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Good to Gourmet

While restaurants around the nation are closing down, TV cooking shows and gourmet cooking equipment have never been more popular. The trend is clear. More and more Americans are looking to their own kitchens for gourmet meals. This week, we look at several easy ways to upgrade your cooking from good to gourmet.



Gourmet Taste



Match your food and drinks

At fine restaurants, waiters give drink suggestions with each meal. Pairing a meal with the right beverage can make both the meal and the drink taste better. Find drink suggestions for nearly every type of meal and occasion [here](#).

Update an old classic

Some amateur chefs make the mistake of thinking that only unpronounceable foreign dishes can be classified as gourmet. In reality, many gourmet restaurants have made their reputations by updating old classics. For instance, macaroni and cheese is a staple side dish at many gourmet restaurants. To pull this off, you will need unconventional ingredients. In the example of mac and cheese, chefs often use rare cheeses, bread crumbs, and even seafood. These dishes are a wonderful way to establish yourself as a gourmet chef, since even unsophisticated eaters can identify the dish as unique.



Use fresher ingredients

Gourmet chefs know that great food starts with great ingredients. Fresh ingredients are more nutritious, more attractive, and easier to prepare than processed ingredients. Fresh ingredients are hard to come by in big grocery stores, where even the produce has been grown with chemical fertilizers and preserved unnaturally. Fortunately, it is easier than ever to find local farmers' markets and pastured meat. Find local fresh food options [here](#).

Use exotic ingredients

To achieve a truly exceptional taste, chefs like to employ exceptional ingredients. There is a wide range of exotic fruits and vegetables that can add a whole new dimension to familiar dishes, or open up new possibilities for dishes altogether. With exotic ingredients, a little goes a long way--just find a handful of ingredients you enjoy working with. You can find a [fruit directory](#), a [vegetable directory](#), and a [directory of herbs and spices](#). If you have trouble finding exotic ingredients at your local supermarket, expand your search to include stores that cater to ethnic customers (e.g., local Asian markets or Kosher delis), which often sell ingredients unavailable in standard supermarkets.



Gourmet Aesthetic



Get creative with sauces

Often times, it's the sauce that distinguishes a great salad, pasta, or meat dish. Sauces are so important that many gourmet restaurants employ specialized chefs to make, mix, and serve sauces. Because sauces are held in such high esteem in the kitchen, chefs tend to make them prominent in the presentation of their dishes--drizzling them in unique patterns or even using other food items as sauce holders. Another common technique is to adorn a plate with two different sauces in complementary tastes and colors, which can allow for some interesting swirl and criss-cross patterns.

Use bigger plates

At a gourmet restaurant, people often remark that the food looks so small. Sometimes, this is the case, but often times, the food appears smaller than it is because of the gourmet tendency to arrange food at a distance on a very large plate--making each item appear smaller. Chefs are not particularly concerned with making food appear smaller, but they don't want different food items to slide into each other, which leads to a messy, mushy look. Instead, most gourmet restaurants use extra-large plates--allowing for adequate portion sizes and substantial space between each item on a plate.



Think vertical

Stacking is very popular in gourmet restaurants these days. When done correctly, it has the effect of making the food appear as though it's been sculpted into a work of fine art. This is particularly useful when the individual items are all intended to be mixed together, or when there is not enough room on the plate to separate the items effectively.

Gourmet Style



Tell a story

Every meal has a story. Gourmet chefs understand that when you receive a great meal, part of what you are receiving is a great story. The waiters at gourmet restaurants often describe their specials by explaining how the animals that are being eaten were raised, where the grains and vegetables came from, etc. For example, "Tonight, we're serving Alaska King Crab. It's considered the finest crab meat in the world, and it's only available in this part of the country for one month a year."



Serve everyone at the same time

In most restaurants, one waiter brings all of the food, setting plates down one at a time. Sometimes, this means that the last person is served 2-3 minutes after the first person. The finest restaurants usually send several waiters to serve a meal, so everyone can receive their plate at the exact same time. This allows everyone to start eating immediately, without waiting for others to be served. After all, there is nothing worse than having a tantalizing steak in front of you, but being duty-bound to wait 3 minutes to touch it.



Share your passion

Gourmet chefs have a reputation for being pretentious and sensitive, but that is rarely the case. Most gourmet chefs are passionate about food and love making people happy. If asked about techniques and recipes, they usually share openly. If offered tips and suggestions, they usually accept them graciously. This is one of the reasons why food social networks are growing in popularity. Sites such as www.groupprecipes.com allow food lovers to share recipes and tips amongst themselves.