

Chapter 5 Choosing Ingredients

What to cook? How to decide?

5.1 Variety creates excitement: Consider the colors and various foods in each food group to create variety and excitement in your dishes.



Choy Sum

Bell peppers



Kabocha pumkin

Asian Eggplant



- Vegetables – Leafy greens, squashes, root vegetables
- Fruits – Citrus, melons, stone fruits, tropical fruits
- Protein – Beef, chicken, pork, fish, seafood

5.2 The Flavor Profile:

- A useful concept for tasty and healthy cooking. **Put together ingredients that give you a combination of two or more of the 5 major taste sensations:** saltiness, sweetness, sourness, bitterness, and savoriness (umami - see Chapter 6).
- The flavor profile is the balance of these different taste sensations you experience in your mouth. It gives each ethnic cuisine its national character.
- It is what makes Italian dishes taste "Italian," Japanese dishes taste "Japanese," etc.
- Most importantly - it is why the smell and taste of some dishes remind us of home cooking!

5.3 Sourness and bitterness add depth and complexity to the flavor profile.

- Adding a little sourness from acid (lemon, lime, vinegar) **enhances the salty sensation. So you can use less salt!**



- Adding lemon or lime juice to another fruit (like melon or papaya) brightens the taste of the fruit as well. Adding lemon juice or zest to kale brightens the flavour of Kale and dark green

Curly Kale



- Bitterness also complements saltiness and spiciness. Foods that taste slightly bitter (kale, collards, chard, Gai Lan / Broccoli, Ong Choy/water spinach, bitter melon) go well with foods that are salty and spicy. They are also a great source of umami and antioxidants.



Bitter gourd (melon)

5.4 Seasonality

- We tend not to notice the change in seasons in Hawaii because of our warm climate. But we do have seasonal changes in the availability of fruits and vegetables.
- Look for the most abundant vegetables and fruits in the market, and you are likely to find the best quality and taste during that particular time of the year.
- Look at the CTAHR Seasonal Food Chart at www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/sustainag/Downloads/seasonality_poster.pdf

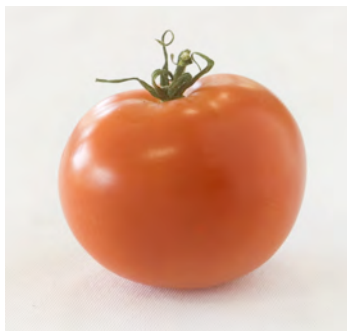
Sweet corn
April - JuneYoung ginger
August - OctoberCantaloupe
May - July

5.5 Fresh is tasty, fresh is healthy – there is a logic to it!

- **Locally grown** foods are the most likely to be freshest if you think about **how long and far the food travelled** before it reached you.
- **The freshest foods are also the healthiest.**
 - **Local produce taste better and is more nutritious than imported produce.**



- Locally grown food is harvested when it's **ripe and ready**. As fruits and vegetables grow on plants, the starch naturally turns to sugar and the nutrients, texture, and color continue to develop.
- Produce that is imported has been harvested before it is ripe hence the nutrients, texture, and color have not been fully developed. The produce may ripen during transport or sometimes is treated with a gas that triggers the ripening process. Fruits and vegetables also lose nutritional value when traveling far distances.
- **Use local produce whenever possible** as it will result in tastier meals and snacks and allow you to reap the benefits of optimal levels of nutrients. (A tomato grown in Hawaii taste better and is more nutritious than a tomato grown out of state.)
- For those who think that healthy foods are bland and boring, think no longer. Go ahead, cook them and taste! Illustration: Taste a locally grown tomato, and taste a tomato shipped in from out-of-state growers. You will see the difference.



