

Cooking Terms and Techniques

You may see these words in recipes you try. If you don't know what a word means, you can use this list to find out. Words are listed alphabetically. Some important ways of cooking have been printed in traffic-light colors.



RED tells you to stop and think before you use this method. It could make your food a RED food. Baking sweets, like cake or brownies, almost always makes a food RED. But baking a chicken breast could be YELLOW. Or even GREEN. It would depend on the sauce you use. The same is true for baking a potato. Or roasting vegetables.



YELLOW cooking methods are healthier than RED. They use less fats, oils, or sugar. If you are careful, you could make a YELLOW cooking method GREEN.



GREEN cooking-methods like poaching and steaming are the healthiest. They do not use fats, oils, or sugars.

Al dente means a food is cooked until tender but still firm to bite.

● **Bake** means to cook by free-circulating dry air. Preheat the oven, especially for proper

rising. Do not crowd foods. Give them room to bake evenly. Be careful about baking. Baking sweets makes food **RED** because of the sugars and oils involved. Other baking, like baking chicken or potatoes, could be a **YELLOW** or **GREEN** cooking-method depending on the sauce you use.

Batch cooking means to cook a lot of food at once to save time. Then freeze some to eat later.

Beat means to mix ingredients rapidly, incorporating air for a smooth, creamy texture.

Bind means to add a food, such as an egg, which holds other foods together.

Blanch means to plunge food in boiling water briefly to tenderize it. Then submerge it in ice water to instantly stop cooking. Blanching is used to partially cook vegetables before roasting or stir-frying. It sets the color and flavor of vegetables. It ensures even cooking.

Blend means to combine foods to a desired consistency, usually until smooth. Often it is done in a blender.

Boil means to heat a liquid on a stovetop until bubbles cover the surface.

Bouillon means a clear seasoned broth usually made from lean beef. See "broth."



● **Braise** means to brown and then simmer a food in a small amount of liquid over a long period of time, usually 1 to 3 hours. Braising can be done in a covered skillet on the stovetop or in the oven. Braising makes tougher cuts of meat tender. Remove all visible fat when braising red meat. Do not add oil. Braising can be a **YELLOW** or **GREEN** activity depending on the sauce you use.

● **Broil** means to cook with intense, direct heat in an oven or under a broiler. The high heat seals in the juices, browns the outside, and keeps food tender. Broiling can be a **YELLOW** or **GREEN** activity depending on the sauce you use.

Broth means a liquid in which meat, chicken, fish, cereal grains, or vegetables have been cooked. Broth is used as a base for soup, gravy, or sauce.

Brown means to cook food quickly in a preheated hot oven, broiler, or hot skillet to “brown” the outside and seal in the juices.

Chop means to cut foods into same-sized pieces.

Colander means a basket-shaped container with small holes on the bottom and sides. It is used to strain liquids from solid foods.

Dash means a small quantity. Usually it is one or two quick shakes from a small hole in a bottle.

Dice means to cut into small cubes ranging from 1/8 to 1/4 inch.

Dilute means to make a sauce or stock less strong by adding more liquid.

Drain means to remove liquid or fat from food using a strainer or patting with a paper towel.

Drippings or **pan drippings** mean the juices or fat that are left in a pan after meat or poultry has been roasted or sautéed. Skimmed of fat, drippings are often used for sauce.

Drizzle means to slowly pour a thin stream of liquid lightly over food.

Dust means to sprinkle a food very lightly with flour or a sugar substitute.

● **Fry** means to cook food in a skillet over high heat on a stovetop. It takes longer than sautéing. However, it often involves cooking with **RED** fat or oil. Use the Healthy Cooking Tips to cut down on fat and oil.

Garnish means to decorate food with fresh herbs, edible flowers, fresh vegetables, or fruit to make it look more appealing.

Grate means to change a solid food, like cheese or ginger, to fine shreds by rubbing it against a hand grater.

● **Grill** means to cook food on a rack, rapidly, with dry heat over gas, wood coals, charcoal, or an electric coil. Grilling is an intense, rapid cooking method that gives food a crisp exterior and moist, flavorful interior. Vegetables, meats, and poultry can be grilled. Cut vegetables in pieces that are too large to fall through the rack. Grilling can be a **YELLOW** or **GREEN** activity depending on the sauce you use.

Herb means a plant or plant part that gives flavor to food.

