

CHAPTER TEN

HOME SAVORY HOME

YOUR SINGLE BIGGEST ASSET
IN WEIGHT CONTROL

8 Reasons Regular Guys Should Learn to Cook

Some guys I know don't consider cooking a worthwhile venture. Other than the occasional stint behind the grill, they'd rather bask in blissful ignorance than feed themselves in more than three steps: stab, chew, swallow.

But ask any woman (or man who already knows how) why it is better to be a kitchen-savvy dude and you'll start to see what these guys are missing. Whether it's because they think it takes too much time or too much effort or wrongly assume it's a woman's job, men who never learn to cook are losing a huge opportunity to take their man skills to the next level.

1. Chicks dig it

There isn't a woman alive immune to a man who can make her a delicious meal. Step up to the plate boys, we're begging you.

2. Life skills are manly

You can fix your car, hunt wild animals, and build a campfire. Shouldn't you know how to feed yourself without a drive-thru?

3. You'll save money

Although there's a good chance you're single if you never learned to cook (see point #1), a home-cooked meal is a much cheaper date night (or singles night) than dinner for two at Chez Fancy—particularly with the 150 percent wine markup common at most restaurants.

4. It's faster than going out

Fancy date meals aside, cooking at home is almost always faster than going out—as long as you know what you're doing. Once you have a few basic skills down, you can stop wasting your time in fast-food spots simply because you don't know what else to eat.

5. Guy Fieri shouldn't be better than you at anything

Food Network star Guy Fieri has bad hair, bad clothes, and ridiculous sunglasses, but the dude knows how to cook. Are you going to let him upstage you like that? Of course you aren't.

6. Your puppy (aka girl magnet) will eat better

My notorious, adorable puppy, Toaster,* loves salad scraps (sugar snap peas are his favorite), eggs, meats, fish, and pretty much anything else we're willing to share. A balanced diet is as good for dogs as it is for people (just don't give them onions, garlic, or grapes).

7. You might lose weight

Cooking is one of the easiest ways to improve your diet and stick to reasonable portions. This is a recipe for weight loss, if you're willing to swallow it.

8. You might like it

Cooking is relaxing, fun, creative, and purposeful. It can also result in delicious eats. Why wouldn't you want to add it to your tool belt?

* Toaster was named San Francisco's Cutest Dog in 2011. He has a trophy and everything.

8 Reasons Awesome Girls Should Learn to Cook

I know a few girls who enjoy cooking, and even more who like to bake. But there is also a group who can't even boast the grill skills my regular guys have in spades. I know these girls well, because I used to be one.

When I was in college, saying I was a “bad cook” would have been generous. I couldn't cook anything—I even burned water on occasion and was generally afraid of stoves, pans, and ovens. I couldn't prepare any food that required more than a can opener and microwave, and fixing these flaws was not high on my priority list.

I only changed my tune when I got to graduate school, learned how amazing food could taste when great ingredients are prepared properly, and realized I could no longer afford to eat out in all the fabulous restaurants on my student salary. Unwilling to sacrifice the quality of food I was eating, I forced myself to start shopping at the farmers market and preparing my own meals. This switch changed my life for the better, and I would never go back to my kitchen-free days.

But why was I such a brat about it in the first place? Honestly, I thought I was above cooking. I was busy building my career and had better things to do than slave away in the kitchen, thank you very much. Cooking was for stay-at-home moms, I thought, not for ambitious girls like me. Who has time to be so domestic? I was a jackass and have since learned the error of my ways. This one is for all you awesome girls out there who still don't know the value of being kitchen savvy.

1. It's still hot

I'm sure you have no trouble attracting men with your intellect, but no matter how smart and beautiful you are, guys always melt for a girl who can cook an amazing meal. You may have already gotten into college, but extracurriculars still matter.

2. Cooking makes you beautiful

Nothing is more attractive than a woman who radiates health. Cooking nutritious food at home will give you sparkling eyes, shiny hair, healthy nails, and glowing skin.

3. Good food makes you smarter

Junk food creates spikes and dips in blood sugar that make you tired and kill your ability to concentrate. Cooking healthier food at home will give you the focus to stay sharp all day.

