of the dish brighter and balanced. For instance, you can squeeze in lime on a dish of tacos, add tamarind to a South Indian dish or serve yogurt with spicy biryani. Acid does not have to taste sour to intensify different flavors; it is used for highlighting other tastes.
- **Give your ingredients the right amount of heat:** In a kitchen, one of the most important components is heat, but this is not just about cranking up the heat. While meat may require a hot pan for the crust to form, garlic on high heat burns within minutes. On the other hand, some vegetables benefit from roasting at high temperatures, while curries are better off simmering for long periods.
- **Taste like a chef, not like a recipe follower:** Recipes give guidance, but they cannot substitute for every kitchen, ingredient or taste preference. A tomato may be unexpectedly sweet, a chilli may be unexpectedly spicy and a sauce may reduce faster than you think. This is the reason why chefs keep tasting their dishes. If the dish is too rich, it may need some acid; if it tastes bland it may need salt and if it lacks flavour, it may need to be cooked longer. What really makes a good chef is finding out what is missing in their dish.
- **The secret isn't more ingredients, it is a better decision:** It is not always the case that the best food is the one that has many ingredients. A bowl of dal, roasted vegetables and even a simple pasta dish can become an amazing meal if every ingredient is used properly. When cooking for family or while trying to recreate the flavours of a meal offered by one of the restaurants in Delhi, Mumbai, or Rome, it is essential to pay attention to details, timing and balance. The flavour should be built, not just added at the end of cooking. When talking about food, the taste is not necessarily determined by how many ingredients you add to the dish. In fact, the real taste comes from knowing when to season and brown the food, to find the right balance, and to adjust accordingly. By approaching cooking with intention rather than simply following recipe guidelines, you can have amazing meals even with everyday foods.