



FIVE FIXES FOR COMMON COOKING MISHAPS



1. Help! My sauce is too watery. Can it be fixed?

If your gravy or other hot sauce turns out thinner than you like, it can be rescued easily. First, mix a starch – usually flour, cornstarch, or arrowroot – with a cold liquid that complements your sauce, such as milk, stock, or water. Start with about a tablespoon of starch in a small dish, then add liquid slowly, mixing constantly to avoid lumps. Then whisk this “slurry” into the sauce. Simmer until your sauce reaches the desired consistency and any raw flour/starch taste has disappeared. Still not thick enough? Repeat.



2. How do I keep my pasta from clumping together when I cook it?

Cooking pasta until it reaches that sweet spot – which the Italians call “al dente” or “to the tooth” – is rather simple. It just takes lots of water, some salt and the right amount of time at a rapid boil. Don’t add oil. While it may keep pasta from sticking, oil also keeps your sauce from sticking to the pasta. The real secret is to use plenty of water, and keep that pasta moving.

Start with a pot large enough to hold your pasta plus 4-6 quarts of water per pound of pasta. Bring the water to a rolling boil, add a good amount of salt to season the water (1 tablespoon per quart), and add the pasta. Stir until all pieces are covered by the water. Keep the pasta boiling rapidly in an uncovered pot and stir occasionally. Follow directions on the package and don’t overcook. Pasta cooked too long gets soft and sticky.

*If you’re watching your salt intake, take heart. Some of the salt is absorbed by the pasta, but most of it is retained in the water and is drained off.



3. My dish is too sweet, what can I do?

Achieving great flavor is really about balancing ingredients and their flavor components. Often adding something sweet, like honey or fruit, to a savory dish can bring out flavors that we might not have experienced otherwise.

But, if your dish turns out too sweet, think in opposite terms. A splash of vinegar or something citrusy like grapefruit, orange or lemon can fix the sweet/sour balance and actually perk up the taste at the same time. To start, add small amounts (a splash or a teaspoon) and continue until you like the taste. Avoid adding salt unless it’s absolutely needed, as salt can bring out the sweetness in some ingredients.



4. My recent batch of mashed potatoes can be used for wallpaper paste. How can I avoid this in the future?

Generally, the less you mess with your potatoes, the lighter and fluffier they'll be.

Start with a potato that is high in starch, such as a Yukon Gold or russet, and boil until just fork tender but not soft or mushy. Drain potatoes well to remove excess moisture (remember water + starch = paste!), then return them to the pot and cook over

high heat for about 30 seconds to dry them further. Turn off the heat, mash the potatoes with a fork or potato masher, and then add milk and butter and continue to mash until light and fluffy. Add seasoning to taste. Alternately, use a potato ricer or food mill – but never a mixer, food processor or blender. These appliances are too vigorous, making your spuds release way too much starch. When that starch mixes with the liquid in the potatoes, you get a glue-like texture rather than a soft and fluffy one.



5. My veggies turned browned when I cooked them. What happened?

Drab-looking vegetables happen for two reasons—they've been overcooked, or they sat in an acidic sauce or dressing too long.

Asparagus, green beans and broccoli lose their crispness and bright color when boiled longer than five minutes. So, for ultimate color and texture, cook quickly, drain off the water, season to taste, and serve immediately. Vegetables can also be blanched and

then re-heated before serving. To blanch, drop veggies into a pot of salted, boiling water and cook for two minutes. Remove them from the hot water and plunge them into a large bowl of ice water to “shock” them; this stops them from cooking further and sets their color. Once they've cooled off, remove them from the water and set on paper towels to dry. When ready to use, sauté them in a small amount of olive oil to heat them through and serve immediately.

Using a sauce or dressing that contains anything acidic, such as lemon juice or vinegar, can brown vegetables if its lingered too long. To avoid discoloration, toss or drizzle vegetables with the dressing right before you serve them.