4. Cooking is more efficient

Going out may seem quicker because there is no prep or cleanup, but in the long run it actually takes more of your time. Once you have it down, you can make yourself a solo meal and have your kitchen back in working order in about thirty minutes. Win.

5. You'll save money

Being a girl is expensive. And if you're the type who likes to splurge on designer brands, every dollar counts. Cooking at home is a great way to save money on food, freeing it up for you to use on other things.

6. It keeps you slim

For most people I know, eating out is the single biggest factor in their ability to control their weight. At home you have complete power over everything you eat, and when you cook healthy foods, this works to your advantage.

7. You might one day be a mom

You may have your eye on the prize today, but if you ever plan to raise a family, your life will be a lot easier if you pick up some kitchen skills beforehand. Processed foods are bad for you and even worse for kids. Plan ahead for your future healthy family.

8. You might love it

Cooking is like art and science all rolled into one. It allows you to build skills, be creative, and de-stress, and when you're finished, you have a wonderful and delicious product to enjoy (and show off on Instagram). Cooking is more mentally stimulating than I ever imagined, and it is worth exploring for its own sake.

Super Simple Beans

Place a few cups of dried beans in a bowl and cover with water. Let them soak for several hours on the kitchen counter. Cover them with a plate if you're worried about dust or bugs or put them in the fridge if you live in a warm climate. The skins will crinkle for the first few hours of soaking; add more soaking water if it looks as though they need it. When the skins are smooth again and the beans have plumped up, they're ready to be cooked. Be sure to pour off the soaking water and rinse the beans thoroughly.

There's no wrong way to cook beans. Personally, I prefer to cook them in a simple beef stock. Vegetable stock works nicely too if beef stock isn't your thing, and even water will suffice. (You may need to add a little salt when the beans are done cooking if you use water instead of stock.) Beans absorb flavors and seasonings easily, so adding onions, peppers, garlic, celery, carrots, bay leaves, and other spices is wonderful, but your beans will then have those flavors for all the dishes you use them in. I keep the flavors simple during the initial cooking and then add spices later to match the mood of the dish I'm making.

Since I like my time in the kitchen to be as efficient as possible, I always cook my beans in a pressure cooker, which shortens the cooking time substantially. If you aren't in a hurry, feel free to simmer them for 1 hour or so on the stovetop instead. They're done when they're tender, but not falling apart. Follow the instructions on your pressure cooker for optimal cook times, but in my experience soaked beans take about 10 minutes under pressure.

5-Minute Lunch

The Tastiest, Healthiest Bean Salad on the Planet

Don't worry, this is not one of those nasty three-bean salads your well-meaning aunt brings to picnics. Beans are one of the absolute best go-to foods when you want something tasty and satisfying.

Feel free to substitute any vegetables you have or like better for the ones in the recipe or use lentils instead of beans. This dish turns out differently every time I make it, depending on what I have in the house, my mood, and of course the season. In the summer, for example, I tend to use cucumber, French radish, and a handful of arugula. Also feel free to experiment with different oils, vinegars, citrus, herbs, salts, and spices (smoked paprika is a great addition). I use this dish most often for a light lunch or substantial snack. It can be served warm or cold or can be made into a full meal by adding a fried egg (or other protein) on top with a side of greens. These instructions are for a single serving, but it scales easily.

Heirloom Bean Salad with Winter Vegetables

SERVES 1

1 cup cooked Rancho Gordo pinto beans

2 small or 1 medium carrot, thinly sliced

¼ cup sliced lo bok or daikon

½ green onion, finely chopped

2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped

1 tablespoon olive oil or nut oil

1 teaspoon rice or red wine vinegar

Salt and pepper

Place the beans in a bowl and add sliced vegetables, green onion, and parsley. I tend to go heavy on the herbs, because they add such a wonderful freshness, but feel free to experiment with the amount you like.

You're welcome to mix the vinaigrette beforehand, but if you're lazy like me, you can just add oil and vinegar directly to the bowl along with some salt and pepper and any other spices you choose. Gently stir the mixture with a spoon, taking care not to damage the beans. Adjust salt and pepper and enjoy.

How to Prevent Gas and Other Digestive Problems Caused by Healthy Eating

The number of questions I get from people about bloating, gas, and other digestive problems is not small, and since it is a sensitive subject, I'm sure the questions I get represent just a fraction of the concerns out there.

