

Mise en Place

Making a meal involves gathering ingredients, equipment as well as all the cutting and chopping of food. This is the mise en place stage of making a meal. Mise en place is a French term that means “Put in place or everything in its place”. This means having all required equipment readily available to prepare your meal easily. This would include pans, measuring cups and spoons, wire whisks, mixing bowls and little containers for small measures of chopped garlic, spices and herbs. It is also helpful to have staple ingredients like flour, black pepper and olive oil also within a reasonable reach. The reason for this is that you want to concentrate on the task at hand and not having to stop and get something that should have been a part of your mise en place to prepare a recipe or meal. This allows you to mindfully focus on critical elements of meal preparation such as time, temperature and degree of doneness.

A serious and constant companion of mise en place is another “Culinary Code of Conduct” termed “Clean as you go”. The entire time you are preparing mise en place you clean as you go to avoid a pile of dirty utensils and bowls, a step critical to prevent of any cross contamination of ingredients. Even when cutting the same ingredient like a lot of mushrooms, you want to cut some, put them in a bowl, and repeat the process until all are sliced. That way you don’t have a mound of mushrooms on your cutting board while trying to find room to slice the remaining mushrooms. Cutting on a clean uncluttered board makes cutting safer and more fun.

Just like you have to make time to be physically active do yoga or other self-care practices, you have to create time to cook! The problem is that we may not allocate enough time for the mise en place because we underestimate the time it takes to do it. This is why efficiencies in cutting, chopping and cooking are so important. They quicken completion of meal preparation, build confidence and are likely to result with a great tasting and satisfying meal.

The new reality is that mise en place in 2020 has changed. And in many ways for the better. We have digital information at our finger tips to access recipes, learn about culinary techniques and may acquire an amazing array of new culinary gadgets that speed that process. Immersion blenders, spiralizers and professional grade cutlery are now easily available and affordable at many stores. So it is perfectly fine to multitask when preparing your mise en place. That means that you can have a grain cooking in a rice cooker while you are peeling and chopping garlic or oven roasting vegetables or cleaning, spin-drying and cooking the chard. Mastering culinary skills empowers you with the confidence and increased desire to prepare healthy meals efficiently. And, the more often you eat great-tasting freshly prepared whole foods, your taste buds will begin to change and increase the desire for preparing healthy meals. And it begins with mastering mise en place!

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