Chapter 7  Creating Flavors

Bringing out the Best from the Freshest Ingredients

- Understand the difference between seasoning and flavoring.
- Explore, and experience the enhancement of flavor while limiting the use of salt, fat/oil, and added sugar.
- Master the use of spices, herbs, and acids to elevate flavors and the sensation of saltiness without the use of additional salt.
- Take advantage of the best source of sweetness for food preparation – the natural sugar present in fresh fruits and vegetables, and natural sweeteners such as honey and maple syrup that impart more sweetness than the same amount of sugar.

7.1 Seasonings:

- Add character and complexity to the dish – complimenting and contrasting

- Sweetness can counter or balance bitterness, spiciness, and sourness or acidity.

- Does not change the flavor of the ingredients when used in small amounts

- Salt (sea salt, Hawaiian Salt, kosher salt)  

- Pepper (black, white, red pepper flakes)

- Acids: can enhance spicy and salty sensations, without additional salt. Neutral flavored vinegar such as rice or white vinegars, citric acids (lemon, lime, orange, calamansi juice – in small amounts).
7.2 Flavoring Agents: add flavors to enhance the dish

- **Herbs:** Garlic, ginger, parsley, (cilantro/Chinese, curly/American, flat leaf/Italian), basil (sweet, Thai), mint, thyme, lemongrass

- **Spices:** Dried spices – Chili powder, curry powder, cumin, paprika etc.

- **Acids:** strong flavored Vinegar (apple cider, balsamic vinegar etc.); citrus Juice (lemon, lime, orange, calamansi); Wine (white/red wine, sherry, port wine) etc.

- **Sauces:** Many store bought sauces are both seasoning and flavoring agents because they contain salt e.g. soy sauce, oyster sauce, ponzu sauce (Japanese soy sauce and citrus juice), tomato sauce, kochujang (Korean savory, spicy chilli bean paste).

7.3 The Secret of Maximizing Flavors:

*The truth is, there is no secret at all! The secret to maximizing flavors while making your dish healthy is right before your eyes. You will recognize many of the following ingredients in recipes that you have been using.*

*The following sections will break down the elements of flavoring techniques so you can apply them effectively to any new recipes you may find, or to main ingredients.*

1) Basic Flavorings

- **For every culture,** there are basic ingredients that are used at the starting point for cooking.

- They are the building blocks of that culture’s cuisine.

- They are easily available, inexpensive, and full of nutrients and flavors. Here are two sets of ingredients for Western style, and Asian style cooking that you most frequently see, but probably do not realize their role in the foundation of the flavor profile in your dishes.

- Most of the ingredients used for these techniques of flavoring grow well in Hawaii and can be found at the farmers markets.
2) **Common elements in using flavoring agents** (regardless of cultural variations)

- **Aromatics:** A combination of aromatic ingredients (onions, celery, carrot, garlic, ginger, shallot, bell pepper, leek etc.) that offer up great aromas and flavors when cooked, and give you that smell of comfort food. Herbs and spices can also be added as you cook this “flavor starter”.

- **Bringing out the flavors:** The starting ingredients are diced and sautéed i.e. cooked in a little oil in medium to high heat, until they are slightly browned. **The brown color comes from the caramelizing of the natural sugar in these ingredients.** And the natural sugar adds sweetness and balance to the dish for the salty, spicy, or acidic/tangy seasonings you add later in the cooking process.

- **Dual purpose:** **Many of these ingredients are, in fact, vegetables!** So if you want to increase the amount of vegetables in your diet, just add more of them.

- **Blending in:** If you want the vegetables (that are used as the flavor starter) to blend into the dish, such as a stew or a soup, then dice them into small cubes (1/4 inch) or mince them. The vegetables will soften and eventually melt into the dish when cooked long enough.

3) **Western Style Basic Flavoring**

- **The Mirepoix** *pronounced as “meerpwah”*

> This combination of sautéed aromatics was attributed to a cooking technique used by the cook for the Duke of Mirepoix in 18th century France. And of course, the Duke got the recognition instead of the cook!

2 parts **Onion**, diced medium or small  
1 part **Carrot**, diced medium or small  
1 part **Celery**, diced medium or small

Sauté in a neutral oil (Canola, corn, peanut, or salad oil), or olive oil in medium high heat until the carrot is lightly browned.
• A *bouquet garni* is a small bundle of fresh or dried herbs which include thyme, bay leaf, rosemary, parsley, sage, etc. The herbs are tied together with twine at the stems or in a cheesecloth bag. The bundle is designed to keep the herbs together during cooking and then taken out before serving. If you do not plan to take the herbs out, you may add the fresh herbs chopped for a rustic styled dish.