It's not uncommon to experience digestive discomfort when you change your diet. For one thing, any drastic change in eating can be a shock to your system, even if it's for the better. Also vegetables, legumes, and other healthy foods contain a number of nutrients such as oligosaccharides, soluble fiber, and natural sugars like fructose that can produce excess gas in the intestine.

Fortunately, several remedies can help prevent the embarrassment and discomfort caused by eating these foods. However, it is important to remember that everyone's digestive environment is unique, and different things will work for different people. This means you'll need to experiment with the following tactics in order to identify what works best for you.

1. Chew thoroughly

When food reaches your intestine that has been only partially digested, the bacteria in your gut cause the food to ferment, producing a substantial amount of (smelly) gas. More chewing helps your stomach acids do their job more effectively and can dramatically reduce the bacterial gas that gets formed.

Chewing is even more important when you're eating vegetables and high-fiber foods, because they are more difficult to break down in your mouth and stomach than, say, a slice of white bread. This means you need to grow accustomed to chewing each bite of food more than you did for processed foods.

2. Take smaller bites

For the same reason it is important to chew, taking smaller bites can help ensure that large chunks of food do not reach your intestine undigested. People who take smaller bites also tend to eat slowly, which helps prevent overeating—another cause of poor digestion.

3. Don't get too full

Overloading your stomach will eventually overload your gut, which can prevent proper digestion and cause discomfort. Both chewing and taking smaller bites can help with this, but you can also use our tricks to eat less without noticing if this is a problem for you.

4. Eat balanced meals

On a similar note, you don't want to overload your gut with one kind of food. If all you're eating is a giant mound of vegetables for dinner and you're having trouble digesting it, try balancing out your meal with more protein, starch, and fat. These will enable you to feel satisfied with a smaller volume of food (remember point #3) as well as decrease the load of any one nutrient that may be causing problems.

5. Increase vegetable and fiber intake gradually

Going from fast food every day to lots of vegetables can be shocking to your system. The bacterial environment in your gut is accustomed to a certain flow of nutrients, and drastically changing this can cause gas and bloating. Your gut can acclimate to a new diet over time, and the key to avoiding discomfort is to make changes gradually. If you're really struggling with all that broccoli, cut back a little and see if it helps. Once you're comfortable, you can try adding more if you like.

6. Experiment with probiotics

Most of the gas in your intestine is produced by bacteria, but there are also strains of bacteria that have the opposite effect. Adding probiotic foods to your diet can help populate your gut with helpful bacteria that can ease digestion and reduce gas. There are several strains of probiotic bacteria, and research suggests that different strains work better for different people. Experiment with different kinds, and when you find one that works, stick with it to maintain the benefits.

Examples of probiotic foods are yogurt, sauerkraut, kimchi, kombucha, and miso. Keep in mind that when you cook these foods, you will kill some of the active bacteria, so try to eat them raw whenever possible.

7. Soak your beans

Beans are infamous for producing excess intestinal gas, but proper preparation can mitigate this problem. Instead of buying canned beans, get dry beans and soak them for at least six hours before cooking them. Soaking beans and discarding the soaking water eliminates the majority of the oligosaccharides that cannot be digested, reducing bacterial fermentation and intestinal gas. If you do buy canned beans, rinse them thoroughly, since most of the oligosaccharides are in the canning liquid.

8. Eliminate wheat

Some people have chronic stomach problems that are caused by food intolerance. Wheat sensitivities are the most common, and eliminating wheat and gluten is often the only solution. If you've tried everything and are still in pain, it may be worth giving up wheat and gluten for four to eight weeks to see if it helps. If it works, now you know. If it doesn't, at least you tried.

9. Eliminate dairy

Like gluten, many people have sensitivities to lactose, the sugar in milk, that can develop over time. Cutting it out for a few weeks is an easy way to tell if it is a problem for you.

10. Avoid fake sugars

Sugar alcohols such as sorbitol and xylitol can cause digestive problems similar to the oligosaccharides found in beans. If you've been relying on artificial sweeteners to cut back on real sugar, this may be a cause of your digestive issues.

11. Reduce fresh and dried fruit intake

Fructose can ferment in the gut, and too much will result in gas and discomfort. If you've drastically increased your fruit intake, this may be problematic for your digestion. Cut back until you find the amount you can tolerate.

