

# Cooking A World of New Tastes



**S E G M E N T 4**

**Food, Fun, and Flair**

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## SEGMENT 4

# Food, Fun, and Flair

### Learning Objectives

- Identify the “senses” of food
- Discover ways to make food attractive
- Discover different garnishing techniques
- Understand the difference between herbs and spices
- Encourage ways to link the classroom and the cafeteria
- Reach out to other resources (websites, local chefs, culinary classes)

The cafeteria in your school is really just another classroom... it's a classroom where kids have fun while they learn. In the lunchroom, they get an education in nutrition and with new international menus, they learn about world culture and geography, too!

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*“What really impressed me, they put orange zest in it. It smelled so good shaving it off the orange. The aroma’s wonderful, it’s going to be something different, and I think the kids are really going to like it.”*  
(Zesty Oatmeal Raisin Cookies)

— Lorrie O’Neal,  
Culinary Workshop for  
Healthy School Meals  
at Johnson & Wales  
University.

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## Food Makes “Sense”

According to Chef Mike Moskwa, instructor at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island, *“Food is something very sensual, and as human beings, we have five senses, we have taste, of course, and that’s what food’s all about. But interestingly enough, when you stop to think about it, it’s the very last one we use...”*

- We hear food (some foods make noise)
- We smell food
- We see food
- We feel food

*“You usually use all those senses before it gets to your mouth, so if the visual and other sensory elements of the food are attractive, even if the food is just less than inspired, it still tastes great, because you’ve hit all those wonderful sensory buttons!”*

### Make Food Attractive

As we think about fun and flair in our cooking, we have to start by asking:

- What foods do students like?
- What makes them select certain foods?
- What attracts students?

### Some reactions from students:

*“I’m eating a **chicken fajita**. I really like them a lot because I eat a lot of Mexican food, because my mom cooks that way.”*

— Student, Sudbrook Magnet Middle School, Baltimore, Maryland

*“That **Tabouleh**, it was a weird taste that I wanted to try; it was **very good!**”*

— Student-taster, Healthy Kids Cuisine Workshop, Dallas, Texas

*“This tastes really great, like real **gingerbread**, and I guess it’s also low fat?”*

— Student, Sudbrook Magnet Middle School, Baltimore, Maryland





In general, younger children are attracted by bright colors, so fruits and vegetables can be an eye-appealing treat. And every parent knows that kids of all ages are partial to finger foods—things they can pick up easily in their hands. So let's say you decide to serve trays of fruit and vegetables for their eye appeal. If you cut them into pieces, instead of leaving them whole, kids will be more likely to grab a plateful. Kids also like main dish finger foods, like tacos, pizza, and fajitas. They are quick and easy to eat, and no utensils are needed. Choose textures, colors, flavors, and cooking techniques that complement each other.

*"Foods on a plate should show variety, but they should also be harmonious. Your millions and millions of taste receptors are all registering different things, so where that piece of pepper is in one part of my mouth, there's a piece of rosemary somewhere else, and the tomato in another part, and it's music. That's what we talk to students about, is you've created a symphony."*

— Chef Mike Moskwa, Johnson and Wales University

### Garnishes

Be bold with the garnishes. Add a special flourish that makes your presentation a little more appealing. Simple garnishes like just a little chopped parsley, or some curly lettuce leaves, under a tray of salad, or a little carrot curl, are probably the simplest things to do.

A garnish can also be integrated into the meal, like a colorful vegetable that sets off a neutral color main dish, or it can be a special touch of creativity that stirs a child's imagination.

### Creative Seasonings

*"I work with a lot of fresh herbs and spices at home, but we don't do that in school lunch, or I'm not used to doing it at school lunch, especially the fresh herbs and spices, and I know I'm going to be doing that!"*

— Holly McIntyre, Culinary Skills Workshop for Healthy School Meals, Johnson & Wales University



### Chef's Tip

- *"Every time you build a meal, build a pyramid!"*
- *"Select the highest quality ingredients like fruits and vegetables when they're in season and cuts of meat that are lower in fat."*
- *"Select the cooking technique that brings out the flavor best!"*

— Chef Mike Moskwa  
Johnson & Wales  
University (Providence, RI)





## Chef's Tip

*"If you need nutmeg, use the nut, and grate it on a grater - the flavor is extraordinary! It's the same with a cinnamon stick, if you grate them you release the oils and that's when the flavor is bursting!"*

— Chef Mike Moskwa  
Johnson & Wales  
University (Providence, RI)

## Herbs and Spices

### Herbs

- flavorful leaves of aromatic plants
- fresh, dried, or freeze-dried
- Examples: Parsley  
Oregano  
Basil

### Spices

- come from the bark and seeds of aromatic plants
- intense and flavorful
- Examples: Chili Powder  
Cumin

For more information on Herbs and Spices, contact the National Food Service Management Institute at 1-800-321-3054.

