

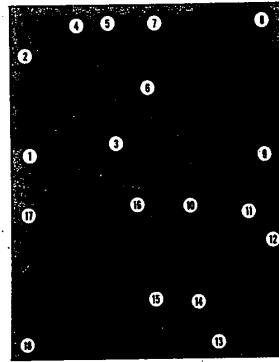
Monday, May 10, 1982 O&amp;E

(F1B)

# PLATE APPEAL: Turning a Plain-Looking Plate Into Oh What a Dish!

Plate Appeal. It's the difference between a mundane meal and a divine dinner. An accent on presentation as much as on preparation...on achieving a plate which will tantalize the eyes as it tempts the taste buds.

Today's emphasis on plate appeal requires an appreciation of color and balance. While it once sufficed to follow Julia Child's recipes, today's cooks can also learn from the Dutch Masters' rules. But even a home chef can earn her artistic license. With a few simple tricks on balancing colors, shapes, and textures, every meal can be a magnificent masterpiece.



1. Carrot curls on Romaine lettuce.
2. Lemon and lime slices twisted with watercress.
3. Turnip-sculptured daisy with carrot center and celery stem.
4. Black olive slices tucked into a radish fan.
5. Green onion brush.
6. Home Style Potato Planks™ topped with thyme and parsley.
7. Radish flower.
8. Belgian endive.
9. Lamb chops.
10. Carrot accordian woven with watercress.
11. Celery stick wand.
12. Carrot cork-screw topped with carrot leaf.
13. Thin carrot strips placed in a black olive.
14. Sculptured radish.
15. Fresh asparagus spears.
16. Tater Tots®.
17. Salmon on a light dill sauce, topped with lime slices and fresh dill.
18. Tomato rose.

## The Palatable Palette

Think color when planning the various courses of the meal, for color is the key ingredient in an attractive plate. The more varied a palette used, the more palatable a plate you'll create.

When choosing foods for the meal, start with the main entree and select side dishes of complementary colors. If a dark colored main dish, like prime rib, will be served, add potatoes to fill in the medium and golden colors and a light colored vegetable or salad to round out the spectrum.

Splashes of color will add elegance and excitement to the meal. Sieved egg, parsley, paprika, and chopped pimento, for instance, can be used to change the color of foods without affecting their taste. Or serve mixtures of contrasting vegetables—julienned strips of carrot and zucchini or green beans faced with red cabbage.

Food companies are responding to the interest in visual effects by providing products with extra color attraction. Ore-Ida Foods, for example, added the appeal of the peel to its new Home Style™ Potato line for color contrast and extra hearty taste.

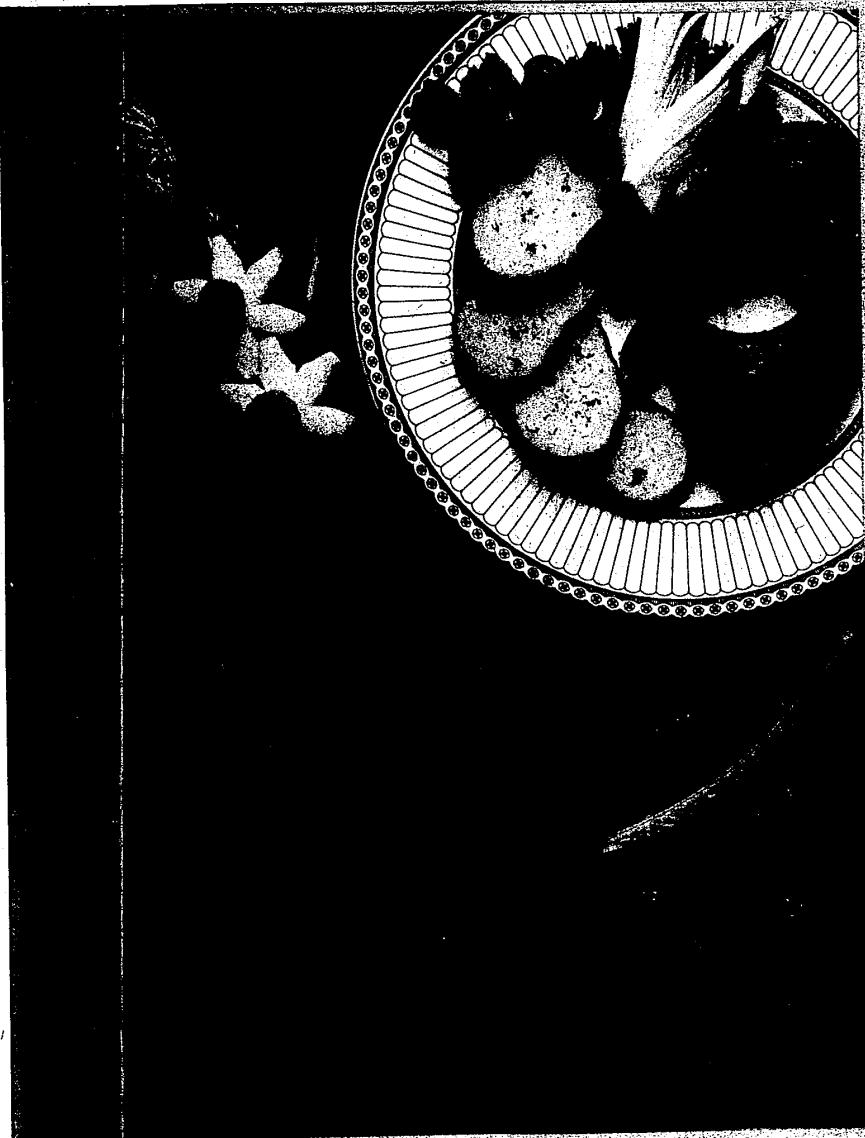
All food colors on the plate need not contrast sharply, however. Several shades of the same color can be featured to achieve a monochromatic look. The dark green of broccoli, for instance, can be softened with the more delicate green of cucumber slices or artichoke leaves. Offset the green shades with light foods like fish or poultry.