(*Note: I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt and assuming you've eliminated most of the high-fructose corn syrup from your diet already.*)

12. Use medication

Beano is an enzyme formulation that helps with digestion of oligo-saccharides that can cause gas. If you simply cannot miss out on your grandpa's famous chili, popping the occasional Beano at the beginning of your meal should help.

On the other hand, if you still haven't figured out what you're sensitive to and find yourself in an unpleasant state, Gas-X is an effective form of relief that can be used on occasion. It takes twenty to thirty minutes to work. As always, be sure to follow the safety instructions when taking any medication.

How to Cook Perfect Rice Without a Rice Cooker

This recipe works for any style of rice. I prefer short-grain brown rice for most dishes, but sometimes cook long-grain basmati rice or the delicious and nutritious Japanese haiga white rice.

Place 2 to 3 cups of dry rice grains in a large saucepan. Add cold water until it is almost full, and use your hand to swirl the rice around and loosen any dirt and dust. When the rice settles back to the bottom, dump the water off the top and repeat. Continue to rinse the rice until the water is almost perfectly clear, about four or five times.

After the last rinse, add cold water to the rice until you have at least three times the volume of water as rice. Don't worry too much about the amount and err on the side of excess. This is especially important with brown rice, which absorbs more water than white rice.

Place the rice and water on the stove and turn the heat on high. When the rice begins to boil, reduce heat to medium and continue to simmer, uncovered. This is a good time to start the rest of your dinner.

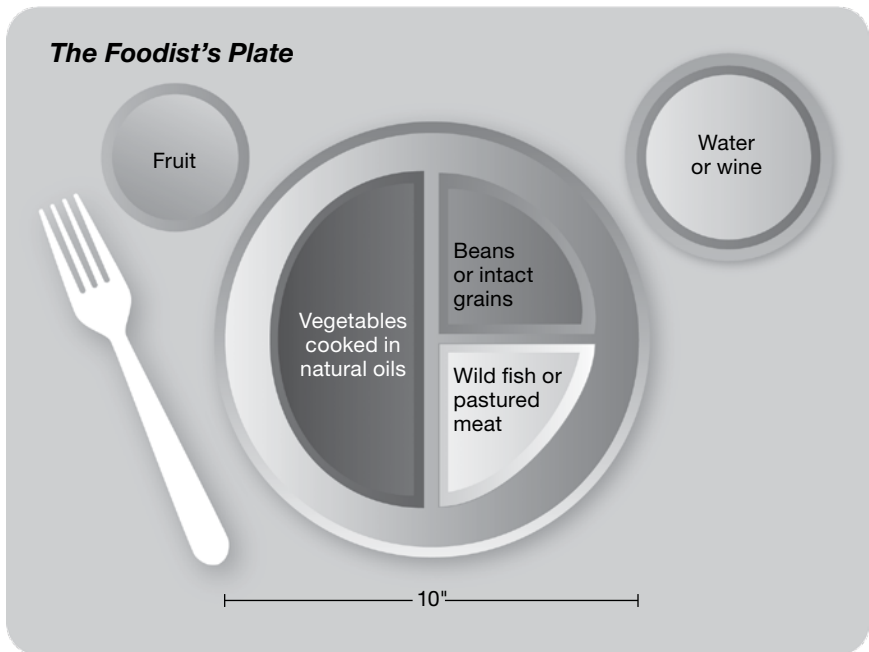
Check on the rice grains after about 15 minutes by grabbing a few out with a fork and testing them for tenderness (squish between your fingernails or teeth). Rice becomes opaque when it cooks, so there is no point in checking it while it is still somewhat translucent.

Once the rice does start to turn opaque, check tenderness every 2 to 5 minutes. If too much water evaporates and the rice starts to look soupy, add more water. You should add enough water at the beginning to avoid this.

Simmer the rice until it is *almost* tender enough to eat. If you aren't sure when it is ready, imagine you are an impatient person who wants the rice to be finished as quickly as possible, so you decide the rice is done and serve it, but later regret that decision because the rice is ever so slightly *al dente*. If you think it's ready (this is not an exact science, so don't overthink it), dump off all the liquid. A mesh strainer or splatter guard works nicely for this (simply hold it tightly over the pot and dump the water into the sink). Place the pot with rice back on the burner and reduce the heat to as low as it will go. Cover the rice and set a kitchen timer for 5 minutes.

