

SERVING UP THE HARVEST

Serving Up the Harvest

Andrea Chesman



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To Richard, Rory, and Sam, always



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PREFACE

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF GARDENERS, I think. There are gardeners who cook, and there are cooks who garden. I happen to be a cook who gardens. You can recognize my type by my less-than-photogenic garden, my casual attitude toward weeds, my hatred of thinning (throwing away good food!). I spend winter evenings with cookbooks, not with treatises on soil building. I am unlikely to plant vegetables that are reluctant to grow in my northern garden just to prove that I can. I have never grown a prizewinning anything. I have never even set aside space in my garden for a carving pumpkin.

Don't get me wrong. I have tremendous respect for those who put gardening first. Their gardens are gorgeous! These gardeners are often so adept in the outside world that they are capable of building beautiful trellises and amazing bean tepees. They never fail to properly put the garden to bed in the fall, and their peas are inevitably two weeks earlier than mine. They often lead the way with planting new varieties or experimenting with old heirloom varieties. They save seeds, and they have opinions on compost.

But here's the big difference. Cooks who garden are thrilled by the harvest. We believe every overflowing basket of vegetables is an opportunity for a crispy fresh salad, a fragrant harvest stew, a terrific new pasta sauce. On the other hand, gardeners who cook will spend hours in the garden, making everything look perfect, and then find themselves stricken with guilt. Oh no, they suddenly realize, someone has to cook all those vegetables!

Of course, not everyone who enjoys vegetables has the chance or the inclination to grow her own vegetables. Some of my very best friends buy all of their vegetables. And why not, with farmers' markets, produce stands, and CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farms distributing wonderful fresh produce to rural, suburban, and urban markets? Once these shoppers get their vegetables home, however, there is still the problem of what to do with them.

Well, not to worry. Cooks like me have fun in the kitchen, making recipes that are quick, easy, and delicious and honor the vegetables we have worked so hard to bring into our kitchens.

But whether you are a gardener who cooks or a cook who gardens, we undoubtedly share the thrill that comes with the start of the gardening season. My garden lies uphill from my house on a plot that has been a garden as far back as anyone remembers, which is more than 50 years. Each spring, the snow melts from the garden plot early and, before my lawn is snow-free, garlic shoots poke through the dark soil of the raised beds. Within a few weeks, I plant peas and spinach, then more spring greens. I begin to harvest fresh chives, oregano, and thyme to enhance my cooking. Then it is asparagus season, and the harvest has truly begun.

Because I live in the North (Zone 4), my gardening season is limited. I have often been able to get two sowings of peas as well as green beans out of my garden, but some years I have very few tomatoes. I have never been successful with peppers or eggplant. Although this cookbook follows the harvest, the particulars of my harvest seasons may be different from yours. I know that my brother in Alabama harvests his first tomatoes when I am reveling in the first asparagus. Still, he gets in a crop of spring greens, just like I do, though the month of the harvest is different, and my season lasts longer than his. So I have organized this book by season, and within each season, I have organized the vegetables alphabetically, since variations in number of days to harvest various vegetables make it impossible to predict the exact order of the harvest. What is possible to predict is that you won't find certain vegetables growing together, and you won't find recipes for unlikely combinations of vegetables in this cookbook. No stews with winter squash and peas, no green bean and asparagus salads.

There are some flaws to this system. Take carrots. You could easily plant short-season carrots, harvest them young, and enjoy in the summer. Or you could plant a long-season variety well suited to long-term storage. So are carrots a summer or fall vegetable? Well, I've chosen to put them with other fall storage crops, because I don't usually cook with summer carrots. Those early carrots are just perfect as they are. Carrots from the root cellar can and should be enhanced by cooking. If you can't find a vegetable in its "proper" season, look for it in the index.

What I've tried to accomplish with my seasonal organization is to present simple recipes that feature in-season vegetables, recipes that let the unique flavor and texture of each vegetable take center stage. I hope you enjoy them. ■

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no way this book could have been written without the help of all the farmers who supply my local farmers' market and food co-op with delicious vegetables. I am simply too limited as a gardener to grow enough vegetables — and enough variety of vegetables — to provide myself with all the produce needed for the recipe tests that went into this book. My special thanks to Will and Judy Stevens of Golden Russet Farm in Shoreham, Vermont, and Marion Pollack and Marjorie Sussman of Orb Weaver Farm in Monkton, Vermont, for veggies, inspirations, and recipes. My thanks also to all the folks at the Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op for keeping such a terrific store going, and for inspiration, conversation, and making my regular shopping trips so much fun.

