1

Know Your Salt

Most types of salt you buy are at least 97.5 percent sodium chloride and thus nearly identical. But they vary based on how and where they're made and what goes into that last 2.5 percent. Here's an overview of four common kinds.

TABLE SALT

Iodized or not, table salt is milled to create small, uniform cube-shaped crystals. It has an added anticlumping agent to keep it "free-flowing."

Use it: to season pasta water; it dissolves quickly. The tiny size of the crystals can easily lead to oversalting, so make sure to sprinkle—not pour—it.

KOSHER SALT

This is the workhorse of restaurant kitchens: Chefs know what they're getting with every pinch. The name comes from the fact that the crystals are good at drawing out moisture from meat, so it's used in the koshering process.

Use it: any time you're seasoning during the cooking process.

FLEUR DE SEL

Unlike salt harvested from deposits in the earth, sea salt comes from evaporating ocean water. *Fleur de sel* refers to the delicate, fine crystals that rise to the water's surface; the classic version is hand-collected in Guérande, France.

Use it: for sprinkling over crudo or raw veg before serving.

FLAKY SEA SALT

Snow-white, pyramid-shaped crystals harvested from coastal waters. The most prominent producer is Maldon, which sources its flakes from the waters off Essex, England.

Use it: to add a hit of salinity and crunch to finished dishes like salads, seared meats, and chocolate desserts.

▶ Stick with a Salt Brand

You want to know what is hands down the best salt that you could possibly cook with? The one you cook with most often. Seasoning is about consistency above all else, and picking one box and sticking with it means that a pinch today will be the same as a pinch tomorrow will be the same as a pinch next week. Using an unfamiliar salt is like driving someone else's car—it'll get you there, sure, but it just isn't the same.

SALT CAN ALSO...
CONDUCT HEAT

Remember those pink salt blocks everyone was searing steaks on for a minute? A bed of kosher salt performs a similar function: transmitting heat.

SALT-ROASTED POTATOES

Preheat oven to 425°. Spread **2 cups kosher salt** in a 13x9" baking dish. Scrub **1½ lb. fingerling potatoes**, pat dry, and poke a few holes into each; arrange over salt. Roast until flesh is very tender and skins are crisp, 30–40 minutes. Meanwhile, strip leaves from **2 rosemary sprigs** and cook with **3 thinly sliced garlic cloves** and **¼ cup olive oil** in a small saucepan over medium-low heat, swirling pan occasionally, until garlic is golden, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl and add potatoes; toss to coat. Serve potatoes generously sprinkled with **flaky sea salt**.
4 servings

The BA Test Kitchen uses Diamond Crystal kosher salt. If you prefer Morton, decrease the amount of salt called for in a BA recipe by about a third.

This two-ingredient chicken relies on nothing but kosher salt—lots of it—to yield crisp skin and juicy meat.

2

Do Not Fear the Salt

It takes more salt than you think to season your food like a pro. And no matter how exacting our test kitchen editors are about every aspect of a recipe, the one thing they can't do is come over to your house and season the dish for you. So how do you get the hang of seasoning with confidence? Practice, practice, practice. To get you started on the path to salting fearlessly, we came up with this here exercise. As a bonus, it results in dinner.

SALT BOOT CAMP

FULLY SALTED ROAST CHICKEN

One 3½–4-lb. chicken

Kosher salt

1 Pat the chicken dry with paper towels. You want the salt to stick to the chicken but not dissolve on contact. A dry chicken will become a crisp chicken.

2 Measure out 2 Tbsp. (18 g) Diamond Crystal kosher salt. Grab a generous pinch—i.e., a scant ½ tsp. (1.5 g)—and from at least 10" above the chicken, let the salt rain down over every surface and inside every nook and cranny of the cavity. Repeat with several more pinches of salt to cover entire bird inside and out. For a 4-lb. bird, we used the full 2 Tbsp.

3 Place chicken on a wire rack set inside a rimmed baking sheet and chill uncovered at least 8 hours and up to 1 day. Leaving the chicken uncovered further dehydrates the skin as the salt draws out moisture.

4 Preheat oven to 425°. Let chicken come to room temperature (about 1 hour), then roast 40–55 minutes. Let rest 15 minutes before carving. Though it may have seemed like a lot of salt at the start, the result will be meat that's seasoned evenly and thoroughly—not excessively.

"We need salt in our diet to function. We just need it to come from the right places. Salt from natural, unrefined sources—such as gray salt and pink salt—contains good amounts of the trace minerals we need for proper cellular function."

MARISSA LIPPERT, NUTRITIONIST

Chop whole preserved limes and add to a salad dressing, yogurt sauce, or anywhere else you want to add sourness and saltiness in one go.

SALT CAN ALSO... **PRESERVE**

If you like lox, bacon, or anchovies, you should thank salt—and time. That's all that it takes to turn supermarket limes into this pleasantly salty-tart-funky pantry staple, the sibling of preserved lemons.

PRESERVED LIMES

Rinse **8 organic limes**; pat dry. Cut off ends and upend on a cut side. Make 2 perpendicular slits lengthwise into fruit to form an X, cutting only three-fourths of the way down. Pack lots of **kosher salt** into slits and place limes into a 1-qt. jar, pressing to compact and release juices. Seal jar; let limes sit at room temperature 12 hours. Uncover and press firmly again to compact. Repeat once or twice daily until limes are softened and submerged in juices, 2–3 days. (If there is not enough juice to submerge limes after 3 days, add fresh lime juice to cover.) Chill 1 month before using.