After 5 minutes turn off the burner and set the timer for another 5 minutes. Do not lift the lid during this process unless you are concerned that you cooked the rice too long and want to check if it is getting too sticky.

After the rice has sat for 5 minutes, remove the lid, fluff the rice with a fork, and serve. If for some reason you think you overcooked the rice, you can skip the steaming step and just let the drained rice sit covered with the burner off for 5 minutes. If you undershoot, you can always extend the length of the steaming step.



10 Ways to Make Your Salad More Satisfying

I absolutely love salads, but if all you're eating is vegetables with a little bit of dressing, you won't get enough calories to keep you satisfied until your next meal. There are dozens of healthy additions you can use to make your salad more filling and delicious. Here are ten of my favorites.

1. Warm Ingredients

Grilled or sautéed onions, peppers, mushrooms, and meats wilt salad greens and make them slightly warm, adding depth and character to an otherwise boring salad.

2. Brown Rice

Adding a half cup of warm rice to a salad adds beautiful texture and flavor and keeps you full longer. Thawing one of your single-serving rice balls will add less than two minutes to your salad prep time.

3. Nuts

Walnuts, pistachios, and sliced almonds are my favorites, but feel free to try pecans, cashews, peanuts, pumpkin seeds, or anything else that sounds interesting.

4. Beans

Chickpeas, black beans, edamame, and other legumes are inexpensive and delicious ways to add some gravity to a salad.

5. Avocado

Half an avocado is sometimes exactly what a salad needs to take it to the next level.

6. Smoked Salmon

For a slightly more upscale salad experience, top your greens with a few slices of smoked salmon.

7. Quinoa

Mix in a small amount of quinoa as an accent or make it the base of a salad and then add cooked or raw vegetables and greens.

8. Grilled Meats

Your salad is a great place for summertime barbecue leftovers.

9. Egg

Boiled, fried, or poached, an egg is a wonderful way to make your salad more substantial.

10. Sardines

Canned fish is one of the easiest ways to get healthy protein and oils into your salad.

Tips to Keep Produce Fresh

1. Shop regularly

It is probably self-evident, but it is still important to state that the freshest vegetables are the ones you bought today. They are even fresher if you get them at the farmers market (picked yesterday) rather than a grocery store that imports produce from around the world. In order to keep fresh vegetables and fruit in the house, shop for produce and groceries at least once a week.

2. Shop strategically

This is my true secret to keeping food fresh. Different foods have different shelf lives, and you can take advantage of this fact when planning your meals for the week. Always make sure you buy a few robust vegetables for your Thursday and Friday night dinners (or try to schedule your restaurant dates for later in the week).

Cruciferous vegetables (like broccoli, kale, collards, cabbage, chard, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts) and root veggies (including carrots, beets, parsnips, radishes, sunchokes, and potatoes) store the best and can last well over a week in the crisper (twist off the greens if they're still attached—most can be eaten, so feel free to save them and throw them in salads). Summer squash can last for many days in a dry plastic bag in the crisper, and winter squash can last weeks and sometimes months on a shelf. Eggplant has a shelf life similar to summer squash and can be stored in the same manner. Delicate vegetables like lettuce, spinach, and other spring greens are not as robust and should be eaten more quickly. Juicy fruits like berries, stone fruits, and even tomatoes are more time sensitive and should be incorporated into meals earlier in the week.

3. Cook intelligently

Having a rough idea of what meals you are going to make during the week can help you keep veggies fresh in several ways. In addition to planning your dishes around which vegetables last the longest, you can prepare large batches of food early in the week and then freeze or refrigerate the leftovers to eat later. Avoid overspending

by buying ingredients to use in multiple different dishes rather than buying extra items for vastly divergent menus. For example, rather than purchasing red peppers for a stir-fry and radishes for a salad, you can skip the radishes and add the extra pepper to your salad instead.