Highlight the picture you've painted with colorful garnishes to tie together the various shades and shapes and complete your culinary canvas.

## Garnishes: The Strokes of Genius

Garnishes are no longer limited to radish roses and sprigs of parsley. Today, "anything goes"—as long as it really does go with the colors, shapes, and textures used in the main entree and side dishes.

House plant cuttings can be washed off to add a dash of panache to the plate. And celery and carrot leaves, once doomed to the disposal, are now favored for their soft greenness and warmth. Even a tomato peel, thinly sliced, can be delicately arranged into a beautiful rose, which by any other name would



still be an eye-catcher.

The trend toward more natural effects can be seen in today's garnishes. Clusters of red grapes, fresh pink shrimp, and citrus fruits cut with a saw-toothed edge are among the garnishes literally beautiful enough to eat.

Some garnishes earn extra points because they serve a double-duty. Fresh dill and flower petals, for instance, add fragrance and color to the plate. And thin strips of celery or lemon, placed in ice water until they curl, provide brightness and interesting shapes to the plate.

## Shapes and Sizes: A Balanced Picture

Fat, skinny, large, small. Round, square, short, tall. Variety is the spice of life, and the secret to creating a plate with appeal. To design a dish with dazzle, you'll need a collection of contours and conformations.

Some foods can be shaped and sized for geometric variety. Most vegetables, for instance, can be cut into sticks or cubes or shredded. And if arranged with an eye for architecture (crosshatches of red pepper sticks or parallel lines of green onion olives), the plate will win extra praise. Another trick is to use large foods as a base for smaller items—a hollowed out green pepper filled with marinated fruit or a ratatouille of vegetables.

Look for products that provide a host of sizes and shapes.

Let your artistic expression flow and engineer a delectable design. For today's dining, it matters what shape.

## Art in Good Taste

A masterpiece of shapes and colors will earn applause on the visual scorecard, but the meal must taste as good as it looks for the chef to score a standing ovation.

Side dishes should be selected with the main entree in mind. A slice of meat served with a sharp mustard sauce or a peppery gravy calls for a mellow vegetable, topped with melted butter or a mild glaze. Distinct flavors can also be countered with sweet tastes—a dried fruit stuffing, sweet-glazed potatoes, or a sweet pickle served on the side. Or, take a cue from the Europeans and serve a tossed lettuce salad after the entree so guests can clear the palate and appreciate all the different flavors served.

## Dabbling in Sauces

Sauces save many a cook. They can make bland foods more flavorful and dry foods more palatable. There's a tendency to overdo on sauces, however. Just adding a sauce to a food doesn't make it gourmet. As a general rule, use only one sauce per meal. Spoon sparingly alongside the item or place underneath, allowing the food to shine on its own merits.

## The Masterpiece Framed

The plate serves as a backdrop for foods. A display piece for the dinner you've designed, the color of the plate should enhance and highlight the foods selected.

A white or beige surface is easiest to work with because it will complement any food color. While dark colors require more thoughtful menu planning, the background can bring a striking contrast to a light colored menu. To "frame" the meal you've sketched, choose a plate with a small border around the rim.

## Minimalist Movement: Less is Best

"Less" is the trend in quantities of food served, a movement nutritionists applaud. Keep second helpings ready in the kitchen for hearty eaters, but don't make others feel obliged to burst their buttons to prove they've enjoyed your meal.

By serving smaller amounts, you can leave more space between the food so guests can appreciate the balance of colors and shapes you've created. Make the individual offerings as stunning as the total picture by centering the food on the plate, keeping each item separate.

The home cook need not be a Michelangelo to create a plate with appeal. With a little time, a lot of imagination, and an eye for colors and shapes, common foods can be transformed into royal feasts, creating an aura of magic guests will remember long after the party's over.