I'd also like to thank all the people who gave their time to be interviewed for profiles in the book. Thanks also to my sisters for help with recipe testing and profile leads, and to Annie Harlow for her fabulous potato recipe.

This book would never have been started without the encouragement and advice of Dianne Cutillo, a wonderful editor, and it would never have been finished without the help of Andrea Dodge. Thank you to all the other hands at Storey Publishing, including Jessica Armstrong, Pam Art, Kent Lew, Cindy McFarland, Jennifer Jepson Smith, and Sarah Thurston. ■

1 THE WELL-STOCKED PANTRY

NOTHING BEATS THE SIMPLE PLEASURE that comes from eyeing a basket of freshly harvested vegetables — be it from your own garden or a CSA or a farmstand — and cooking whatever appeals to you at the moment. If your kitchen is well stocked with staples, you'll be able to whip up a delicious dish at a moment's notice.

PANTRY STAPLES

A well-stocked kitchen contains an assortment of oils, vinegars, and soy sauce. Chicken broth, pasta, rice, flour, nuts, canned beans, salt, pepper, and spices are also items you should never be without.

Broth

Chicken or vegetable broth is a pantry staple, needed for braised vegetables and some soups, stews, and sauces. I try to keep a supply of homemade chicken broth (see [page 9](#)) in the freezer. But to guarantee I am never without it, I also stock a quart or two of store-bought broth in the cupboard. You'll have to taste a variety of chicken broths before you can settle on your house brand; quality and availability vary tremendously. I usually stock organic free-range chicken broth. It comes in shelf-stable aseptic boxes and keeps longer in the refrigerator once opened than homemade broth.

Vegetarians can substitute vegetable broth for chicken broth, but commercial vegetable broths are tricky. Often one flavor dominates, especially carrots or tomatoes, making the broth unsuited for some applications. Or the broth's flavors are muddy and unpleasant. Taste before you use; generally ones labeled “un-chicken” are the most neutral in flavor. A recipe for vegetable broth can be found on [page 8](#).

Oils

Many recipes start with sautéing garlic or onion in oil. I stock extra-virgin olive oil as my daily cooking oil and salad oil. It is a heart-healthy monounsaturated oil. It is also the oil of choice for coating vegetables that are to be grilled or roasted. To add more flavor to the oil, you can infuse it with herbs (see [page 5](#)).

When a neutral-tasting oil is needed, I use canola oil, another monounsaturated oil. For stir-fries or deep-frying, I might use peanut oil because it has a high smoking point, but canola oil is fine to use. I also use toasted dark sesame oil in stir-fries for flavor.

Vinegars

Vinegar isn't just for salad dressing and pickles. A drizzle of vinegar finishes roasted vegetables to great effect. It is also used in sauces when a sharp contrasting flavor is needed. I regularly use several different vinegars when I cook.

If you are buying vinegar for making pickles, make sure the vinegar contains 4 to 6 percent acetic acid and has a 40- to 50-grain strength.

Balsamic Vinegar

True *aceto balsamico* is made only in Emilia-Romagna, Italy. It has been aged for at least 12 years, resulting in a vinegar that is fruity, thick, rich, and dark brown. This is an expensive vinegar; you can pay anywhere from \$15 for 250 ml (about 1¼ cups) aged 6 years to more than \$200 for vinegar aged for 200 years. If you are paying less, you probably are getting vinegar that has been flavored and

colored with caramel syrup. Do yourself a favor: Buy the best you can afford and use it sparingly. ~~White balsamic vinegar is actually clear, and it adds sweetness without color to salad dressings.~~

Cider Vinegar

Cider vinegar is made from apples and is great for using in sweet pickles. Its cidery flavor is rather pronounced. It is also good in some tomato-based salad dressings.

Red Wine Vinegar

Made from red wine, red wine vinegar is sharp and slightly fruity in flavor. The best red wines are aged in oak casks. One can find varietal vinegars as well as less expensive blended red wine vinegar.

Rice Vinegar

Used extensively in Asian cooking, this vinegar is mild and sweet. It is sometimes called rice wine vinegar. Rice vinegar does not always have the same acidity of other vinegars, so it cannot be used for preserving foods. Buy the unseasoned kind so you can control the flavorings you add.

Sherry Vinegar

From Spain, sherry vinegar is a distinctively flavored red wine vinegar that works well with most vegetable dishes. Its flavor tends to be milder and sweeter than red wine vinegar and has a nutty undertone.