Julienne means to slice fruits or vegetables into 2 to 3-inch strips, usually 1/8 inch wide.

Marinate means to tenderize and flavor food by placing it in a seasoned liquid, usually composed of some combination of vinegar, lemon juice, oil, herbs, and spices.

Mash means to break down whole cooked foods, such as beans or potatoes, into a smooth evenly textured mixture. A potato masher is a great tool for this.

● **Microwave** means to cook using high frequency radio waves. Microwaving does not require fats or oils. It is as healthy as the foods and sauces you use.

Mince means to dice foods like garlic and ginger very fine. It requires a sharp knife and patience.

Parboil means to partially cook in boiling water or broth. Vegetables are often parboiled and finished off with a quick sauté.

Pinch means as much of a dry food as you can hold between your thumb and forefinger. About 1/8 of a teaspoon.

Pit means to remove the pits from fruit.

● **Poach** means to cook food gently in liquid just below the boiling point. Cook at just the point when tiny bubbles break the surface of the liquid. Fish is usually poached in a stock. Eggs are poached in lightly salted water with a small amount of vinegar.

Preheat means to set an oven or broiler at the right temperature 15-30 minutes before using.

Pureé means to blend food into a creamy smooth consistency with a blender or food processor.

Reduce means to simmer in order to cut down on the volume of a liquid by evaporation. Reducing makes the flavor stronger.

● **Roast** means to oven-cook food in an uncovered pan to produce a well-browned exterior and a moist interior. Roasting meat and chicken requires tender cuts. Use a draining rack so fat can drip from the meat. Vegetables for roasting should be cut into uniform sizes so they cook evenly. Roasting can be a **YELLOW** or **GREEN** activity. It depends on the sauce you use.

● **Sauté** means to cook food quickly in a small amount of hot oil or liquid in a skillet or sauté pan over direct heat. Sautéing seals in natural juices, sets colors and preserves the integrity of each ingredient. Sautéing is a **RED** cooking-method if you use oils. Or it can be a **YELLOW** cooking-method depending on the sauce you use.

Scald means to cook a liquid over low heat until just before it boils. Look for small bubbles around the edges.

Scramble means to prepare eggs by gently stirring while cooking.

Sear means to brown the surface of meat very quickly in a hot oven, under a broiler, or in a skillet over high heat on the stovetop. Searing is done to seal in juices. See "brown."

Seeding means to remove the seeds of a fruit or vegetable by

cutting it in half and scooping out the seeds.

Separating means separating egg yolks from egg whites. Do it over a bowl. Gently break the egg crosswise into halves. Cup the yoke in the bottom half of the shell. Allow the white to drain off into the bowl.

Shred means to tear or cut into long thin pieces. Carrots and potatoes are usually shredded with a knife. Well-done meats, such as pot roast, can be shredded with the fingers.

Simmer means to cook gently over a low heat at a very low boil.

Slice means to cut food into pieces. Cut either crosswise or lengthwise, depending on the recipe. Make the slices the same thickness to ensure uniform cooking.



Spice means a vegetable or vegetable part used to give foods flavor.

● **Steam** means to cook food, covered, over a small amount of boiling or simmering water. Steaming is an important low-fat method of cooking vegetables. It retains a food's flavor, shape, texture, and nutrients. It requires a metal basket that fits in the bottom of a saucepan. Steaming takes from 5 to 8 minutes, depending on the type and size of the vegetable.

Stew means to slowly cook meats and vegetables in liquid in a covered pan, either in the oven or the stovetop.

● **Stir-fry** means to quickly sauté meat or vegetables while stirring constantly in a hot skillet. Use the Healthy Cooking Tips to cut down on fat and oil. Stir-frying can be a **YELLOW** or **GREEN** activity depending on the sauce you use.

Stock means "broth."

Strain means to remove solids from liquids by pouring through a strainer or sieve.

Temper means to gradually add a hot food into a cool food without causing the cool food to change chemically. Add small amounts of a hot food to the cool food while stirring. This gradually heats the cool mixture so it can be added to the rest of the hot mix.

Toss means to quickly and gently mix foods together using a large spoon and fork or salad tongs.

Truss means to tie the legs and wings of poultry close to the body with string before roasting. This keeps it from losing its shape while roasting.

Whip means to beat rapidly with a whisk to add air and increase volume.

Whisk means a looped wire utensil attached to a handle. It is used to mix sauce, dressings, eggs, and other liquid foods.