Do ahead: Limes can be preserved 6 months ahead. Keep chilled.

Makes 1 quart

▶ Okay, Salt Isn't Always the Answer

While it's true that the very little NaCl wakes up food, it is pretty miraculous, it isn't the only thing that a dish needs to shine. Acid (i.e., citrus or vinegar) and heat (from raw alliums or chiles) are also key, which is why we season in stages—some salt, then some lemon, then some chile—until everything comes into brilliant focus.

Like your desserts extra-salted? Just keep adding more and tasting the butterscotch until you reach your personal sweet-salty threshold.

3 Season from the Start

Ready for your new kitchen mantra? Here it is: Always Be Seasoning. That means adding a good pinch of salt at every stage of cooking—not just at the very end. This ensures that your finished dish is as flavorful as possible, both because each element has been seasoned and because salt draws taste-diluting water out of foods and into the pan to be cooked off.

SALT BOOT CAMP

PROPERLY SALTED PASTA

Kosher salt

¼ cup olive oil, plus more

3 large shallots, chopped

5 garlic cloves, finely chopped

½ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes, plus more

2 small bunches broccolini, stems cut into ½" pieces, florets cut into bite-size pieces

12 oz. tubetti or other short tube pasta

1½ oz. Parmesan, finely grated, plus more

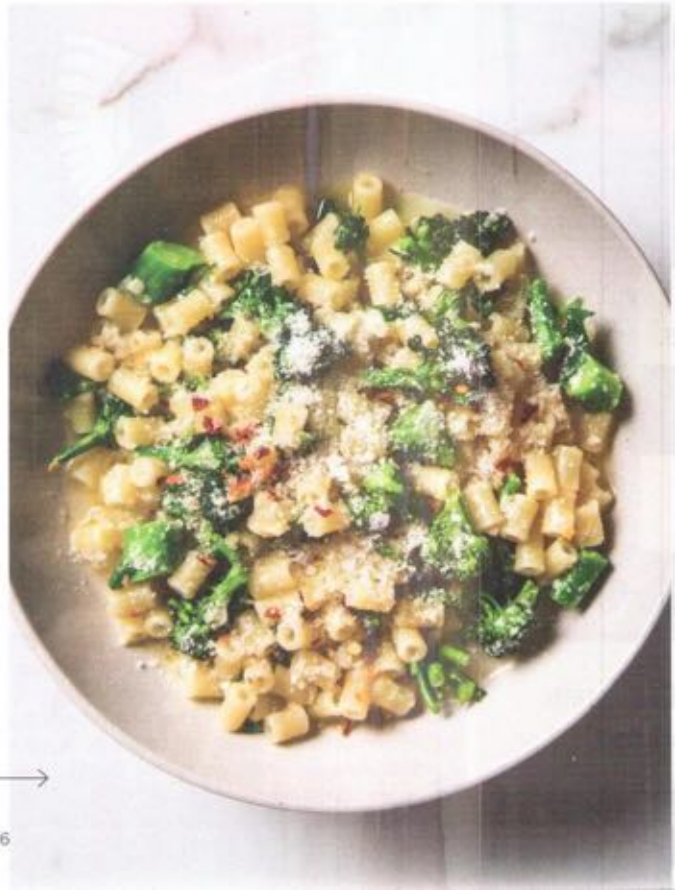
Lemon wedges (for serving)

1 Bring 6 quarts water to a boil in a large pot and season with kosher salt. The water should taste like the ocean; this'll take about ¼ cup salt.

2 Meanwhile, heat ¼ cup oil in a large skillet over medium. Add shallots, garlic, and ½ tsp. red pepper flakes; season with a medium pinch of salt, about ¼ tsp. (just under 1 g) Diamond Crystal. Cook, stirring occasionally, until shallots are translucent, about 4 minutes; remove from heat.

3 Cook broccolini in boiling water 1 minute, then use a slotted spoon to transfer to skillet with shallot mixture. Return water to a boil. Cook pasta, stirring occasionally, until very al dente, 7–9 minutes.

4 Drain, reserving ¾ cup pasta cooking liquid. Add pasta and cooking liquid to skillet; toss to combine. Cook over medium-high heat, gradually adding 1½ oz. Parmesan and tossing often, until cheese is melted and a thick, glossy sauce forms, about 4 minutes. You're adding quite a bit of salt via the water and the cheese, so do a taste check. If needed, add more salt a small pinch at a time. Squeeze lemon wedges over pasta and drizzle with oil. Top with more Parm and red pepper flakes.



The combination of salty water and salty Parmesan puts this pasta at risk of becoming oversalted. If that happens, throw in a knob of unsalted butter at the end to mellow it and add a smooth finish.

SALT CAN ALSO...
BE ITS OWN FLAVOR

We all know that salt, when used in just the right amount, enhances the taste of other ingredients. But add just a little more and it becomes a flavor all its own.

SALTED BUTTERSCOTCH

Cook **1 cup (lightly packed) dark brown sugar**, **1 cup heavy cream**, **½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter**, **¼ cup Scotch**, **2 Tbsp. light corn syrup**, **1 tsp. vanilla extract**, and ¼ cup water in a large saucepan over low heat, stirring, until sugar is dissolved. Increase heat to medium and bring to a boil (without stirring). Cook, swirling often, until sauce is thick enough to coat spoon, 8–10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in **1½ tsp. flaky sea salt**.

DO AHEAD: Sauce can be made 1 week ahead. Cover and chill. Reheat gently before using.

Makes about 2 cups

FOOD STYLING BY SUE LI. ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOE WILSON.