

1. Fry the bacon in a medium skillet over medium heat until brown and crisp, about 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate and set it aside.

2. Whisk together the oil, vinegar, onion, parsley, and salt and pepper to taste in a small bowl. Broil and arrange the asparagus on a serving platter as directed. Cool for 5 minutes, drizzle with the dressing, sprinkle with the bacon, and serve.

BROCCOLI

SOME PEOPLE STEAM, BOIL, OR MICROWAVE broccoli to an undesirable army-green mush. Luckily, the texture is hardly noticeable because such broccoli is often served underneath a thick, fluorescent orange cheese sauce. We wanted a quick way to produce properly cooked broccoli. We also wanted updated flavors that enhanced rather than hid the flavor of the broccoli.

Most cooks prepare the florets only, but in the test kitchen we prefer to eat the whole broccoli—both stalks and florets. We noted that the crunchy stalks, though as tasty as the florets, took longer to cook. Our first thought was to peel the stalks of their fibrous, tough outer layer, and this, in fact, made them tender and decreased cooking time. Because we didn't want to use staggered cooking times or two pots, we cut the florets into bite-size pieces, then peeled the stalks, halved them lengthwise, and cut them into ½-inch pieces. Now the florets and stalks cooked in exactly the same amount of time.

The next step was to refine the cooking process. First, we tried boiling the broccoli, but this seemed to beat it up quite a bit. Next, we steamed the broccoli in a steaming basket, then sautéed it with other ingredients. The results

were good, but working with two pans was a bother. We tried simply sautéing the florets and stalks in a frying pan with oil, but we found that the relatively dry heat took quite a while to penetrate and cook the broccoli. We were able to speed up the process, however, by adding water to the pan. When the cold water hit the hot pan, it turned into steam—which, when trapped under a lid, cooked the broccoli in merely 2 minutes. Removing the lid, we were able to evaporate the small amount of water left in the pan, resulting in perfectly steamed yet dry broccoli made using just one pan.

This technique not only is simple but also makes it easy to season the broccoli. We sautéed aromatics and other ingredients, such as garlic, ginger, and red peppers, then added the broccoli and water to the pan. This quick method ensures perfectly cooked broccoli, uses only one pan, and allows for countless flavor variations.

Steamed Broccoli with Toasted Garlic and Lemon

SERVES 4

TIME: 20 MINUTES

Watch the pan closely to make sure the garlic does not burn. It should be golden but not fully browned.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium cloves garlic, sliced thin
- Pinch hot red pepper flakes
- 2 anchovies, minced (optional)
- 1 ½ pounds broccoli (about 1 medium bunch), prepared according to the illustrations on page 67
- Salt and ground black pepper
- ½ lemon, cut into 4 wedges

1. Heat the oil, garlic, and pepper flakes in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat until

the garlic is golden brown, about 5 minutes. Add the anchovies, if using, and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

2. Increase the heat to high; add the broccoli and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, then cover and cook until the broccoli begins to turn bright green, 1 to 2 minutes. Uncover the pan and cook, stirring frequently, until the liquid has evaporated and the broccoli is tender, 3 to 5 minutes longer. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer the broccoli to a serving platter. Serve immediately with lemon wedges.

Steamed Broccoli with Red Bell Pepper and Sweet Soy Sauce

SERVES 4

TIME: 20 MINUTES

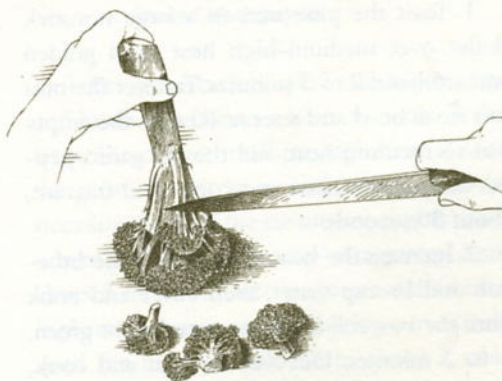
A sweetened soy sauce and rice vinegar mixture replaces plain water for steaming the broccoli in the pan. Serve with red meat.

- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 medium red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut into thin strips about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 2 medium cloves garlic, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds broccoli (about 1 medium bunch), prepared according to the illustrations at right
- Salt and ground black pepper
- 2 medium scallions, sliced thin

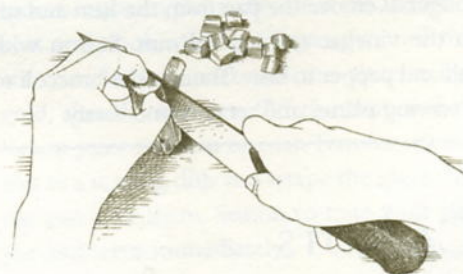
1. Mix together the soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water in a small bowl and set the mixture aside.

2. Heat the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until almost smoking. Add the bell pepper and ginger and cook until the pepper is softened and slightly charred, 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Increase the heat to high; add the broccoli and the soy mixture, then cover and cook until the broccoli begins to turn bright green, 1 to 2 minutes. Uncover the pan and cook, stirring frequently, until the liquid has evaporated and the broccoli is tender, 3 to 5 minutes longer. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to a serving platter, sprinkle with the scallions, and serve immediately.

PREPARING BROCCOLI



1. Place the broccoli upside down on a cutting board and cut off the florets close to their heads with a large knife.



2. Once the florets are removed, stand each stalk on the cutting board and square it with a large knife. This removes the tough outer $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the stalk. Cut the squared stalk in half lengthwise and then into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces.

Steamed Broccoli with Pine Nuts and Raisins

SERVES 4

TIME: 20 MINUTES

This variation works well with chicken or pork.

- 1/4 cup pine nuts
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium cloves garlic, sliced thin
- 1/4 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes
- 1/4 cup raisins
- 1 1/2 pounds broccoli (about 1 medium bunch), prepared according to the illustrations on page 67
- 1 1/2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- Salt and ground black pepper

1. Toast the pine nuts in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until golden and aromatic, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer the nuts to a small bowl and reserve. Return the empty pan to medium heat; add the oil, garlic, pepper flakes, and raisins and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

2. Increase the heat to high; add the broccoli and 1/2 cup water, then cover and cook until the broccoli begins to turn bright green, 1 to 2 minutes. Uncover the pan and cook, stirring frequently, until the liquid has evaporated and the broccoli is tender, 3 to 5 minutes longer. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the vinegar and toasted nuts. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer the broccoli to a serving platter and serve immediately.

CARROTS

THE SLICK, SACCHARINE CONFECTION often called glazed carrots belongs in a candy dish on a coffee table, not as a side dish on a dinner plate. These abused vegetables, adrift in

a sea of syrup, lie limp and soggy from overcooking or retain a raw, fibrous resistance from undercooking. Most recipes for glazed carrots are hopelessly dated, residing in books from the Betty Crocker era or in more contemporary tomes by authors who feel obliged to include them. These recipes never deliver what we hope for in glazed carrots: fully tender, well-seasoned carrots with a glossy, clingy, yet modest glaze.

We began with the problem of how to prepare the carrots for cooking. Matchsticks were out from the get-go—we were looking for simplicity, not to improve our knife skills. A bag of “baby” carrots unceremoniously emptied into a pan for cooking revealed pieces of wildly different girth, with some more than twice as big around as others. Sure that these would cook unevenly, we halved the large pieces lengthwise; so much for the convenience of this product. Tasters remarked that these little carrots, cooked, were shy on both carrot flavor and good looks, so we peeled regular bagged carrots and cut them on the bias into handsome oblong shapes. Once cooked, these comely carrots earned much praise for their good flavor. Slender bunch carrots (sold with their tops on and at a higher price), also cut on the bias, were no more flavorful, and their diminutive size lacked presence. Regular bagged carrots it was.

Most recipes call for steaming, parboiling, or blanching the carrots prior to glazing, resulting in a battery of dirty utensils. Instead, we put the carrots with a bit of liquid in a skillet (nonstick, for easy cleanup), along with salt and sugar for flavor; then we covered the skillet and let the carrots simmer. Mission accomplished: The carrots were cooked through without much ado. We further found that chicken broth used for the cooking liquid lent the carrots savory backbone and a full, round flavor, whereas water left them hollow and wine turned them sour and