## Partnerships With USDA

Many organizations are supporters of USDA's School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children. Some have joined to provide recipes and products for school food service professionals. For example:

- The California Prune Board has developed many recipes that are available to you on the USDA's Healthy School Meals Resource system. Try the low fat brownies using prune paste.  
<http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov:8001>  
Click on Food Industry-Partners in Healthy School Meals.
- The United Soy Bean Board offers an alternative to supplement meat. Soy can be an important part of the meat products kids like best, from chicken nuggets to pizza toppings, taco mixes to sloppy joes. Combination soy products and meat, fish, or poultry products are easy to get from your distributor.

## New Menus

As we come to the end of this century, we're exploring menus that food service workers would never have dreamed of when the school lunch program started 50 years ago. America's schools are serving up foods that taste and look great, and give children the nutrients they need to stay healthy and grow up strong. Through the USDA's recipes and this video training series, we hope to provide you with the tools you need to create healthy, attractive meals that kids will love. But this is only a start; there's always more to learn.

## One Way Is Through ....

*“Practice, practice, practice, it’s a simple message! You know what you learn, keep practicing it, the food gets better! Another way is to improve your culinary skill. Always be on the lookout for fresh ideas you can learn, new cooking styles, and by taking culinary classes in your area. “*

— Chef Ron De Santis, CMC, Culinary Institute of America

Check out your local community college or cooking school. They’ll give you the latest ideas in food preparation and presentation. See the Resources section for a list of cooking schools. Also, contact a local chef and show him this video. He may be glad to demonstrate these and other culinary techniques.

## Connect With a Chef

If you have questions as you explore the world of international flavors, use the Internet to access a team of chef experts, including those you met through these videos. Connect with us online! Go to <http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov:8001> and Click on the Chef Connection.

## Cafeteria - Classroom Link

Students learn about different countries in school, and why not learn about the foods representing those countries from the school’s cafeteria. Teachers and food service staff can work together to promote special events. School food service staff can cook up some culturally diverse ethnic recipes and menu items for service in the cafeteria, or for taste tests in the classroom. Teachers can plan an international theme complete with decorations for the cafeteria and/or classroom, and include entertainment, displays, and typical music.



## Chef's Tip

*“Now it’s your turn to start Cooking a World of New Tastes for America’s students. These children are our customers, but they’re also our future. We want to give them the very best. These children eating properly today, learning what foods are all about, will be tomorrow’s customers.”*

— Chef Ron De Santis, CMC  
Culinary Institute  
of America





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## The Tabouleh Challenge

Here's one recipe that may still be unfamiliar to you. Try it out on your staff and students! First, try it as an item within a familiar menu. Get feedback from your customers!

### The Challenge:

Introduce an unfamiliar recipe - Tabouleh (USDA Tool Kit); another name is "Armenian Salad". This recipe introduces an unfamiliar food (bulgur) with familiar foods (tomatoes and cucumbers), introduces an unfamiliar grain product, bulgur wheat, also a USDA commodity, and introduces a new grain-vegetable combination.

### Skills Demonstrated:

1. Proper preparation of grains (bulgur wheat)
  - a. appearance: raw product, properly cooked, overcooked
  - b. preparation techniques
  - c. chilling techniques
2. Assembling ingredients for recipe preparation
3. Dicing tomatoes
4. Peeling, deseeding, dicing cucumbers
5. Dicing onions
6. Chopping fresh parsley and mint
7. Whisking oil into dressing ingredients as an emulsifier rather than using eggs

## Background Information

Cracked wheat is made from whole wheat grains that have been cut into smaller, coarse pieces. Cracked wheat that has been partially cooked and then dried is called bulgur. It is most commonly used as an ingredient in side dishes and salads.