When buying herbs, I like to get one bunch of Italian parsley (it keeps a long time and is incredibly versatile) and only one bunch of a more delicate herb like thyme, dill, or cilantro. With this strategy you can explore recipes of different cuisines that utilize similar ingredients. For instance, if I have cilantro, I may make Mexican food one night and a Vietnamese dish another night. Both incorporate similar vegetables and herbs, but the flavor profiles of these cuisines are entirely different. This is where it comes in handy to have a well-stocked pantry—go beyond the basics and learn to work with ingredients like fish sauce, coconut milk, and anchovies. This is a great way to delve into a new cuisine and explore different flavors.

4. Store properly

Proper food storage can go a long way in keeping your produce as fresh as possible. Generally speaking, most vegetables maintain their crispness best in the aptly named refrigerator compartment, the crisper. Crispers have different humidity settings than the rest of the fridge and are optimized for vegetables. I find that leafy greens and herbs keep best in dry plastic bags or plastic storage containers. When you get home with a large bag of salad greens from the farmers market, rinse them clean and spin them in a salad spinner. Let them sit out for an hour or so to completely dry, and then put them in large plastic containers to store for the week. With this strategy the crisper is not necessary.

Most fruit I don't refrigerate to protect the taste, but berries are an exception. I have had fantastic luck storing berries in a jar or storage container with the lid closed tight. I always put my berries away immediately after getting them home, trying to handle them as little as possible to keep any mold or bacterial spores out. I try to roll the berries into their new container without actually touching them with my hands. I buy berries much more often now, since they don't go bad for me as quickly as they had in the past.

Finally, ripe fruits produce gases that cause neighboring fruits to ripen more quickly. If you have something that is perfectly ripe or over-ripe, you may want to keep it in the fridge away from the rest (unless of course you want the nearby fruit to ripen faster). Likewise, keeping fruits on the counter in paper bags will trap the gases and cause them to ripen more quickly if you want to speed up the process.

5. Don't give up

Sometimes despite your best efforts you end up with a wilted head of lettuce or a floppy bunch of basil. But if wilting is your only problem and the plant looks otherwise edible (still green and free of mold), then all is not lost. The reason plants wilt is they lose water from their cells to the environment through osmosis. But the osmotic properties of leaves can be used to your advantage. You can revive wilted greens and even roots like carrots by submerging them in a bath of cold water for thirty to sixty minutes, which replenishes the water in the vegetables and allows them to regain their crispness. It is astounding how much they will perk up.

Mold is another issue when storing fruits and vegetables, but you can sometimes salvage a batch of food if you catch it early and carefully remove all traces of it to keep it from spreading to the rest of your produce (I recommend finding a new container for the uncontaminated portion). Remember, mold is a living, growing thing that breeds more of itself. Keeping foods in sealed containers and touching them as little as possible with your hands can help control it.

How to Make Cauliflower Taste as Good as French Fries

What's weird is that this is just roasted cauliflower; it couldn't sound any less glamorous. But for some reason roasting cauliflower completely transforms it from a vegetable people are pretty sure they don't like into something they just can't get enough of.

The coolest part of all is that anyone (like *any* anyone) can make this. I like to add curry powder to mine, but you can play around with whatever spices you like or just make it plain. (Pssst, try tossing in some fresh cilantro after it's done roasting.)

The trick is to use a very hot oven, around 500°. Covering the cauliflower for the first fifteen minutes steam-cooks it, while retaining the natural flavors and sugars. When you remove the foil the high heat browns and caramelizes the florets, giving the cauliflower a slightly crisp texture and complex flavor that is irresistible.

Cauliflower shrinks down substantially when cooked, and the biggest complaint I get from people about the recipe is that they wish they'd made more. It still freaks me out how good this is.

Roasted Curried Cauliflower

SERVES 2 TO 4

1 large cauliflower (or several small ones), about 2 pounds

Olive oil

Kosher or sea salt

Curry powder

Preheat the oven to 500°F (if you use a convection oven, 475°F may give you better results). Break the cauliflower head into medium-small florets and place them in a large bowl or baking pan. Be sure the pieces are as evenly sized as possible, or they will cook unevenly. The smaller you make the pieces, the quicker they will cook and the more caramelized they will become, which I consider a good thing.

Drizzle the cauliflower pieces generously with olive oil and season well with salt and curry powder. Distribute them

evenly in a single layer on the bottom of a baking pan. If necessary, use a second baking pan to make sure the pieces aren't too crowded.