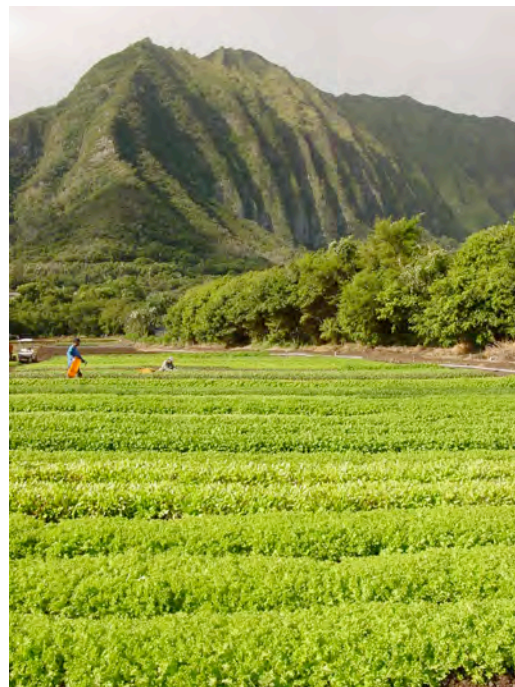
Kamuela Tomato

5.6 Local versus Organic:

- Organic foods have become more available and affordable. Foods grown without conventional pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, antibiotics, or growth hormones are definitely preferable.
- However **the "organic" label has also been used as a marketing gimmick**. Some food products labelled "organic" may not be of the best quality and may still contain artificial preservatives, artificial colors, and a lot of sugar and/or salt.
- Look at the nutrition facts label and ingredients on food products.
- In order to state a product is organic, the farm, farmer, and companies that handle the food before it gets to the supermarket or restaurant all need to meet USDA organic standard guidelines. Smaller local farms/farmers may not have the resources to meet these guidelines or may chose not to apply to become certified organic because of the size of their operation, but **that may not necessarily exclude them from growing and offering a high quality product**.
- Look at the quality of the product and get to know your farmer and their farming practices. Support local farmers and their business. Think about what your priorities and values are as you decide what to buy.



Ewa sweet Onion



Baby greens grown in Waimanalo

5.7 Wild Caught or Farm Raised:

- Fish is an excellent source of protein and **alternative to red meat**.
- They also contain **omega 3 fatty acids** which play an important role in brain function and growth in infants and children as well as lowering the risk of heart disease in adults.
- The source of omega 3 fatty acids found in fish also make **EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) fatty acids** which can also reduce inflammation. Your body is not able to make omega 3 fatty acids and so we need to get it from foods we eat.
- Wild caught pelagic (deep open ocean) fish from Hawaiian waters are flavorful and **safe to eat** – such as opah, ahi, shutome, hebi etc. Kept chilled in the fishing boats, the low temperature maintains the freshness and texture of the fish.
- However the availability of seafood in the world is diminishing due to over fishing.
- Hawaii has a growing aquaculture industry that produces high quality seafood that is nutritious and fresh. Farm raised seafood, if produced in a safe and environmentally responsible manner, are great alternatives to the wild caught seafood and deliver good nutrients and flavors.
- **The factors that need to be considered for farm-raised seafood are:**
 - Clean and safe (unpolluted) environment for raising the seafood
 - Absence of growth hormones or additives that alter the appearance/color or taste of the seafood
 - Environmentally sustainable methods of farming and fishing



Farm raised Sun Fish (orange Tilapia)



Hawaii Aquaculture Farm raising Tilapia



Wild caught Opah at the Honolulu Fish Auction

5.8 Controlling salt, fat, and sugar:

- **Reading labels:** The key to healthy eating is providing an environment conducive to good health (see Ch 2.5), practice mindful eating (see Ch 2.7), and knowing what you are eating. The Nutrition Facts label can help people make informed food choices.
- **When Less is More: Fresh ingredients** should be your first choice for low salt, low fat, low sugar options. Fresh ingredients are packed with flavors. So less is more when it comes to using seasoning and flavoring agents such as salt and sauces. A combination of natural ingredients and techniques for extracting the natural sugar and intensifying natural flavors (See Ch 8.12) will help reduce the need for salt and sugar as additives. By the same principle of “less is more”, the use of cooking techniques such as poaching, quick sauté, and braising will reduce the amount of oil used.

5.9 Choosing “low salt” products:

- Products labelled “lower sodium” or “reduced sodium” **may not necessarily mean the product is “low in sodium.”**
- The USDA defines “reduced sodium” as at least 25% less sodium than the original product. (So if the original product contains 800 mg sodium per serving, then the “reduced sodium” version may be 600 mg sodium per serving.)
- Choosing “reduced sodium” products can help to lower the amount of sodium you eat. However, note that “low sodium” is defined as 140 mg of sodium or less per serving.
- **“No-Salt Added” or “unsalted”** means no salt is added during processing, but it **doesn’t mean the product does not contain any sodium or salt.**
- Check the Nutrition Facts Label to determine the actual sodium the food product provides.
- **The maximum amount of sodium recommended is 2,300 mg or less a day.** For someone with high blood pressure, further reduction to 1,500 mg sodium a day may be helpful.



