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CHEF'S SECRETS REVEALED ! New York's food stars dish on how to fix our common kitchen mistakes

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Top city chefs have a reputation for guarding their secrets - but that doesn't mean they're above throwing a bone (so to speak) in our direction. In the first installment of Chefs' Secrets Revealed, NYC's brightest culinary stars pinpoint the most common mistakes made by amateur foodies. With their tips, everyone can come closer - at least a little - to cooking like a pro.

TYPICAL

MISTAKE:

Screwing up

the seasoning ...

"People don't realize how fresh herbs can make a big difference in the taste of a dish," says Pnina L. Peled, executive chef at Cinque Terre. "Dry herbs or seasoning potentially lose their flavor and scent, lessening their effect on food. Fresh herbs not only improve the flavor of food but are also healthy."

"Sage, for example, is considered to be beneficial to women. Rosemary contains a potent essential oil that is a diuretic, promotes perspiration, improves digestion and helps the respiratory, nervous and immune systems.

"The list goes on and on. My suggestion to the home cook is to keep it fresh and simple."

pnina says:

Use fresh herbs!

PNINA'S GRILLED MARINATED LAMB CHOPS

AND MEDITERRANEAN SALAD

1/2 cup Greek olive oil, plus 2

tablespoons for lemons

6 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1/4 cup rosemary leaves, roughly
chopped

2 racks of lamb, 8 chops each,
trimmed

8 lemons, cut in half crosswise

Salt and freshly ground pepper

Mediterranean Salad

3 heirloom or vine-ripe tomatoes,
sliced into wedges

1 seedless cucumber, such as
hot house, cut into large dice

1 avocado, diced (optional)

1/4 cup fresh mint leaves, roughly
chopped

Juice of one lemon

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

Salt and freshly ground pepper

to taste

Whisk together oil, garlic and rosemary in a bowl. Add the lamb chops and turn to coat. Cover and marinate for 1 to 1 1/2 hours in the refrigerator.

Remove the chops from the refrigerator about 20 minutes before grilling. Set the grill to high, and grill the lamb chops for about 6 minutes per side for medium doneness. Remove them and allow to rest for 2 minutes so that the juices are absorbed back into the meat. Slice into individual chops.

Brush the cut side of the lemons with olive oil and grill, cut side down, on high for about 1 minute. Turn lemons 45 degrees to make cross marks, then remove from the grill.

Season the lamb chops with salt and pepper and serve with the grilled lemons and the Mediterranean salad (all ingredients at left combined and tossed together).

TYPICAL MISTAKE:

Planning Omission

"Timing and menu planning are probably the No. 1 problems that you see in amateur chefs. If you are making risotto and grilled marinated tuna - which is a great summer meal and is fairly simple to make at home - for instance, you have to be aware that the fish is going to cook much faster than the risotto. Also, remember to avoid making too many hot items, because you won't have enough room on the grill. And don't be afraid to weave in a few prepared products - they're a definite timesaver without sacrificing taste."

Todd English, executive chef at Olives (201 Park Ave. South)

TODD'S SAFFRON RISOTTO

1 to 3 tablespoons

unsalted butter

1 Spanish onion, chopped

2 chorizo sausages, cut into small dice

3 garlic cloves, minced

1 tablespoon saffron threads

1 cup dry white wine

2 cups Arborio rice

8 cups chicken broth or canned low-sodium

chicken broth

2 tablespoons chopped

scallions

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves

1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a large, straight-sided nonreactive saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion, chorizo, garlic and saffron, stirring well after each addition, and cook until golden, about 5 to 6 minutes. Add the wine, and cook until it has almost completely evaporated, about 4 minutes. Add the rice, and stir until it is well coated.

Add 1 cup of the broth, stir well, scraping the bottom and sides of the pan, and cook until it has been absorbed by the rice. Continue adding the broth, 1 cup at a time,

stirring well after each addition, until the liquid has been absorbed, about 18-20 minutes.

Stir in the scallions, cilantro, Parmesan, salt, pepper and, if desired, 2 tablespoons of butter. Serve immediately.

Recipe from "The Olives

Table" (\$35, Simon & Schuster) by Todd English with Sally Sampson.

TYPICAL MISTAKE:

Blind

Ambition

"When preparing meals for company, it's easier to tackle

recipes that don't incorporate ingredients you might not have ever experimented with. When taking shortcuts, such as using store-bought meals, go step to personalize prepared food with a homemade sauce or side."

Marcus Samuelsson, executive chef at Riingo (205 E. 45th St.) and Aquavit (65 E. 55th St.)

MARCUS' MUSTARD SAUCE FOR

SMOKED SALMON

(Can be prepared up to one day ahead)

2 tablespoons honey mustard

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

2 teaspoons sugar

1 1/2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

1 tablespoon strongly brewed cold coffee

Pinch of salt

Pinch of freshly ground black pepper

3/4 cup grapeseed or canola oil

1/2 cup chopped fresh dill

Combine the mustards, sugar, vinegar, coffee, salt and pepper in a blender.

With the machine running, add the oil in a very slow, steady stream, until consistency is thick and creamy. Transfer to a bowl and stir in the dill. Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or overnight, to allow the flavors to marry.

Serve slices of salmon on thinly sliced whole grain bread with the mustard sauce.

TYPICAL MISTAKE:

Killing pasta by overcooking
and then murdering the
rubbery results with the wrong sauce.

"Pasta is often overcooked. To avoid this, use a large pot with a large amount of water, at least 4 quarts per 1 pound of pasta. The pasta needs lots of room to move around in to release its starch and swell to the proper proportion. After the water comes to a boil, add 1 1/2 -2 tablespoons of salt per pound of pasta. Insufficient salt will also result in blandness.

Also, remember to stir the pasta frequently during cooking. After draining it, shake the colander to remove all the water from hollow pastas - which will eventually dilute any sauce. Take care to match the sauce to the specific pasta you are cooking: Linguine and cappellini soak up so much sauce, they require extra amounts, while penne and rigatoni allow the sauce to sit on top, thus requiring less. Alfredo and ragu taste better with a wider, flat noodle such as pappardelle or fettuccine."

Sal Scognamillo, head chef at Patsy's (236 W. 56th St.)

SAL'S BAKED ZITI SORRENTINO

Serves 4

4 cups (32 ounces) Patsy's Tomato

Basil Sauce

8 ounces ricotta cheese

1 pound ziti pasta, cooked to
package directions

2 cups (8 ounces) shredded

mozzarella cheese

1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

In a large saucepan, bring Patsy's Tomato Basil Sauce to a boil. Remove from heat, reserve 2 cups of sauce and set aside.

Add the ricotta and cooked ziti to the sauce remaining in the pan. Mix well and simmer until ingredients are thoroughly heated. Spoon the mixture into a greased heatproof casserole. Pour the reserved sauce over the mixture and top with mozzarella and Parmesan cheese. Broil until cheese is melted.