

Flavor Building—The Steps to Delicious

By Chef Laura Pole, RN, MSN

Eating for a Lifetime

www.eatingforalifetime.com

Delicious! What I consider to be one of the most important principles of Health Supportive Cooking. There are a few steps to Delicious: starting with a good recipe; choosing quality ingredients; building the flavor of the dish.

The first chapter of Chef Rebecca Katz's book One Bite at a Time is called "The FASS Factor: Tricks for Getting to Yum". She considers this the most essential chapter in her book. FASS, an acronym coined by one of her clients, stands for using the right amount of Fat, Acid, Salt, and Sweet to build the flavor in a dish.

To the FASS acronym, I would add "BAP", that is, Bitter, Astringent and Pungent. The ancient Hindu medicine system, called Ayurveda, says there are 6 tastes that everyone needs to take in each day, to maintain balance, and feel fully nourished. Those tastes are Salty, Sour, Sweet, Bitter, Astringent and Pungent.

Americans tend to eat lots of the Salty, Sour and Sweet tasting foods, and not enough of the Bitter tastes (like in lettuce and leafy greens), or Astringent taste (a taste that creates a drying sensation, and found in legumes/beans, apples, pears and spices such as turmeric) or Pungent taste (strong spicy or peppery flavors found in garlic, cinnamon, cumin, pepper, ginger, etc.).

Finally, consider that using herbs and spices not only builds flavor in the food, but also have a role in preventing and fighting cancer and other chronic diseases..

Let's take a closer look at "FASS" and "BAP":

FASS

Here are some quality ingredients to achieve "FASS". They are:

- Extra Virgin Olive Oil (fat); unrefined coconut oil; nut oils
- Lemon Juice (acid); lime juice; good quality vinegars
- Sea Salt (salt)
- Grade B organic maple syrup (sweet); fruits; all-fruit jams

You have to taste your food at every step of building flavor---"every time you add an ingredient or cook it to release its flavor, you must taste, taste, taste", says Chef Rebecca.

Here's what each of these flavor-builders does:

Fat

In culinary school, I learned that fat does 2 major things to make a dish satisfying: it "carries the flavor" and it has "satiety value"; that is, it leaves you feeling full and satisfied. How does it carry the flavor? As Chef Rebecca explains, "The coating action of fat allows flavors to spread around the tongue and mouth so that they can be fully tasted." Healthy fats also help you boost your absorption of phytonutrients.

Cold-pressed Extra Virgin Olive Oil has a couple things going for it as a fat---it has a delicious, clean taste and it has lots of health-promoting ingredients. Other kinds of fats will help carry the flavor and create that "I'm satisfied" sensation. I suggest you choose cold-pressed oils for cooking and baking. Other fats can be added to the food (i.e. "Cashew Cream" swirled into Curried Butternut Soup; organic clarified butter or ghee ; spreading Almond Butter on toast; making a smoothie with avocado).

Acids

Have you ever made sour pickles or cerviche, or marinated chicken, fish or meat in a marinade with either vinegar or a fruit juice such as pineapple or papaya? If so, you were using the acid of the vinegar or fruit to begin to "cook" the food. What this really means is that the acid is breaking down the tissues and fibers in meats and vegetables and releasing the savory juices. In addition, acids, such as citrus acids (from lemons, limes, oranges etc.) are sour, which helps to counterbalance sweet flavors. Acids also help boost your absorption of minerals and stimulate your digestion.

You can use lemons and limes for acid. Other acids, such as in vinegars (brown rice, red wine, balsamic) also work well for certain dishes. I'm particularly fond of Golden Balsamic Vinegar, which is a little milder than the classic dark red/purple balsamic vinegar.

Salt

It's one thing to use salt to make something taste salty (i.e. pickles or sauerkraut). It's quite another thing to use salt in cooking to bring out the all the flavors of the food. For example, if I'm making a sweet fruit dessert, and I taste it and it doesn't taste sweet enough, I won't add sugar at that point. Instead, I'll add a pinch of salt and voila! ---it suddenly tastes sweet enough!

As part of your kitchen pharmacy, know that salt will help with your sodium/potassium balance, which translates into improved energy and cell metabolism.

