

## THINGS COOKS KNOW

## Pucker Up

Don't overlook acid in your quest for better dishes. Experts share the many ways it boosts deliciousness.

BY JENNA HELWIG



## TART SMARTS

A tall glass of lemonade, pickles on a burger, subtly tangy sourdough bread: These all have one thing in common (aside from being tasty). They boast a hit of acid—to balance out sweetness, cut through fat, or liven up flavor. Acid usually doesn't make foods taste sour, says Jeremy Rock Smith, executive chef at Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. "It brings brightness to a dish and makes the flavors stand out."

## WITH VEGETABLES AND SALADS

"When I season a dish, acid is almost always the 'What's missing?' ingredient," Smith says. "The sweetness of a roasted beet is intensified by a splash of vinegar, while lime cuts the flatness of a veggie curry." Ingredients like olives, capers, and fresh cheese are also acidic and will add zip to your vegetable sides or salads.

## WITH MEAT AND POULTRY

"The acid in a marinade helps relax the proteins in meat, which makes it more tender," says Smith, author of *The Kripalu Kitchen*. To create your own marinade, combine equal parts oil and acid (such as citrus juice, vinegar, or yogurt), then add kosher salt or soy sauce. Don't marinate anything for more than 10 hours, though, or the acid may make the meat tough or sometimes mushy. When braising, Smith likes to incorporate acids like a splash of wine or a spoonful of tomato paste. "It helps make meat easier to chew and digest by breaking down collagen, which is abundant in tougher cuts."

## ON THE PLATE

Consider how to balance acid throughout your meal, not just in each recipe. Cranberry sauce at Thanksgiving, for example, is an essential bright spot in a sea of richness. If you're sitting down to eat and realize your plate needs more pop, sprinkle on some lemon zest, drizzle on a little hot sauce, or spoon on some salsa or chutney. A simple salad of brightly dressed lettuce can also provide that kick.

## IN BAKING

"Acids do three main things in baking," says Posie Brien, editor of *The All-Purpose Baker's Companion* from the King Arthur Baking Company. "They leaven baked goods, enhance flavor, and create tenderness by counterbalancing dough-toughening gluten." This is one reason you see buttermilk in so many baking recipes.



## IN SWEETS

Acidic dairy products, like cream cheese, yogurt, and sour cream, balance out sugary frostings and whipped cream. "Tartness is an ideal foil for sweetness—it makes desserts less cloying and more complex," Brien says. The same goes for fruit: Think of a classic combo like strawberries and balsamic or watermelon and lime. ■