

# Foundations of Flavor

Flavor and taste are often used interchangeably, but in fact these are two very different experiences. You may be more familiar with the five distinct tastes: sweet, bitter, sour, salty, and umami. Taste is only part of the entire experience we call flavor. By understanding flavor, and your own flavor preferences, you can create more delicious foods that both you and your family will enjoy.



Salt

## Enhances overall flavor

- Helps to tone down bitter tastes
- Balances sweet and sour tastes
- Amount, timing, and type of salt matter

## Enhances texture

- Can make meat juicier and more tender
- Helps create structure of baked items, such as bread

## Sources of salt

- **Kosher salt, finishing salts**
- **Soy sauce**
- **Brined:** Olives, capers
- **Cheeses:** Feta, Parmesan

We recommend using Kosher salt as your go-to salt when cooking. Kosher salt is known for its large, jagged, crystal structure. Chefs like this salt because it does not contain additives, is readily available, and can withstand high temperatures.



Acid

## Balances other flavors

- Contrast to sugar
- Cut through fat
- Balance salt
- Brighten a dish

## Alters texture

- Break down/tenderize proteins

## Sources of acid

- **Citrus:** Lemon, lime, orange, grapefruit
- **Vinegar:** Rice, balsamic, apple cider, white wine, red wine
- **Fermented dairy:** Greek yogurt, hard cheeses such as parmesan



Fat

## Alters texture

- Crisp, golden brown crusts
- Juicier, more succulent meats
- Creamier sauces
- Tender baked goods

## Carries flavor

- Flavors linger longer

## Unique flavors

- Olive oil vs sesame oil vs canola oil vs butter

## Sources of fat

- **Oils:** Olive, sesame, canola, avocado
- **Protein:** Dark meat poultry, fatty fish
- **Dairy:** Whole milk or reduced-fat milk, cheese, yogurt

Be careful not to overuse fat. Instead, use a little at different stages to amplify flavors and improve texture.



Temperature

## Heat alters texture and flavor. Consider time and temperature.

### Slow and low heat = tender and moist

- Usually for tough or thick cuts of meat, large vegetables
- Can build complex, deeper flavors
- Tenderize meat and soften tough vegetables

### Fast and high heat = crisp, golden brown crusts

- Usually for thinner cuts of meat or vegetables
- Creates a sear, char, or crust
- Retains moisture in meat
- Retains crisp texture in vegetables

## Cold or raw

- Provides contrast to other items in meal
- Cold foods contrast hot foods
- Crisp, raw vegetables contrast soft, cooked foods
- Creates a cooling effect alongside hot or spicy foods

## Recipes Are Road Maps

- Recipes, generally, can be looked at as road maps or guides.
- Feel free to get creative and go off-course.
- Think about your own flavor preferences. What would you add, remove, increase, or decrease to fit your flavor preferences?



### Citrus Salad Dressing

#### Ingredients

- Juice from 3 limes or lemons
- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

#### Directions

1. Combine juice, olive oil and salt and pepper in a small bowl. Whisk to combine.
2. Serve immediately with your favorite salad or chill until serving.



#### FOUNDATIONS OF FLAVOR

- Alter the ratio of acid (citrus) to fat (olive oil) to your liking.
- Once you have your Foundations of Flavor set, turn up the volume by adding dried herbs, fresh aromatics (such as garlic or ginger), or substitute some of the oil for another fat (such as Greek yogurt).

[medinsteadofmeds.com/citrus-salad-dressing](https://medinsteadofmeds.com/citrus-salad-dressing)

## Taste-Test for Success

- Keep small spoons handy for quick taste-tests.
- Taste-testing throughout the cooking process will help you to dial in your flavors.
- If you feel your dish is missing something, revisit the Foundations of Flavor. Perhaps you need a little more salt or seasoning, a quick acid addition, a modest amount of fat to carry flavors, or perhaps warmer or colder serving temperature.

### Pasta with Spinach and Beans

#### Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2, 15-ounce cans cannellini beans, drained, and rinsed well
- 1 cup chicken or vegetable broth
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1, 12-ounce box whole wheat pasta (fusilli, penne, farfalle, or orecchiette)
- 1 pound spinach
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated



#### Directions

1. In a large pot, boil salted water for the pasta.
2. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat and sauté the onions for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally to not over brown.
3. Add the pepper flakes and cook in the skillet for another minute.
4. Add the beans, broth, and salt in the skillet. Cook over medium heat to slightly thicken.
5. Cook the pasta in the pot according to package directions.
6. When the pasta is 1-2 minutes from being cooked, add the spinach to the water.
7. Drain the pasta and spinach and return to the pot. Add the bean mixture and combine.
8. Serve in a pasta bowl topped with cheese. You can add olive oil as well if you like.

**FOUNDATIONS OF FLAVOR:** Depending on if you serve warm or cold, you may have to adjust your seasoning. Taste-test before serving.

[medinsteadofmeds.com/pasta-with-spinach-and-beans](https://medinsteadofmeds.com/pasta-with-spinach-and-beans)