I use sea salt for my cooking salt and my table salt. Conventional table salt is stripped of most of its minerals (except sodium), dextrose is often added as an anti-caking. The taste of table salt is primarily bitter, and because of the added dextrose, you have to add more salt to get a salty taste. Sea salt, on the other hand, is more supportive to your health, as it contains an array of vital minerals, and it works better for flavor building.

Sweet

Give your taste buds a little hint of sweet, and they tell the pleasure center of your brain “Something good is coming.” This balance of sweet taste, in my opinion, is what keeps the flavor of the food enticing with every bite, so that I enjoy the dish to the very last bite.

The sweet taste can come from an actual food ingredient (i.e. caramelized onions, or sweet potatoes, or apples) used in the recipe. And/or, you may need to add a little extra sweetener such as the very flavorful Grade B Maple Syrup, honey or brown rice syrup.. All these sweeteners come with vitamins and minerals that are lost when sugar is refined. They’ll serve as a nice counterbalance to the acid in a dish, as well as cut some of the bitter flavor.

Another nice way to cut the bitter flavor of dark, leafy greens, is to sauté them with raisins, or add a splash of mirin (a sweet, cooking wine used in Japanese cooking).

Aromatic Culinary Herbs and Spices

The aromatic herbs and spices give a flavor “personality” to your dish, making it more interesting to your palate. They also play a role in healthy gene expression, including suppressing substances that turn on cancer genes.

BAP—Bitter, Astringent, Pungent

As I mentioned earlier, the medical system called Ayurveda, teaches that we all need a balance of 6 different tastes from our food, to keep us in balance. By including a variety of health supportive foods in your daily fare, you are more likely to get all the 6 tastes. What we typically do, however, is eat a lot of salty, sour and sweet.

Take a fast-food hamburger for example. The ingredients in a burger pretty much only contain these 3 tastes. So, you eat a super-sized sandwich, and even though your stomach may be full, your body still longs for the balance of tastes. Your brain doesn’t sense that it’s satisfied, so it tells you to go back to the counter and order something else. Well, chances are, there’s only more foods with salty, sour and/or sweet taste. You order fries with ketchup and get another dose of salty, sour and sweet. But you’re still not satisfied. How about an apple pie—that has fruit in it, so it must be good for you, right? Gulp and ugh. Now you’re stuffed and bordering on miserable, but still not satisfied. And on and on it goes.

Now, if you had eaten a salad with dark leafy lettuces and greens (as opposed to iceberg lettuce), with a simple dressing (i.e. olive oil, lemon juice, a little salt, a little garlic powder, a little honey), you’d have just taken in bitter, sour, salty, sweet and pungent. Add a topping of 3-bean salad, and you’ve just included some astringent (as well as protein) in your salad.

Still want a burger? Why don’t you make your own patties from grass-fed, hormone and antibiotic – free ground buffalo. Season them with chopped onions, garlic, sea salt and chili powder. Serve it on a sprouted whole grain bun with a nice-sized leaf of romaine lettuce, organic spicy salsa and if you like, some melted organic cheddar cheese. In that one burger, you’ve included all the 6 tastes!

Let the tasting begin!

[print this recipe](#)

Hummus with Garbanzo Bean Flour

Contributed by: Bob's Red Mill Natural Foods

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup Olive Oil
- 2-1/2 cups Water
- 2-3 Garlic cloves, minced
- 1/4 cup Tahini
- 1/4 cup Lemon Juice
- 1/8 tsp Tabasco Sauce
- 1/4 cup Vegetable Broth
- 1/2 tsp Cumin, ground
- 1 Salt and Pepper to taste
- 3/4 cup Garbanzo Bean Flour

Directions

Bring 2-1/2 cups water to boiling on medium heat. Whisk the garbanzo bean flour into the boiling water. Cook 1 minute stirring constantly. Turn heat down to medium low and continue cooking 5 minutes. Let cool.

In the bowl of a food processor, puree the garbanzo mixture, garlic, broth, tahini, lemon juice and Tabasco sauce until smooth. Then add the cumin, salt, pepper and slowly pour the olive oil through the feed tube of the processor.

If mixture is too stiff, add more broth to get desired consistency. Spoon and scrape the mixture into a bowl, cover with plastic and let sit for at least one hour at room temperature. Taste to see if more lemon juice, salt or pepper is needed.

Makes 6 servings.