White Vinegar

Strong but neutral in character, white vinegar, or distilled white vinegar, is used mainly in making pickles. It is also used in certain sauces from Southeast Asia.

White Wine Vinegar

White wine vinegar may be made from a single wine or from blended wines, as with red wine vinegar. Quality varies with price. White wine vinegars range from fruity to dry. The advantage of white wine vinegar is that it does not color foods, as red wine vinegar will.

Condiments and Sauces

I have a cupboard near my stove filled with bottles of oils, vinegars, soy sauces, fish sauces, hot sauces, and the like. I have a refrigerator likewise filled with opened bottles of mustard, chili sauce, chutneys, and pickles. If I had to start over, the following is what I would stock first.

Asian Fish Sauce

Fish sauce is used extensively in Southeast Asian countries, much the same way soy sauce is used. It is a clear liquid, ranging in color from amber to dark brown. Salty and pungent, its flavor is less strong than its odor. Fish sauce is made by layering salt and fish in barrels and allowing the fish to ferment. The liquid that accumulates from this process is the fish sauce. In Thailand, the sauce is called *nam pla*; in Vietnam it is called *nuoc mam*. Buy imported fish sauce from either country.

Mustard

Made from ground yellow, black, or white mustard seeds, mustard adds a distinct spicy flavor to many dishes, especially a classic vinaigrette.

Mustards are a popular condiment, amenable to so many different styles and flavorings that one can belong to a mustard-of-the-month club. For the recipes in this book you will need **American**

ballpark mustard, the ubiquitous bright yellow mustard made from a smooth blend of yellow mustard seeds, vinegar, and turmeric, and **Dijon mustard**, made from mustard seeds, wine, salt, and spices. Dijon mustard is creamy in texture, gray-yellow in color, and has a clean, sharp flavor, which makes it perfect for vinaigrettes.

Buy mustard in small jars, keep opened jars refrigerated, and use within 6 months, before the flavor fades.

Soy Sauce

Soy sauce is made from fermented soy beans and a grain, usually wheat, and aged for a few years. The best soy sauces have no additives or artificial color. **Tamari** is a pure Japanese dark soy sauce. It is slightly less salty than many Chinese soy sauces. Kikkoman is a very reliable brand of soy sauce that is available in most supermarkets. Pearl River Bridge is another good brand, but is not as widely available.

Salt and Pepper

Salt and pepper are the most important seasonings in your cupboard. Treat yourself to some coarse sea salt or kosher salt for sprinkling on grilled and roasted vegetables especially. Sea salt is made from evaporated seawater. It contains minerals in addition to the sodium chloride found in table salt and kosher salt, and hence has more flavor. Black pepper should always be freshly ground.

In the Refrigerator

Lemons are a necessary item for many recipes. Select fruits with glossy, fine-grained skin, and store in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 weeks. A lemon will yield 2 to 4 tablespoons of juice.

Parmesan cheese is another refrigerator staple. Buy authentic Parmesan from Italy and grate it as needed. The best are labeled Parmigiano-Reggiano.

It's amazing how much a sprinkling of nuts can spark up a ho-hum vegetable or add crunch and texture to a salad. Almonds, cashews, pine nuts, walnuts, pecans, and peanuts all have their uses. Because nuts have a high fat content, they should be kept in the refrigerator to prevent rancidity. Shelled nuts can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 4 months or frozen for up to 8 months. Unshelled nuts will keep twice as long.

RECIPES

The recipes collected here are for basic ingredients — flavored vinegars, broths, and herb combinations — that you may want to stock up on when you have the time. It will make cooking from the garden much easier.

herb vinegar

The best time to collect herbs is before they go to flower. Collect in the morning, after the dew has dried from the leaves but before the hot sun has evaporated the essential oils from the leaves. It is easiest to begin the process in a regular canning jar. After the vinegar is infused with herbs, you may want to transfer it to a better bottle for pouring. Recycled wine bottles work well, and can be used as gift bottles as well. Corks are available from many hardware stores.

