

Vegetables: added value for you and your diners

by A. C. Bartolotta

Imagine a dinner plate with a beautifully browned pork chop, a crusty brown serving of creamy au gratin potatoes, and a soggy, indistinguishable mass of something fairly green. Or is it beige or gray? Is it beans or spinach or what?

Whatever it may be, it's enough to lower the value of the other food items on that plate and, in fact, lower the value of the entire foodservice operation in the eyes of the dining guest.

These dining guests, as well as the club foodservice people responsible for serving them, can no longer tolerate improperly handled vegetables. Cooks who do an outstanding job of preparing and serving vegetables are appreciated by the dining

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public. Their vegetables are eaten and enjoyed, instead of being left on the plate, only to be wasted.

Vegetables are intended to round out a meal. They provide an important balance of eye-appealing colors, satisfying textures, and mouth-watering flavors. Properly cooked and served, vegetables also play an important role in balancing main course food cost factors as well.

Eye-appealing vegetables can be a positive focal point when the plate is set before the dining guest. In fact, the visual impact can be so great that the guest may be willing, unconsciously, to settle for a slightly smaller portion of meat, fish, or whatever the main course is. This happens only when an effort is made to satisfy the aesthetic expectations of the customer.

Today's consumer is putting greater emphasis on vegetable

cooking. For example, there's now a widespread appreciation for vegetables prepared the Oriental way, cooked to the just-tender-crisp state. The customer naturally will favor the restaurant which serves "ordinary" vegetables in this manner. And, the foodservice operator benefits in more than customer satisfaction. Those responsible for profit and loss figures will soon realize that vegetables cooked just-tender-crisp will yield more portions than those which have been overcooked and mishandled.

In other words, vegetables are as important as meat or any other element in a meal. This fact must be fully understood by all who come in contact with vegetables from preparation to serving.

For effective, efficient, attractive use of vegetables canned or frozen, read and practice the following lists of DO's and DON'Ts.

TIPS FOR FROZEN VEGETABLES

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always cook frozen vegetables from frozen state. Place frozen vegetables in boiling salted water. Cover vegetables in pot on stove top with sheet of clear plastic film; place the film directly on the vegetables — not on the outside rim or top of the pot. This will reduce cooking time.• Carefully follow manufacturer's package directions, particularly for liquid quantities and cooking times.• For quick creamed vegetables, add white sauce to drained cooking liquid, simmer just a few minutes to blend flavors, add drained vegetables, season and serve.• Always cook frozen vegetables in small quantities. Do not overload pots, steam kettles, or steam cabinet pans. More frequent small batch cooking from frozen provides you with a steady flow of ready-to-serve vegetables at their peak of goodness. It takes less cooking time, for more efficient use of energy.• Cook frozen vegetables with a minimal amount of water. The quicker the water gets back to the boiling point, the quicker vegetables will cook and the better the results will be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not allow frozen vegetables to sit out to hasten cooking. More harm is done to frozen vegetables by exposing them to warm (room) temperatures or even refrigerated temperatures: harm in the form of oxidation with resultant color, texture, and flavor loss; flavor transfer; undesirable odors; and flavor pickup.• Do not drown vegetables in a sea of water. When you do: 1) Longer cooking time is required. 2) Desirable textures are destroyed and actual decomposition takes place. 3) Essential flavors are diluted, become less pleasing. 4) Eye-appealing colors bleach out. Resultant discoloration drastically reduces customer acceptance.• Do not add baking soda to cooking water to try to preserve vegetable color or hasten cooking. Soft "slippery" vegetables often are the result of using baking soda. Proper cooking procedures produce excellent vegetables.• Do not pre-soak frozen vegetables in water to slack out. Vegetables become water soaked and lose important texture and color.• Do not heat quantities of vegetables sufficient to carry through an entire 2-hour meal period. Excessive heat and moisture oxidation take their toll. Vegetables are not generally worth serving after all this abuse.



FROZEN TIPS continued

- Utilize the cooking liquids in numerous ways to increase menu variety and profits. When minimal water is used, the resultant liquids are extremely flavorful and offer countless menu merchandising uses.
- Whenever possible, heat only small quantities of vegetables just before serving time. Greater yields and better-tasting vegetables will result, as well as greater economies, because less seasoning (butter or margarine, spices/herbs) will be required. They will go farther because no need to season large volumes of flavor-robbing liquids.
- Cool vegetables very rapidly when cooking in advance of actual serving time. Drain liquids from cooked vegetables (utilize liquids elsewhere — do not throw away) and plunge the cooked drained vegetables into cold, clear water immediately. Cool rapidly, remove as quickly as possible from cooling liquid, drain thoroughly, place into storage pan (2½ by 12 by 20 inches) and cover with clear plastic wrap. Refrigerate.
- Serve vegetables hot (150-160° F.) unless used in salads, relishes, etc., when chilled service is most desirable.
- Utilize cooked vegetables as quickly as possible. Once cooked, vegetables deteriorate rapidly, even under best possible refrigeration conditions.
- Serve attractive portions of vegetables; standardize the portions with an eye toward how they fit with specific foods. Sometimes a third of a portion of green peas sprinkled on creamed chicken and a corn bread square, strategically placed on the dinner plate, will do more good than trying to crowd a full size portion on a plate with the entree — as long as the peas are colorful, plump, and tasty.
- Never cook frozen vegetables in violently boiling water; bring back to boil as fast as possible, then reduce heat and let simmer just a few minutes. Adjust seasoning and serve.
- Never let cooked frozen vegetables cool off in the cooking liquid.
- Do not store cooked vegetables in water, unless storage time will be prolonged.
- Do not serve watery vegetables on dinner plates with other meal elements. Drain vegetables thoroughly. Watery liquids make serving plates look messy, the liquid dilutes the flavor of other foods and quite often is spilled on the dining patron.
- Never allow vegetables to be thrown or plopped onto a plate, regardless of where they land or how they look.
- Do not serve oversized portions of vegetables because they over-shadow the meat portion. Also avoid skimpy vegetable portions which give an empty plate look and also make the meat portion look too small.
- Serve vegetables attractively — neat placement on plate, particularly in front of patron on serving line.

TIPS FOR CANNED VEGETABLES

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drain liquid (vegetable broth) from the can into heating container (pot). Simmer the liquid to reduce it at least 50 percent, then season the liquid, add the drained vegetables, cover, and remove from fire. Allow to set a few minutes for vegetables to heat, then serve. • Pour heated vegetables into double panned, shallow half-size steam table pans whenever possible. Use minimum amount of liquid and directly cover vegetables with cling wrap. • Eliminate the practice of keeping vegetables in a bain-marie full of liquid with vegetables swimming in the flavor-diluting liquid. • Use any leftover heated vegetables the very next day while they still have some semblance of bloom left in them. Use them in salads, marinated, or mixed in with other greens and then seasoned; in soups, sauces, hashes, stews, meat and vegetable pies, etc. □ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not "cook" canned vegetables. They're fully cooked and need only to be heated, seasoned to serve. • Do not hold heated vegetables in a steam table for any extended period. • Never throw any vegetable broth or liquid away. Utilize this valuable ingredient in soups, sauces, beverages, casseroles, salad dressing, etc. • Do not keep vegetables in deep steam table inserts. Spoons macerate and chop up vegetables unmercifully every time they're thrust into the insert. • Don't serve a great amount of liquid with vegetables, particularly on dinner plates. Use a slotted spoon. Excess liquid makes dinner plates messy and dilutes meat sauce flavors. □