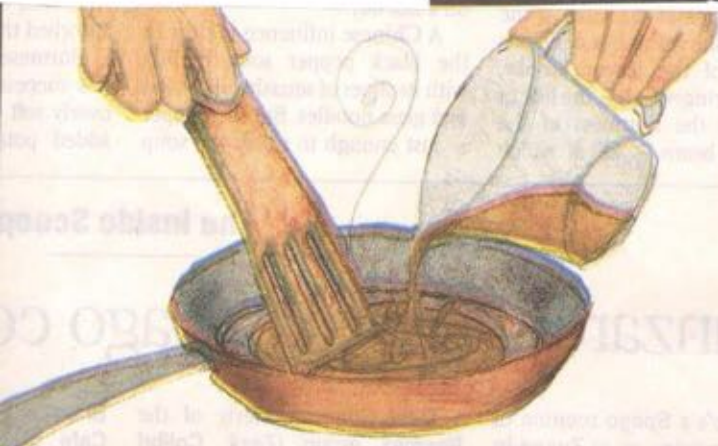


KITCHEN ESSENTIALS:

10 techniques every cook should know



Making pan sauce

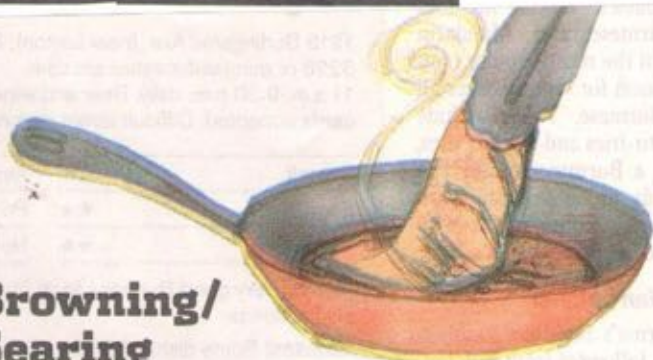
One of our all-time favorite techniques – making a pan sauce – is a great secret for home cooks. Within minutes, you can create a quick, professional-tasting meal using just a few ingredients.

This method utilizes the brown bits on the bottom of a pan (called fond) that appear after you've used the searing or browning technique, with anything from meat or poultry to fish.

We like to start by sauteing some diced shallots or other aromatics for added flavor, either in the fat leftover from browning the meat or in a little extra olive oil or butter.

Next, add liquid to the hot pan, and bring to a simmer. You can use wine, stock, vinegar, juice or other flavored liquid. Use a wooden spoon or spatula to scrape the fond from the bottom of the pan and incorporate it into the sauce, adding color and flavor. This is called deglazing. Reduce the sauce by letting it simmer and cook down, which concentrates the flavors and thickens the sauce. How long it simmers depends on how much liquid you add, but it's never more than a few minutes.

To finish, remove the pan from the heat and whisk in cold cubes of butter, which will further thicken the sauce, add extra richness and provide luster. Season it with salt and pepper, and you'll have a finished sauce that will enhance a main course.



Browning/ Searing

Myths abound about the benefits of searing, most notably that it seals in the juices. In reality, searing or browning meat or fish creates a caramelized, golden crust that adds texture and a depth of flavor.

The most important factor in this technique is to start with a very hot pan. Ideally, you should use one made from a stainless steel or anodized metal – a heavy material that will conduct and distribute heat evenly and well.

Although you can use nonstick pans for delicate fish, pans without a nonstick finish do a better job of browning, and leave lovely browned flavorful bits to use in a pan sauce (see "Making pan sauce.")

To brown, heat a completely dry pan, then add enough oil to lightly coat the surface (if you're using meat that has a lot of fat, you can skip this step and put it directly into the dry pan). The oil should heat to the point where it shimmers, but does not smoke. You can test this by flicking a droplet of water into the pan – if the pan is ready, the water should sizzle and evaporate upon contact.

Place your ingredient directly into the pan. It will hiss at first, but let it cook until a golden brown crust forms. If the pan is heated properly, the ingredient won't stick to the pan, and you'll be able to lift it with tongs or a spatula easily.

Keep in mind that if you overcrowd the pan, the ingredients will steam rather than brown, so sometimes you'll need to cook in batches. It's OK to wipe out the pan in between, but leave the fond – the brown bits that stick to the bottom.