■ MAKES 1 QUART ■

1½ – 2 cups fresh, firmly packed herbs (a single type or a mixture of herbs), plus additional herbs to identify the finished product

3 – 3½ cups red wine, white wine, or sherry vinegar

- 1 Wash the herbs in a basin of cool water. Remove any discolored or insect-damaged leaves. It is fine to keep the leaves on the stems. Dry the herbs in a salad spinner or pat dry. Be sure the herbs are completely dry before proceeding.
- 2 Pack the herbs into a clean canning jar. Pour the vinegar over the herbs.
- 3 Store in a cool, dark place for 2 to 6 weeks, shaking the mixture every few days. Begin tasting after 2 weeks. When the vinegar is flavorful, it is ready.
- 4 Pack a single fresh herb into a clean storage bottle to identify the flavoring in the bottle. This is optional, but very helpful.
- 5 Strain the vinegar through a coffee filter to remove all herbal debris, and pour into the storage bottle. Cork or cap, label, and store in a dark cool place. The vinegar will keep indefinitely.

pesto

Pesto — the heavenly paste made from fresh basil, Parmesan, olive oil, and pine nuts — is an incredibly versatile flavoring agent. It is worth the space in the garden to grow as many basil plants as you can, so you can make many batches of pesto to freeze and have it available year-round. This is the recipe I use.

■ MAKES ABOUT ⅔ CUP ■

- 1½ cups tightly packed fresh basil leaves
- 2 garlic cloves
- 3 tablespoons toasted pine nuts, almonds, or walnuts (see [page 7](#))
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus additional oil for sealing the top
- 3 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

- 1 Combine the basil, garlic, and pine nuts in a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Process until finely chopped.
- 2 Add the oil through the feed tube with the motor running and continue processing until you have a smooth paste. Briefly mix in the cheese and salt and pepper to taste.
- 3 Set aside for at least 20 minutes to allow the flavors to develop if you are going to use the pesto immediately. Otherwise, spoon it into an airtight container and pour in enough oil to completely cover the pesto and exclude any air. Seal and store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week, or in the freezer for up to 6 months.

herbes de provence

Herbes de Provence is a blend of dried herbs characteristic of the cooking of southern France. Typically, the blend will contain dried basil, fennel seed, lavender, marjoram, rosemary, sage, summer savory, and thyme. The herb mix can be bought wherever herbs are sold, or you can make your own.

■ MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUP ■

3 tablespoons dried basil

3 tablespoons dried marjoram

3 tablespoons dried thyme

2 tablespoons dried summer savory

1½ teaspoons dried rosemary

½ teaspoon dried lavender flowers

½ teaspoon dried sage

½ teaspoon fennel seeds

■ Combine all the ingredients and store in a covered jar.

toasted nuts

Toasting brings out the flavor in nuts.

MAKES 1 CUP

1 cup almonds, cashews, pine nuts, pecans, or walnuts

■ Toast the nuts in a dry skillet over medium heat, stirring occasionally until golden brown, 7 to 10 minutes. Alternatively, preheat the oven to 350°F, spread out the nuts on a baking sheet, and bake, stirring occasionally, for 10 to 15 minutes, until golden brown.

vegetable broth

The distinction between broth and stock is slight — broth is salted to taste at the end of the cooking whereas stock remains unsalted. It is easier to cook with broth because the flavors are more easily discerned once the salt is added. But when using broth in a recipe, be sure that any additional salt added to taste.

■ **YIELD: 3½–4 QUARTS** ■

2 carrots

2 leeks

1 large onion

¼ small head cabbage

1 fennel bulb

4 garlic cloves

1 bunch parsley

4 sprigs fresh thyme

1 cup dried porcini mushrooms

4 quarts water

1 cup dry white wine

1 tablespoon black peppercorns Salt (optional)

1 Quarter the carrots, leeks, onion, cabbage, fennel, and garlic. Combine with the parsley, thyme, and mushrooms in a large soup pot. Add the water. Cover, bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 30 minutes.

2 Add the wine and peppercorns and continue to simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. Strain and discard all the solids.

3 Season to taste with salt, or leave unsalted and use as a base for soups and grain dishes. Use immediately or cool, then refrigerate. It will keep for about 5 days in the refrigerator or 4 to 6 months in the freezer.

chicken broth

Save chicken parts, such as wings, backs, and necks, for making broth. If you are buying chicken specifically to make broth, buy dark meat. It is less expensive than white meat and more flavorful. The additional fat in the dark meat will be skimmed off and discarded.

■ YIELD: 2–3 QUARTS ■

3–4 pounds chicken parts

1 large onion, quartered

4 stalks celery

4 garlic cloves

1 bunch parsley

4 quarts water Salt (optional)

1 Combine the chicken, onion, celery, garlic, and parsley in a large soup pot. Add the water. Cover and bring just to a boil. Immediately reduce the heat and simmer gently for 2 hours with the lid partially on. Do not allow the soup to boil.

2 Strain and discard the vegetables. Remove the meat from the bones and save the meat for another use, such as chicken salad.