### Storage

Store grains in a dry area, away from moisture, light, and excessive heat.

### Pre-preparation

Check grains carefully and remove any foreign particles. Place grains in a large pot of cold water. Any grains that float are overly dry and should be discarded.

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## Preparation

Bulgur wheat is properly cooked when it is tender to the bite. The grains should separate easily. Overcooked grains will be mushy and will clump together. Undercooked grains will be crunchy.

USDA's Tool Kit recipe for Tabouleh specifies that bulgur be soaked in boiling water for 30 minutes until the water is absorbed.

## Seasonings

Fresh herbs are preferred since the flavor is greatly superior. Bouquets of fresh herbs can be set into jars filled with an inch or two of water, covered loosely with plastic wrap, and refrigerated. They will last about 2 weeks.

Herbs added to uncooked foods need several hours for flavors to be released and blended. When in doubt, use less than the recipe indicates. You can always add more but it is hard to remove what is not needed. Taste foods before serving and “adjust the seasoning.” Spearmint is the preferred mint rather than peppermint, which is used mostly for confections. Parsley may have dark green curly leaves or flat leaves. Both kinds make excellent garnishes.

Dried herbs are acceptable but you must adjust the amount used. Use dried herbs at approximately one-half the amount specified for fresh herbs, depending on the strength of the herb. To develop the flavor of dried herbs, soak them several minutes in a liquid that can be used in the recipe, i.e. stock, oil, lemon juice, or vinegar. Use just enough liquid to cover. Dried mint or dried parsley may be soaked in the lemon juice or the vegetable oil in the Tabouleh recipe.

Aroma is a good indicator of quality in both fresh and dried herbs. An herb's scent can be tested by crumbling a few leaves between your fingers and smelling those leaves. If the aroma is stale or weak, the herbs are old and less potent. Fresh herbs may also be judged by appearance. They should have good color, fresh-looking leaves and stems, and no wilt, brown spots, sunburn, or pest damage.

Cumin is ground from the seed of the plant and is a common ingredient in curry and chili powders.





## Safety Tip

Do not exceed the 2 hour limit (including preparation time) allowable for foods to be held in the temperature danger zone (40° - 140°F). You may also chill cooked bulgur to 40°F before adding to other salad ingredients. Serve salad chilled at 40°F.

### Safe Food Practices

Use utensils that have been washed, rinsed, and sanitized properly. Wash hands thoroughly before touching foods and after any incident of potential contamination.

Raw vegetables should be thoroughly washed in water to remove soil and other contaminants before being cut.

### Presentation

Display on school lunch tray with following menus:

#### Menu #1:

Grilled Chicken Patty on Bun  
**Tabouleh** (Armenian Salad)  
Fresh Grapes  
Whole Wheat Sugar Cookie  
Low Fat Milk

#### Menu #2:

Fish Nuggets  
Whole Wheat Roll  
**Tabouleh** (Armenian Salad)  
Fresh Orange Wedges  
Low Fat Milk



Note: recipes using whole wheat are a good way of increasing whole grains in your menus.

**Serving line:** Portions served on lettuce leaf in individual containers for self-service. Served from steam table pan garnished with fresh parsley, fresh mint, or green onion tops.

**Food bar:** Self-serve container garnished with fresh parsley, fresh mint, or green onion tops.

### Other

Bulgur is a main ingredient of the Armenian diet. Using the name Armenian salad would link the new menu item to a specific culture, as well as give the customers an indication that it will be a salad.

## Culinary Tip

There's lots of ways you can promote new international tastes in your cafeteria. Explore the opportunities. Brainstorm with students, teachers, and parents on different foods to try next!

## For More Training...

For additional training in culinary skills, contact the **National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI)**. Look in the Resources section for a variety of food preparation video training packages and workshops that are held around the country, such as:

- Culinary Techniques for Healthy School Meals
- Cooking for the New Generation
- Healthy Cuisine for Kids Workshops

Just call the NFSMI at 1-800-321-3054.

Again, for more information on the School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children, training and technical assistance materials, the chef connection and chef organizations, video clips, and other resources, visit the schoolmeals website:

**USDA's Healthy School Meals Resource System**  
**<http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov:8001>**

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**Recipes are from USDA's Tool Kit for Healthy School Meals, and  
Johnson & Wales University**