

Career and Technical Education
Phase III Learning-in-Place Activity
Culinary Arts



Seasoned to Taste

Chefs must master the ability to develop flavor in order to produce great tasting cuisine. Flavor is created through balanced combinations of complementary foods, seasonings, and cooking techniques. The perception of these flavors comes together through all of the senses when we eat, but particularly through taste, aroma, and food textures. Each person's ability to distinguish flavor is different and some people are more sensitive than others. While critical analysis of a dish comes naturally to some, most chefs must train their palates to distinguish ingredient characteristics, learning how to combine them in certain proportions to achieve a harmonious result.

What we find pleasing to eat is largely a cultural experience that develops at a very young age and is ingrained in us throughout our lives. The spread of ethnic cuisines around the globe is directly related to the desire of immigrants to recreate their native foods and cultural experiences. It also leads to culinary cross-pollination as local foods are often substituted for native ingredients that are not available in foreign countries.

The flavor profile of each ethnic cuisine is identified through unique food combinations, seasonings, and cooking techniques. Whether it is the distinctive spice mixtures (masalas) of Indian cuisine, the flavor combinations of corn tortillas, beans, and chilies in Mexican cooking, or the unique technique of wood-smoked barbecue, the successful recreation of authentic-tasting ethnic foods happens by following a few fundamental guidelines when preparing them.

WHAT IS FLAVOR?

Although flavor perceptions are often discussed in terms of taste and smell, all of the senses play a part in the gustatory experience. The taste detection threshold differs from person to person based on our taste buds and personal preferences. We are familiar with a few basic sensations (sweet and sour, salt, bitter, and umami) on the tongue, but experience many more aromas through the olfactory passage of the nose and throat. The unique aspects of a dish, primary ingredients along with supporting flavors and seasonings unified through particular cooking techniques, all contain the five basic taste sensations that must be manipulated to balance the dish. Understanding the practical aspects of this process are fundamental for all cooks.

Challenges:

1. List five foods for each of the basics elements of flavor: sour, bitter, salt, sweet and savory.
2. Sketch a tongue and identify where each element of flavor is measured.
3. How do the senses (taste, smell, sound, feel and sight) effect the foods that you eat? Explain each. Name some foods that you won't eat and relate them to the senses. What makes these foods not appealing to you?