

MONTHLY FEATURE: MARINADES

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Want an uncomplicated way to jazz up that plain pork chop, fish fillet or veggies?

One of the easiest food preparation methods for infusing flavor is to use a marinade. Soaking (or “marinating”) meat, seafood, vegetables or tofu prior to cooking not only seasons it but also helps to tenderize and maintain moisture. Measure a few ingredients into a bowl, whisk together and, presto, you’re ready to go! And, depending on what food you wish to marinate, the process can take as little as 15 - 30 minutes.

A marinade is much like a vinaigrette - composed of oil, acid, aromatics and salt - and, in fact, many vinaigrette recipes can do double duty as a marinade. As an alternative to oil, yogurt, coconut milk or buttermilk also are star marinade ingredients that tenderize, add moisture and emulsify.

Marinades are generally used for food that is grilled, roasted, pan-fried, stir-fried or sautéed. One exception is for ceviche in which raw fish or seafood is “cooked” or cured in a higher acid marinade for a longer period of time and not heated prior to serving.

CAN'T I JUST BUY A READY-MADE MARINADE AT THE GROCERY STORE?

Yes, you can. However, most manufactured marinades contain ingredients that you may not wish to have such as low quality oils, vinegars and spices, additives and preservatives, added refined sugars, food coloring, etc. By taking a few minutes to craft a marinade yourself, you are able to use fresher, more flavorful, better quality ingredients, control levels of sodium and sweetener, and adjust the flavor profile so it is just right for your taste buds.

HOW DO I MAKE A MARINADE?

Most basic marinades start with a 3 to 1 ratio of oil to acid, just like vinaigrettes. However, the ratio can vary depending on the desired flavor profile and the food item being marinated.

- Poultry, fish, seafood and vegetables do well with lower acid marinades - either equal parts oil and acid or larger parts oil to smaller parts acid. Use any of the following ratios for these food items:
 - 3 parts oil to 1 part acid
 - 2 parts oil to 1 part acid
 - 1 part oil to 1 part acid
- More dense meats like beef, pork and lamb do well with either equal parts oil and acid or higher parts acid to oil. Use any of the following ratios for these food items:
 - 2 parts oil to 1 part acid
 - 1 part oil to 1 part acid
 - 1 part oil to 2 parts acid
- When using yogurt, coconut milk or buttermilk, less acid is required. Use approximately 1 cup yogurt, coconut milk or buttermilk to 2 tablespoons acid (such as lemon or lime juice).

To get you started, check out the recipes listed at the end of this post or use the ratios above and follow these steps to create your own custom marinade.

1. Select Ingredients:

- For oil, choose a good quality olive, avocado, safflower or canola oil for the marinade base. A small amount of nut or seed oil can also be added for flavor. As a flavorful alternative to oil, choose yogurt, coconut milk or buttermilk.
- For the acid, choose a traditional or fruit-infused balsamic vinegar, red or white wine vinegar, apple cider vinegar, lemon, lime, apple, cranberry or orange juice, or wine.
- For the aromatics, choose any single or combination of fresh or dried herbs, dried spices such as basil, thyme, oregano, marjoram, cumin, coriander, paprika, etc. Pre-made herb or spice blends work well.
- For salt, choose either Kosher or Sea Salt. Soy sauce, tamarin or coconut aminos can replace salt in marinades.

2. Measure and Mix:

- Measure the oil and acid into a small mixing bowl
- Add aromatics
 - For 1 cup of marinade, use approximately 1 tablespoon fresh herbs or 1 teaspoon dried herbs and/or ¼ - ½ teaspoon dried spices
- Add salt
 - For 1 cup of marinade, use approximately ¼ - ½ teaspoon Kosher or Sea salt (Too much salt will draw out the moisture in meat.)
 - As an alternative to using Kosher or Sea salt, use approximately 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon of low-sodium soy sauce, tamarin or coconut aminos
- Whisk all ingredients together until fully combined. Your marinade is ready to use!

For Added Flavor

To really get creative, consider adding any of these ingredients to the basic formulation outlined above -

- onion (1 teaspoon fresh, minced or ¼ - ½ teaspoon dried)
- garlic (1 teaspoon fresh, minced or ¼ - ½ teaspoon dried)
- ginger (1/2 - 1 teaspoon fresh, minced or ¼ teaspoon dried powder)
- Dijon or grainy mustard (1/2 teaspoon - 1 tablespoon)
- dry ground mustard (1/4 - ½ teaspoon)
- honey, maple syrup or molasses (1 teaspoon - 1 tablespoon)
- citrus zest (1/2 teaspoon to 1 teaspoon)
- black or white pepper (1/8 - 1/4 teaspoon)
- cayenne pepper or dried red pepper flakes (1/8 teaspoon - 1 teaspoon depending on desired heat level)

To create a flavor profile for a specific type of cuisine, think about the seasonings used in those cuisines and incorporate them into your marinade.

- **Asian** - garlic, ginger, hot pepper or wasabi, sesame oil, rice wine vinegar, soy sauce
- **Creole** - onion, garlic, celery, parsley, lemon, Cajun and blackened seasoning blends
- **French** - onions or shallots, chives, thyme, tarragon, herbs de Provence, red or white wine
- **Greek** - garlic, rosemary, bay leaves, oregano, lemon, olive oil
- **Indian** - yogurt or coconut milk, garlic, curry, garam masala, cardamom, ground coriander, cumin, dried chili peppers, fenugreek, fennel
- **Italian** - garlic, onions, basil, rosemary, oregano, fennel, parsley, lemon, olive oil, balsamic vinegar
- **Mexican** - garlic, onions, cilantro, chili powder, oregano, cumin, ground coriander, lime, hot sauce,

HOW LONG DO I MARINATE THE MEAT, FISH, SEAFOOD, VEGETABLES OR TOFU?

Times vary based on the items being marinated. It is best to check specific recipes but as a general guide:

- Chicken, vegetables, tofu, fish and seafood are best when marinated a shorter period of time because acids can affect their texture, making them either tough or mushy.
 - Marinate chicken for 30 minutes - 2 hours
 - Marinate softer vegetables and tofu for 30 minutes, denser (root) vegetables for up to 60 minutes
 - Marinate fish and seafood for 15 - 30 minutes
- Beef, pork and lamb can benefit from longer marinating times because they are generally denser in texture.
 - Marinate pork for 1 - 12 hours
 - Marinate beef and lamb for 4 - 24 hours

WHAT ABOUT FOOD SAFETY WITH REGARD TO MARINADES?

Marinades can pick up bacteria from the raw foods that are soaked in them so to avoid any undesirable affects remember to -

- Marinate items in the refrigerator, not on the counter at room temperature.
- Discard marinating liquid after the food is removed. Do not save it for future use, brush it on the food as it is cooking, or serve as a sauce.
- If basting or a sauce is desired, save a portion of unused marinade in a separate container prior to adding the food items.
- Thoroughly wash bowls, containers, utensils, etc. used for marinating in hot soapy water or in a dishwasher, and toss plastic zip-lock bags.

ADDITIONAL TIPS:

- Use non-reactive, food safe bowls or containers for marinating food items such as glass, stainless steel, good quality plastic containers, or heavy-duty plastic zip-lock bags. Do not use containers made of aluminum.
- Prepare approximately ½ cup of marinade per pound of food.
- Freezing food items in their marinades can cause them to become mushy so is not recommended.

RECIPES: [4 BASIC MARINADES](#)



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