5.10 Choosing low fat products:

- Products labelled “low fat” may still be high in calories.
- “Low fat” products may contain more added sugar to help compensate for the flavor.
- If a reduction in calories and/or fat is recommended for you, choose low fat products wisely. **Low fat does not necessarily equate to low in calories** if more sugar is added to enhance and make up for flavor loss.
- Fat is more calorically dense than carbohydrate and protein (Fat provides 9 calories per gram, whereas carbohydrate and protein provide 4 calories per gram). So cutting down on fat can be beneficial to help lower the amount of calories you eat.
- Check the Nutrition Facts Label for the ingredient list and amount of the calories in the food product.
- The USDA definition of “low fat” is less than 5 g fat per serving.
- One way to cut calories and fat is by choosing low fat or fat free dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt). You will still reap the benefits of calcium and vitamin D without the additional fat calories. Another way to cut down on fat and calories is choosing lean sources of protein (see Chapter 7 Organizing your meals).
- **Remember your body needs healthy sources of fat! Choose high fat foods wisely.** **Nuts and seeds** are full of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats that benefit your heart when eaten in place of saturated fats (animal fat sources) and eaten in reasonable amounts (< ¼ cup). Plus they provide crunch and texture to the dish and keep you satisfied to keep your energy levels up.



Hawaii Macadamia Nuts - a healthy source of fat.

5.11 Choosing “sugarless”, “no sugar”, or “natural” products:

- Products that are labeled no sugar or sugarless may still contain artificial sweeteners.
- “Natural” foods are foods that come from the earth and are still in their original form (fresh fruits and vegetables).
- Many food products have been processed to varying degrees. The FDA has not defined the term “natural” and has not objected to the use of term if the food does not contain added color, artificial flavors, or synthetic substances.
- Products that contain natural fruit juice or juice concentrate are better choices than products with added sugar.
- Although artificial sweeteners have minimal to no calories, keep in mind that the food products that contain artificial sweeteners have calories. Since your body does not feel satisfied from artificial sweeteners, you may end up eating more food and calories that you may not need.
- **Satisfy your sweet tooth (and appetite!) from natural sugar found in fruits and vegetables.**



Your best sources of natural sugar

5.12 Know your number: Calories count

- **Calories give you energy to think, work, exercise, and play.** The number of calories you need depend on your age, gender, activity level, health status, and health goals.
- For someone who needs to **maintain** their **healthy weight**, the number of calories you eat should be balanced by the amount of energy that you expend. Eating more than you need over time will result in undesirable weight gain and increase your risk of diabetes, heart disease, other health complications and can decrease your quality of life.
- For children, pregnant women, or other health conditions requiring **weight gain** for good health, the number of calories you eat should exceed the amount of energy you expend. Often times the number of calories required for these populations can be easily obtained and usually does not require someone to eat large quantities of food.
- For people who are overweight, obese, or have certain medical conditions in which **weight loss** would benefit their health and overall quality of life, the number of calories you eat should be less than the amount of energy you expend.
- If your doctor recommends weight gain or weight loss, talk to a **Registered Dietitian** to create an individualized plan with realistic goals.
- Weight gain or weight loss should always be monitored by your **Doctor**. (If someone is being treated for high blood pressure, weight loss can affect the blood pressure medication effect on the body. Blood pressure medication and dosage may need to be adjusted.)

Estimate calorie ranges to maintain healthy weight:

Women - 1,600 to 2,400 calories a day.

Men - 2,000 to 3,000 calories a day.

Young children (1-3 yrs. old) - 1,000 to 2,000 calories a day.

Older children and adolescents (4-18 yrs. old) - 1,400 to 3,200 calories per day.

The amount of calories you need may be higher or lower than these estimates.

- **Calories are like a budget.** You have a certain amount of calories that you can spend and so choose wisely for good health. If you need 2,000 calories a day and one meal provides 1,000 calories, then you have already used half your “budget” in one meal. Aim for a meal that provides 600 calories or less in one meal.

5.13 Using store bought, canned, or preserved, processed ingredients:

- Store bought ingredients in cans or jars often have either salt, sugar, or oil as preservatives to extend their shelf-life.
- Many are very natural and flavorful products such as olives, capers, anchovies, shrimp pastes, dried scallops/shrimps, tomato products etc.
- Just take into account the salt, sugar, and oil that are already in these products, and consider them as part of your source of seasoning. **Then you may not have to add salt at all.**

5.14 What goes with what - start with fresh, seasonal ingredients:



The Long Squash is the centerpiece for this Stuffed Long Squash dish

- Choose a seasonal vegetable as part of the **center-piece of your meal**
- Think of how it **complements**, and **adds flavors** to, the other components: the protein and the starch
- Then figure out the seasonings and flavoring agents that will work with all the ingredients you have chosen.
- A resource guide for combining seasonings and flavorings: ***“The Flavor Bible” by Karen Page and Andrew Dornenburg***