

GARNISHES, TYPES & THEIR ROLE

INTRODUCTION

Garnishes play a vital role in the food presentation. They enhance the food's appearance. Formerly, the garnishes were those food particles which were left behind the food preparations, like lemon slices, chopped parsley, slit green chilies and ginger juliennes etc.

DEFINITION

Garnish, an embellishment added to a food to enhance its appearance or taste.

Simple garnishes such as

- Chopped herbs,
- Decoratively cut lemons,
- Parsley and
- Watercress sprigs,
- Browned breadcrumbs,
- Sieved hard cooked eggs, and
- Broiled tomatoes

are appropriate to a wide variety of foods; their purpose is to provide contrast in colour, texture, and taste, and to give a finished appearance to the dish.

In the classic cuisine of France, garnishes comprised any accompaniment to a principal dish —vegetables and starch dishes fell under this definition. Further, basic dishes could be varied by the selection of one of a codified array of garnishes.

Under this system a chicken, for example, could be served:

- à la archiduc, with a sauce of paprika and cream;
- à la forestière, with morels and potatoes,
- à la bouquetière,

with an array of individually cooked, decoratively cut vegetables, and so on into hundreds of formulations.

TYPES OF GARNISHES:

Herbs like parsley, basil, thyme and rosemary are among the most common garnishes because they are fresh and often brighten a dish or cut through rich, dense flavor palates.

Other ingredients that can be used as garnishes include slices of citrus like lemon, lime or orange. Edible flowers and leafy greens also make good garnishes because they fill the plate and add color.

1. Leaves and herbs

2. Roots and Greens

3. Edible Flowers

- **Leaves and herbs:** Some of the most popular green leaves for cooking and other herbs to use are oregano, thyme, rosemary, parsley and basil. Basil, rosemary, thyme and oregano are classic herb combinations for Italian food. Others, such as chives and parsley, are often added to cooked foods like baked potatoes after they are cooked so the herbs do not lose their flavor. Bay leaves and sage are both aromatic leaves that can withstand cooking heat, which often enhances their aromatic qualities. Lighter additions to raw or fresh foods, such as salads, include basil and cilantro. Flavorful contributions to more specifically prepared dishes, such as curry, include mint, lemongrass and dill.

- **Roots and Greens:** Greens are often used to line plates, though they may also be eaten with the dish. In some cases, greens are prepared as a small side salad on a plate, which also serves as a garnish to fill out the plate. While butter crisp, endive and leaf lettuces are classic choices for garnishes, curly kale and purple kale are more unusual options that are interesting to the eye.

A couple of **roots** that are often prepared and used as garnish are ginger and horseradish. Either root can simply be finely grated and placed on the side of a dish so your guests can add as little or as much spice and heat as they want. Horseradish can also be prepared in a cream sauce to tone down the level of heat it brings.

- **Edible Flowers:** Not many people think to use edible flowers as food decorations to garnish a dish, but they are always a pleasing addition thanks to the bright pop of color they contribute. Though all are not available year-round, there are many options for edible flowers that can be used throughout most seasons.

- **Calendula flowers and pansies** are available year-round. Heart's ease pansies, the deep purple ones, are a beautiful addition because of their deep, rich color. Petals are often plucked from calendula flowers and sprinkled into a salad mainly for their color as the flower is not very flavorful.

- **Nasturtium** can be used from September to April. Marigolds are grown between November and April. Nasturtiums are fragile and look similar to pansies, though they are typically a bright red, yellow or orange color. The leaves of this plant add a peppery kick when added to food, and its seeds can be pickled to taste similar to capers. Marigolds are quite similar to calendula flowers. Apart from adding to salads, you can use the petals of this flower in place of saffron to yield a bright yellow color, particularly in rice dishes.

- **Cornflowers** bloom from November to May, while verbena is often found between December and April, making it one of the latest blooming edible flowers. Cornflowers are a bright purple, fringed looking flower. Purple is the most commonly found, but pink and white varieties are also edible. Verbena adds a subtle lemon flavor to dishes and is available in white, pink and red varieties.

SELECTION OF GARNISH

- Garnishes are selected in accordance with how they will balance a dish and benefit the aesthetics of the presentation. Though some garnishes are purely for food decoration, many are there for function.

- When considering the flavor profile of a dish, there are several key elements to balancing the flavor while creating complexity as well.

- Fattiness is diminished by acid and heat, just as sweetness is tamed by saltiness. For example, beef is sometimes accompanied by horseradish, which adds heat, though that heat can be toned down if mixed with a dairy product like sour cream. The heat of the horseradish and the creaminess of the sour cream balance the smokiness of the beef to create a more complex dish.
- Garnishes that serve a visual appeal are often used on plates of hors d'oeuvres or appetizers. This type of garnish usually fills an otherwise lacking plate. For example, if you're serving deviled eggs on something other than a deviled egg platter, butter crisp or leaf lettuce can be used to line the plate before arranging the egg halves on top. Usually a spring of dill is also used to top the deviled egg halves, which is a visually pleasing addition that brings a fresh, lifting flavor to the egg and its relish mixture.

GARNISH AND DECORATION

- Garnish can enhance the taste of a dish. While some garnishes are used for visual purposes, they can often be consumed with whatever the plated dish is.
- Decoration is purely a visual component. For example, if serving a crudité platter, leaf lettuce, butter crisp lettuce or kale can be laid flat on the plate first before the raw vegetables are arranged. While the greens are layered under the raw vegetables to tie the presentation of the plate together, the greens can also be eaten with whatever dip is served with the other vegetables.
- Decorations to a crudité platter that should not be eaten and which are solely there for visual improvement are large sprigs of parsley, dill, rosemary or thyme that protrude from the accompanying dip.

IS THERE A NEED TO GARNISH FOOD BEFORE SERVING?

- While prepared dishes are certainly fine to serve without garnishing, taking the extra step to pair a garnish to the dish does elevate the overall plate.
- The garnish adds complexity and freshness to the dish while showing a level of care in its preparation. Garnishes like herbs and lemons for dishes such as seafood, fish, chicken and side dishes should be added before serving.

BEST GARNISHES FOR LIGHT FARE/FOOD

- Lighter fare should be accompanied by garnishes that are not overpowering. Fresh flavors like cilantro, basil, chives, lime and orange are safe bets. Think about what will accompany the dish well.
- A spring salad can be improved with edible flowers, basil and cilantro, while a fall salad would likely benefit from rosemary and thyme.
- If serving an appetizer, make sure the garnish is properly prepared so it is not difficult to bite through or eat. Garnish should be small enough to eat in a single bite.

BEST GARNISHES FOR MAIN DISHES

- Garnishes for main dishes should be flavorful, rather than subtle. Lemons provide a lot of acidity, which brightens, lifts and lightens heavy or dense dishes. Though less acidic and packing much more heat, horseradish can have a similar effect.
- Rosemary is a strong aromatic, so it is best served with main meat-centric dishes when the food is roasted in the oven or stewed. Sage, which does not lose its flavor during cooking, is a great choice for light meats and hearty pastas.