



Hari
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Plating like the professionals

Make it, Share it, Love it



Traditional plating

The presentation of your food is all about impressing the diner and making the plate look so visually stimulating that they just want to dive straight in.

The classic plating method was all about hosting 3 key elements, the main ingredient which was set at 6 o'clock, the starch between 9 and 12 o'clock and the vegetable between 12 and 3.

This is still valid today but the key thing is to be creative, think about your plates and plan what it is going to look like. In reality there aren't any strict rules, dos or don'ts.

Chefs have different ideas about what they like, for example some will say that everything on the plate should be edible, others say all garnishes should come from an element on the plate.

I think that so long as your plate makes sense, it tastes good and looks beautiful then you're winning.

Ultimately remember that this is your plate of food – it represents you – so you decide what you want to put on it!



Techniques

Like anything in life, practice makes perfect, so it's really important to try new ideas and play around with layouts, plates, shapes, glasses, cutlery etc. Everything has an impact on that final plate.

Through familiarising yourself with different techniques and tools for plating up you will start to understand how versatile and adventurous you can be.

Pre-plating your meals is not the only solution – if like me you love home-style food then you can try large platters, mezze style wooden boards or beautiful individual bowls.

You can even create small individual portions in gorgeous miniature pots or long slates for sharing food. Whatever

you do, think about who you are serving and the best way to present the food for both impact AND ease.

Some chefs tell me that they will plate the same meal in different ways on different days because it's an expression of how they are feeling at that time – this is your opportunity to be creative so let those juices flow and get a few killer plating styles up your sleeve for when you need them.





Top tips for plating like an expert

The plate...

Temperature

- Hot plate for hot food
- Cold plate for cold food

Colour

Plain or patterned, coloured or white - it's all about enhancing the food, so make sure you think these elements through.

Shape

Round, angular, bowl, flat - these will all play a part in lifting your food to the next level.

Size matters!

Are you looking for the minimalist wow factor look or something more homely?

Have a focal point on your plate...

In general, the main ingredient on your plate should be the largest portion and everything else is there to highlight and compliment that ingredient.

- Don't overload the plate as this will always look messy
- Odd numbers rules - 3, 5, 7 always works better than evens



Balance...

Think about balance from every angle.

Colours

To make a plate come alive you will normally need two neutral colours but 2 to 3 bright colours.

Textures

Try to include complimentary textures, e.g. soft and crisp, smooth and crunch.

Positioning

If you are pre-plating think about where on the plate the food will be placed and why. Are you building the plate from the centre out, are you plating the elements separately across the plate?

Height

Without going overboard there is something important about having some height on your plate. Rather than a flat piece of meat can it be sliced and the pieces laid over each-other to create depth?

Flavour

This is a tricky one because although it's important to have contrasting flavours they must also be complimentary be able to produce a taste sensation. Think about spices and how to ensure one element isn't too strong or overpowering.

Temperature

This is also an interesting thought and although I have said hot is hot and cold is cold this is a very personal thing. The best example may be with desserts a cold ice-cream can be hugely complimented with some warm sautéed fruits or a hot pie with some cold cream.

Shapes

Try to experiment with the shapes of the elements on the plate - vegetables can be prepared in so many different ways.



Keep it clean...

- Wipe the plate of crumbs, sauce and finger marks
- If cooked in oil use kitchen paper to dab away excess oil or liquid

Garnish with purpose...

Don't include garnish for the sake of garnish – use a garnish that looks good but also makes sense to have on the plate. Some chefs are firm believers in only using ingredients to garnish that have been used elsewhere on the plate. Personally I think it's up to you as the cook.



Use sauce wisely...

By sauce I mean any sauce – gravy, fruit compotes, jus – anything that is about adding a flavoured liquid. Don't just pour it all over, as this will hide all the work you have put into the meal. You could put it on your plate first and build the meal around it – you have to work fast though as the sauce will lose its optimum Temperature.

You could also serve it separately in individual spouts, or take it to the table for a little theatre, or by adding dots and swirls. Be careful with this last one though, as it's nerve wracking and can spoil the whole plate at the end, so do practice perfecting your skills.



Plating tools

Like any job you do need some key tools – this doesn't mean you need to go out and spend a fortune because you should have most of these already.

My top tools...

Large spoon

Perfect for placing ingredients and creating swish patterns with sauces on a plate.

Tweezers

If you're really trying to impress then tweezers help to fine tune your plate, so you can delicately place fine ingredients such as micro leaves. Also use for fine tuning and placing ingredients exactly where you want them to go.

Small offset spatula

These are really helpful when plating up vegetables as well as creating flat splashes across the plate with mash or purées.

Ring moulds

Great for stacking ingredients to get that height, I don't mean towers of rice or couscous but also other elements too.

Squeezy bottle

These are really cheap to buy but are ideal for putting thicker sauces and purées on to plates. They are great for being a bit more adventurous and you can create swirls and precision dots for that amazing dessert.

Pastry brush

Not essential but great for painting plates with sauces and purées.

Tea towel

Sounds basic but always keep one to hand!

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