



Misty's View of Cooking: The Foundation

My biggest pet peeve is a recipe that suggests you toss a load of raw onions, vegetables and meats into a slow cooker in the morning and return home ready to serve a delicious dinner. In the wrong hands, or should there have been an interruption in electrical service that afternoon, you could serve a dangerously toxic stew without flavour or integrity of ingredients.

The chemical composition of onions changes when they are sautéed. Adding heat quickly in a flavourful oil or butter activates the onion and prepares it to be transformed into a golden, translucent ingredient ready to receive the flavours of herbs and spices, the vital secret in flavour-building a stew or soup.

Onions can also become the most delicious garnish for a dish.

your taste buds will soar to even greater heights. Forget the meat that asked for this garnish, and enjoy it on its own or on toast! The family of onions has been a chef's ultimate secret since the time of Careme and Escoffier, the founding fathers of French cuisine.

I encourage you to learn about shallots, green onions, yellow onions, red onions, leeks, Spanish on-

Cooking is like playing a musical instrument. It requires skill and some instructions. For the musician, sheet music often does that job and for the cook, recipes can. Yet how many people can pick up a musical instrument and play pieces from sheet music alone? Have you ever made a violin sound like you were killing a cat? Cooking without some level of skill can evoke a similar result, regardless of how encouraging your recipes are.

Secret number one: recipes are often missing vital chefs' techniques. There may be a hidden cheekiness in recipes that have been written expecting a cook to know a thing or two before getting out the pan. Like sheet music, recipes can only go so far before lack of skill gets in the way.

As you look forlornly at your stack of promising cook books, do not despair. Cooking is not astrophysics; it just requires a few fundamental tips to get you on your way to virtuoso culinary performances.

The most misunderstood and integral ingredient in all savoury recipes is the onion. It forms the foundation of all soups, stews, sauces, and dishes that require and invite a complexity of flavour. Since they comprise the foundation of any culinary construction, onions cannot be added as an afterthought.

This jewel of a food is not expensive, but it is misrepresented most of the time. Hold the onions? I say not, since this many-layered bulb is a versatile chameleon that can provide unlimited flavour delights if you know how to use it.



Delicious building blocks: clockwise from top left: chives, Chipollinis, red onions, white onions, scallions, leeks, Spanish onion, honey whites, elephant shallots

PHOTOS: MIKE DAVIS

Each and every item of food that goes into cooking requires respect for and understanding of its integral purpose and potential. **Onions demand perhaps the most attention.** Apprentice chefs can vouch for the hours of tearful skill-building they put in to learning how to make an onion do its many, many tricks.

Cool, crisp, and thinly sliced, raw red onions make smoked salmon sing. Thicker sliced, sweet onions add zip and crunch to a burger hot off the BBQ. But add these same items *raw* to a stew and the result is a sour, flavourless mess.

Think Provimi liver covered in a nest of caramelized tender onions. In many cases, this onion garnish is what carries the dish into permanent memory. The same old onion that could have been hacked up with a \$29.99 gadget, can be correctly sliced in half from the root top north to south, and then across the onion in an east to west fashion, finally to be massaged slowly in a pan, becoming a glistening swirl of intense sweet and savoury flavour.

Put it on anything and you will be in for an incredible taste sensation...drizzle on a few drops of the best, viscous Balsamic vinegar and

onions, white onions, and Vidalia onions. Experiment with them, since it's cheap to do so. Let them show you the entire range of things they can do. Give them fast heat, then slow, known by chefs as sweating an onion, then take this sweating to the caramel stage by low, slow, monitored cooking.

And remember this, if nothing else: never, ever, add raw onions as a late addition to anything that is going to be cooked or baked! I might cry if you did.

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