3 Chill the broth for several hours. Skim off the fat that rises to the top and hardens.

4 Season to taste with salt, if desired. Use immediately or cool, then refrigerate. It will keep for about 3 days in the refrigerator or 4 to 6 months in the freezer.

basic pie pastry

This recipe can be used for two single-crust pies or free-form tarts or one double crust.

■ MAKES PASTRY FOR 9-INCH OR 10-INCH PIES OR TARTS ■

2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon salt

⅔ cup butter or vegetable shortening

6–7 tablespoons cold water

1 Mix together the flour and salt in a food processor. Add the butter and process until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. With the motor running, add the water. Alternatively, stir together the flour and salt in a medium bowl. Cut the butter into the flour with a pastry blender or two knives until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Sprinkle the water over the flour mixture and stir together. Press the mixture into two disks, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

2 Lightly flour a surface and roll out one ball of dough on the surface, working from the center out in all directions until you have a 12-inch round. If you are making a single-crust pie, fold the dough in half and ease into the pie pan with the fold in the center. Unfold the dough and trim it to the edge of the pie pan. If you are making a tart, transfer to a baking sheet by partially rolling the dough onto the rolling pin, then unrolling it onto the baking sheet. The tart shell is now ready to bake.

3 If you are making a double-crust pie, roll out the second piece of dough in the same manner, but make into a slightly larger circle. Place on the filled pie. Trim the dough $\frac{1}{2}$ inch beyond the edge of the pie plate. Fold the extra under the bottom crust. Crimp the edges. Prick holes into the top piece of dough in several places to allow steam to escape. Bake as directed.

4 To bake the dough for an unfilled single crust, preheat the oven to 450°F. Fit the bottom crust into the pie pan as directed in step 2, and trim and crimp the edges. Prick the dough with a fork, covering the surface with tiny holes. For a partially baked crust, bake for 5 to 10 minutes, until barely colored. For a fully baked crust, bake 10 to 15 minutes, until browned. Let cool or use as directed.

prosciutto chips

Consider these bacon bites done right. Prosciutto chips make a terrific topping for a salad, without the greasiness of bacon. Also, the process of making chips will not leave your kitchen smelling like a diner during the breakfast rush.

■ **MAKES 2 CUPS** ■

4 paper-thin slices prosciutto (about 2 ounces)

1 Preheat the oven to 400°F.

2 Cut the prosciutto into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch strips and lay them out on two rimmed, ungreased baking sheets in a single layer.

3 Roast for 5 to 8 minutes, until crisp and darkened but not burned.

4 Use immediately or store for a few days in the refrigerator. To restore the crisp texture, heat in a 300° F oven for 3 to 4 minutes.

basic pizza dough

I make pizza fairly often, and there are several pizza recipes throughout the book. To turn this dough into pizza, spread tomato sauce over the dough, sprinkle with grated cheese, and top with lightly cooked vegetables or other toppings. Bake at 500°F for 12 to 15 minutes.

■ **MAKES TWO 10-INCH TO 12-INCH ROUND OR TWO 12 X 15-INCH RECTANGULAR PIZZAS** ■

4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon salt

1½ cups warm (110° to 115°F) water

1 packet ($\frac{1}{4}$ ounce) or 1 tablespoon active dry yeast

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 In a food processor fitted with a dough hook or in a large bowl, combine $3\frac{3}{4}$ cups of the flour and the salt. Measure the warm water into a glass measure, add the yeast, and stir until foamy. Stir in the olive oil.

2 With the motor running, pour the water mixture into the food processor and process until the dough forms into a ball. Continue processing for 1 minute to knead the dough. Alternatively, add the yeast mixture to the dough and stir until the dough comes together in a ball. Use the remaining ¼ cup to lightly flour a work surface. Turn the dough onto the surface and knead until the dough is springy and elastic, about 5 minutes. The dough should be firm and just slightly sticky — not dry.

3 Grease a bowl with oil and place the dough ball in the bowl, turning the dough to coat with the oil. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.

4 Divide the dough into two balls. Brush two baking sheets or pizza pans with oil. Stretch the dough to fit each pan. The dough is now ready for topping with sauce and vegetables.

basic cheese sauce

I find most kids are delighted when asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, or green beans are served with a cheese sauce. You can use this sauce to make a gratin (see [page 26](#)) or crêpes (see [page 28](#)). You can also make a white vegetable lasagna with this sauce, layering sautéed or grilled summer vegetables (bell peppers, summer squash, cherry tomatoes, eggplant, green beans, spinach, broccoli, broccoli rabe) with sheets of lasagna and cheese sauce. Use this sauce to make macaroni and cheese, and fold in blanched asparagus, broccoli, broccoli rabe, cauliflower, green beans, or spinach. Or fold in diced and drained tomatoes or halved cherry tomatoes.