• Other flavoring agents that may be added include leek, garlic, tomato, shallot, mushroom, bell pepper, chili pepper.

• Other variations of aromatic combinations:
  
  o *Soffritto* – the Italian flavor starter may also contain garlic (thinly sliced), shallot, leek, and herbs such as parsley.

  o *The “Holy Trinity”* – for Cajun and Creole cuisine, the basic flavorings contain onion, celery, and bell peppers.

4) Asian Style Basic Flavoring - The “Asian Trinity”

• **Garlic** – minced, or crushed flat with the side of the knife blade. (When crushed garlic is used, the garlic is often removed once it is caramelized to impart its flavor to the oil. But for lovers of garlic it can also be left in with the dish.)

  • **Green Onion / scallion**, using the white part of the stalk – fine diced or sliced. Can be substituted with other vegetables in the onion family – shallot, leek, or minced onion (yellow, sweet).

• **Ginger** – sliced, or julienne (thin sliver). Ginger does not brown, and should be added last, after the garlic and/or shallot to avoid burning it.

• **Some times these ingredients are added at different stages of the cooking.** Especially when green onion is used – chopped green onion is often added at the end and mixed in just as the dish is cooked and ready to be served, or as a garnish to sprinkle over the dish on the plate.

• **Young ginger**, thinly sliced, are juicy, flavorful and not as spicy. They can be used as a vegetable to add texture. They have pink shoots, and a thin translucent skin instead of the fibrous beige or light brown skin in matured ginger. They are in season between August and October in Hawaii.
5) Savoriness ("Umami")

Creating layers of flavors: Once the basic flavoring agents are browned (caramelized) and cooked, other ingredients are often added to create layers of flavor and "umami" or savoriness to the dish.

"Umami" comes from the Japanese word for delicious (umai) and is the fifth taste sensation in addition to sweet, sour, bitter, and salty. The source of umami is Glutamic acid or glutamate, which is a natural substance found in various foods (mushroom, tomato, kombu (dried sea kelp), dried seafoods (anchovy, dried shrimps), shellfish, cheese, proteins). When these foods are processed (dehydrated, fermented, aged) and/or cooked, this creates a savory flavor that enhances the palatability and pleasantness of food.

Here are some ingredients guaranteed to give you great flavors (Umami) – that is why we all like them!

- **Mushrooms**
  - Hawaii grown Hon Shimeji, Shimeji
  - Crimini (Baby Bella), white button, portabello
  - Shiitake

- **Tomato** – Fresh, canned*, bottled tomato products
  - **Fresh** – Roma, round, grape, cherry, heirloom
  - **Canned** – tomato puree, diced tomatoes, crushed tomatoes, stewed tomatoes, tomato paste
  - **Preserved** - sun-dried tomatoes

* It is worth noting that there are healthy and wholesome canned products that retain most of the goodness of the natural ingredients being canned. Many tomato products fall into such a category. However, there are still varying levels of added sodium and sugar in these products that warrant careful reading of the ingredients list on the can and comparison between the different brands.
• **Dried or preserved seafood and seaweed**

  o **Dried scallop**, or **dried shrimp** (whole dried shrimps, Dashi Ebi – small dried shrimps used for Japanese stocks).

  o **Dried Kombu**: Japanese dried edible kelp. Used to flavor the water for a basic Japanese stock. A good source of glutamic acid or glutamate that delivers the umami. (The original, natural, form of MSG).

  o Dried and smoked **Bonito flakes** (Katsuobushi): Also an essential flavoring agent for Japanese stock.

  o **Salted fish**: **Anchovies** – flavoring agent used in Mediterranean style cooking. Also contains beneficial Omega-3-fatty acids. **Sun dried and salted fish** – in Chinese, Filipino, and South East Asian cooking.

• **Shells of shellfish** – shrimps or lobster:

  o Often used to flavor the broth to make a seafood flavored soup or bisque.

  o Save your shrimp shells after you peel them and store them in a sealed lock bag in the freezer.

  o Add some to a simmering broth and you have an instant seafood stock for pasta, seafood stew, or noodles/won tons in soup.

  o Sauté shellfish with shell on. You can slice open the top of the shrimp shell all the way down the back to infuse flavor onto the flesh. This applies to sautéed dishes as well as chowders and soups.