■ MAKES ABOUT 2 ½ CUPS ■

4 tablespoons butter

¼ cup unbleached all-purpose flour

2 cups milk

1–1½ cups grated Cheddar, Fontina, Swiss, Gruyère, or Jarlsberg Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Melt the butter over medium heat in a medium saucepan. Blend in the flour with a wooden spoon to make a smooth paste. Cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly.

2 Stir in the milk, a little at a time, until the sauce is thick and smooth. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Stir in the cheese and cook until smooth and melted, about 2 minutes longer.

3 Season to taste with the salt and pepper. Serve hot.

herbed croutons

When I make fresh croutons, I'm lucky if I end up with enough to use in whatever recipe I'm planning to make because little (and big) hands constantly try to steal these irresistible morsels.

Have a kid who doesn't like salad? Top the salad with croutons. Have another one who doesn't like broccoli? Nap it with cheese sauce and top it with croutons. Croutons can form the crumb topping on a casserole, make a quick stuffing for a chicken, enliven the filling of a stuffed eggplant, or turn a quick vegetable sauté into a treat for all ages.

■ MAKES ABOUT 5 CUPS ■

1 pound slightly stale Italian, French, or other white bread

⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 garlic cloves, minced

2 teaspoons herbes de Provence (see [page 7](#)) Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Cut the bread into ½-inch cubes. (It is more tedious to make small croutons, but they have more use in a small size; if you are just using them to top a salad, ¾-inch cubes are fine.) You will have about 2 cups of cubes.

2 Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the bread cubes, garlic, and herbs. Season with salt and pepper. Fry, stirring occasionally, until cubes are crisp and golden, 20 to 30 minutes.

3 Let cool in the pan. Store in an airtight jar at room temperature for 3 to 4 days.

roasted peppers

Peppers — both sweet bell peppers and chiles — are often roasted before they are added to a recipe. This can be done in quantities, in which case a grill or oven is used, or one at a time, in which case a gas burner can be used.

Bell peppers or fresh chile peppers of any color or variety Extra-virgin olive oil to store, if necessary

1 Preheat the broiler and lightly grease a baking sheet with oil.

2 Place the peppers on the baking sheet with space between each one. Broil 4 inches from the heat until charred all over, turning several times, 10 to 20 minutes.

3 Place the peppers in a covered bowl, plastic bag, or paper bag. Seal and allow the peppers to steam for about 10 minutes to loosen the skins.

4 Slit the peppers to catch the juice that runs from them. If possible, incorporate the juice into the dish that requires the pepper to enhance the pepper flavor. Scrape or peel the skins and discard. Scrape and discard the seeds and membranes.

5 Leave the peppers whole or slice, as the recipe requires. To store, place in a jar and cover with the olive oil. Refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.

Gas Burner Variation

If you have a gas burner and wish to roast only one pepper at a time, simply char the pepper over the gas flame, holding the pepper with tongs. Rotate the pepper so that it chars evenly, 10 to 15 minutes. Then place in a covered container and proceed as above.

Grill Roast Variation

To roast the peppers over a grill, prepare a medium-hot fire in a grill or preheat a gas grill on high. Place the peppers on the grill and grill until charred all over, turning several times; this will take 10 to 15 minutes. Proceed with the recipe as above.

2 MASTERING THE BASICS: METHODS & RECIPES

MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME a great deal about cooking, but I don't recall her ever consulting a cookbook. She learned from her mother, who learned from her mother, and so on. I did learn some techniques from formal courses, a lot from on-the-job training in various sweaty commercial kitchens, and even more from kibitzing in friends' kitchens. For those who haven't had the same opportunities, here are a few basic techniques and master formulas.

BASIC COOKING METHODS

One rule of thumb applies to all cooking with vegetables: Use your judgment as to when your vegetables are done. Vegetables are not uniform from garden to garden or from day to day. Rainy seasons produce vegetables with higher water content than dry seasons. Stressed vegetables tend to be woody or fibrous. Overripe vegetables may be extra tender or waterlogged. A vegetable held for a week in the refrigerator is not the same as a freshly harvested vegetable. When cooking, judging when a vegetable is done is never simply a matter of using a timer accurately.

Boiling and Blanching Vegetables

Boiling or blanching vegetables is easy. Both are done in a large pot of generously salted boiling water. Blanching vegetables means adding the vegetables to rapidly boiling water and boiling until just barely tender. They are cooked just long enough to set the color and partially soften the texture. The vegetables are then drained and plunged into a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking process. Vegetables that are blanched may then be dried and frozen to preserve them. Or they can be quickly finished in a sauté. Boiled vegetables are cooked until tender, drained, and eaten.

- Large root vegetables and potatoes do best if they are started in cold water to cover. Bring the water to a boil over high heat, then boil gently until the vegetables are tender.
- Most green vegetables and cauliflower should be added to already boiling water and boiled vigorously.
- Don't cover the pot when blanching or boiling.
- Check the vegetables for tenderness by removing a piece with a slotted spoon and biting into it. Large vegetables, such as potatoes and beets, are done when you can easily pierce them with a fork or skewer.

Steaming Vegetables

To steam vegetables, bring a few inches of water to a boil, place the vegetables in a steaming basket or colander, place the basket over the boiling water, cover the pot, and cook the vegetables until tender. Here are the general guidelines.

- Steamed vegetables are similar in taste and texture to boiled vegetables.
- Steaming takes slightly longer than boiling vegetables.
- Steaming works best with small quantities of vegetables.
- Steamed vegetables are fine served plain, but a pat of butter and a sprinkling of fresh herbs or chopped nuts go far in enlivening the flavors. Steamed vegetables are also enhanced with a drizzle of vinaigrette or browned butter, or a dollop of cheese sauce (see [page 13](#)). Steamed vegetables dipped in aioli (see [page 380](#)) are heavenly. Toasted bread crumbs also can be used to add flavor

and crunch.

Sautéing and Stir-Frying Vegetables

Sautéing and stir-frying add flavor to vegetables by cooking the vegetables in butter or oil, often with the addition of garlic, onions, ginger, or other aromatics. Flavor is also added when the vegetables are browned, a process that caramelizes the sugars on the surface of the vegetables. Sautéing and stir-frying are quite similar in that the food is cooked over intense heat with just a little fat. Stir-fried foods are always cut up, and stir-frying is best done in a wok. Sautéed foods may or may not be cut up, and sautéing is usually done in a skillet or sauté pan.

- Choose a heavy-bottomed pan for even heating.
- Don't crowd the vegetables or they will steam rather than sauté or stir-fry.
- A pan that is too large is better than a pan that is too small.
- A little bit of butter or oil is essential, even with nonstick pans — mainly for flavor. Extra-virgin olive oil is my oil of choice for most sautés, but canola oil can be used for a more neutral flavor. Like olive oil, it is a monounsaturated fat, one of the so-called good fats.
- The addition of minced garlic, chopped onions or shallots, or chopped bacon or prosciutto adds considerable flavor to sautéed vegetables. For an Asian stir-fry, minced garlic and ginger often are essential additions.
- For quick and even cooking, keep the vegetables moving in the pan or wok.

Braising Vegetables

Braising involves slowly cooking vegetables over low heat in a small amount of broth or another aromatic liquid. The resulting vegetables are meltingly tender and very flavorful, and the braising liquid becomes the sauce that is served with the vegetable.

- Braising is perfect for slightly tough or overripe vegetables, such as overgrown green beans.
- Use a high-quality vegetable or chicken broth for the braising liquid (see recipes [pages 8 and 9](#)). Additions of dry wine or sherry enhance the flavor.
- Usually, the vegetables are briefly sautéed in olive oil, butter, or bacon fat to add flavor, then they are simmered in the braising liquid until tender.

Grilling Vegetables

Grilling is an excellent way to cook vegetables. The high heat caramelizes the sugars in the vegetable and enhances the flavor. Grilling vegetables lets you prepare a feast without heating up the kitchen during the hot summer. It is also wonderfully convenient to grill vegetables when you are also grilling meats. Here are a few tips.

- Grill vegetables over a hot fire.
- With vegetables, the question of charcoal versus gas is not particularly relevant in terms of flavor. Because vegetables cook quickly, the fire does not impart much in the way of smoke flavor. However, unless you have a large gas grill that puts out a lot of BTUs, you are better off with a charcoal grill because it will cook the vegetables more quickly and evenly.
- A vegetable-grilling rack is a relatively inexpensive and very useful piece of equipment. It is a flat metal plate drilled with holes. Place the grilling rack on top of the grill grate, and it prevents small pieces of vegetables from falling into the fire. This enables you to chop vegetables into bite-size

pieces before grilling and to cook mixtures of vegetables together.

- When grilling bite-size pieces on a grill rack, toss the vegetables frequently for even cooking. A pair of long-handled tongs works best. You can also use a flat metal spatula or a pair of spatulas — one in each hand.
- A grill wok has less surface area directly in contact with the grill than a vegetable grilling rack. Vegetables tend to cook more slowly and to steam rather than grill. Grilling baskets are less effective than grilling racks because fires are rarely even, so one area cooks faster than another, but the entire basket must be turned or removed from the heat at the same time. Also, people tend to crowd vegetables into a grilling basket, making it likely that the vegetables will cook via steam rather than the dry heat of the grill.
- Vegetables should be slicked with oil before they are grilled to enhance the browning process and prevent the vegetables from drying out. I don't advise using butter unless the vegetables will be served hot; the butter will start to congeal as the vegetables cool.
- Vegetables can be tossed with marinades for added flavor before grilling, but lengthy marinating times are not necessary. With the exception of eggplants, garden vegetables do not absorb marinades, so time spent in a marinade has no impact on the final dish.
- Grilled vegetables can be used to top pasta and pizzas, folded into omelets and frittatas, stuffed into sandwiches, and tossed into salads.

Roasting Vegetables

Roasting is an excellent way to prepare vegetables. The dry heat coaxes out and concentrates flavors. Even vegetables that have few fans, like parsnips, can be surprisingly delicious when roasted. Roasted green beans are so delicious, they can be served as a snack.

- To prepare vegetables for roasting, cut into uniform-size pieces and slick with oil.
- Spread out the vegetables on a lightly oiled large sheet pan (preferred) or shallow roasting pan. The sheet pan is preferred because its low sides allow better air circulation. Shallow roasting pans will do the job, however. In either case, do not crowd the vegetables or they will steam rather than roast.
- Generally, vegetables are roasted at 450°F.
- Shake the pan, or flip the vegetables with a spatula, once or twice during roasting to ensure even cooking.
- You can roast mixtures of vegetables as long as they are cut to uniformly small pieces.
- Roasted root vegetables are delicious and beautiful; roasted green vegetables are equally delicious but somewhat less than beautiful.
- Roasted vegetables can be served with a sprinkling of coarse sea salt or kosher salt and a drizzle of balsamic vinegar or a squeeze of fresh lemon. Vinaigrettes make a fine topping for roasted vegetables.

MASTER RECIPES

FOR THOSE NIGHTS when the bounty from the garden or farmer's market is just too overwhelming to try a new recipe, here are fourteen master recipes to use throughout the year. There's not much difference between making a quiche with broccoli and making one with spinach, or stir-frying green beans and

stir-frying cabbage. A gratin of Swiss chard is assembled just like one made with potatoes. Most recipes require blanching the vegetables first, and cooking times for blanched vegetables can be found at the start of the individual vegetable chapters. Blanched greens, such as spinach, should be squeezed to further remove excess water.

sautéed vegetable medley with fresh herbs

A side dish of sautéed vegetables is welcome with almost every meal. The trick is to blanch the vegetables, then finish in the pan. All of the vegetables are optional — use whatever you have on hand.

■ SERVES 4 ■

- 1 medium zucchini or other summer squash, julienned**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 shallot or 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1 bell pepper or 1 small fennel bulb, cut into strips**
- 1 cup shelled peas, sugar snap peas, snow peas, or corn kernels**
- 1–2 cups mix of blanched vegetables, such as julienned asparagus, broccoli stems, carrots, celery root, snap beans**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 tablespoons chopped or torn fresh herbs (basil, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, summer savory, tarragon, thyme, alone or in any combination)**

1 If you are using zucchini or summer squash, toss with the salt in a colander and set aside for 30 minutes. Squeeze dry.

2 Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the shallot or garlic and sauté until fragrant and very slightly colored, about 1 minute.

3 Add the uncooked vegetables (bell pepper, fennel, peas, snap peas, snow peas, and/or corn) and sauté until slightly softened, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the blanched vegetables (asparagus, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, celery root, and/or snap beans) and continue to sauté until heated through, 2 to 3 minutes.

4 Season generously with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with the herbs. Sauté for 1 minute longer. Serve hot.

mixed roasted summer vegetables

The lemon-garlic marinade is baked into the vegetables while they are roasting, brightening the rather bland flavors of summer squash.

■ SERVES 4 ■

- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- ¼ cup chopped or torn fresh herbs (basil, mint, oregano, parsley, sage, thyme, alone or in any combination)**
- Zest of ¼ lemon, minced**
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**

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