Cover the pans with foil and place into the oven. Roast, covered, for 10 to 15 minutes. The cauliflower should be slightly soft and start looking translucent. If it is not, replace the foil and roast another 5 minutes.

When the cauliflower has finished steaming, remove the foil and toss the florets with tongs. Continue to roast, stirring every 8 to 10 minutes until the tips of the cauliflower begin to brown and become crisp (don't be impatient; it's better if you wait until they're crispy), approximately 30 to 35 minutes.

Super Easy Kale with Pistachios

The key to making a plain green vegetable worthy of an entire meal is adding something with protein or fat (preferably both). Nuts work perfectly, as do any kind of beans or lentils. If you want to make your life even easier, look for kale with smaller, younger leaves so the stems are tender enough to cook and eat.

For me this meal is a perfect lunch. Alternately, you can serve it as a side dish for several people. If you would like a little more substance, serve it with lentils and brown rice or quinoa. I sometimes eat it with sardines, smoked mackerel, or trout on the side.

Sautéed Kale with Pistachios and Garlic

SERVES 1 TO 3

1 garlic clove

1 bunch kale (or chard)

¼ cup chopped pistachios (or other nut)

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Sea salt to taste

½ cup cooked beans or lentils (optional)

Mince the garlic (letting your garlic sit 10 minutes after mincing increases its nutritional value). Rinse the greens and place them on a cutting board. It's okay if your greens are still wet; the water will help them steam. If you buy younger or smaller leaves, removing the stems isn't necessary. If the leaves have very thick stems, you may want to remove them by cutting them out or pinching the stem at the bottom and stripping off the leaves by running your hand along the spine.

Pile the leaves on top of each other all oriented in the same direction. Starting at the tip of the leaves, cut 1-inch strips until you have cut the entire bunch. If you are using Tuscan or red Russian kale, with thinner leaves, it will only need to be cut in this one direction. If your leaves are wide, cut them into 1- to 2-inch squares by making knife cuts in the opposite direction, parallel with the stem.

To a frying pan with tall sides and a lid, add the nuts and place it on medium heat. Lightly toast the nuts, stirring regularly with tongs. After 2 to 3 minutes, add the olive oil to the pan and allow it to heat up. Add the chopped greens to the pan, sprinkle generously with sea salt, and toss with tongs. Cover.

Stir the greens occasionally so they don't burn. Continue cooking the greens as they wilt and turn dark green. If they start to burn, lower the heat, add 1 to 2 tablespoons of water, and cover again to steam.

When the leaves are dark green and wilted, remove the lid and use tongs to toss, then clear a space in the center of the pan. Add the minced garlic in a single layer and cover with a small amount of additional olive oil. Allow the garlic to cook until it becomes fragrant, about 30 seconds, then mix it up with the kale and nuts. Add ½ cup of beans or lentils at this point, if desired.

Continue to cook greens uncovered for 1 or 2 more minutes. Taste-test a leaf and adjust salt to taste. Kale is done cooking when it is dark green and the stems are tender. Unlike spinach, it is very difficult to overcook kale, because it retains its crispness very well. Serve immediately.

Better Than Butternut: The Delectable Delicata Squash

Like most people, I hadn't heard of delicata squash before, but was a big fan of butternut. Butternut squash tastes rich and sweet and has a wonderful texture. It's also very filling and is a fantastic substitute for more starchy carbohydrates. But anyone who has tried to cook with butternut squash knows it isn't easy to work with. Butternut squash are huge, have a tough outer skin, and take longer than most vegetables to cook through. Lazy people don't cook butternut squash, and I came to accept the fact that I am one of those people.

Everything changed when I learned that not all winter squash require peeling. To me the difficult (and sometimes painful) peeling is the hardest part of cooking winter squash, so I was instantly intrigued about the possibility of alternatives. I was delighted to discover that the beautiful green Japanese "pumpkin" kabocha squash don't require peeling (woo-hoo!). I also discovered delicata.

Delicata are much smaller than most winter squash, making them substantially easier to get home from the market and more amenable to the needs of a small household. More important, delicata squash are a cinch to clean, cut, and cook, making them any winter squash lover's dream. Their flavor is even richer and their texture creamier than butternut.

I prefer to roast my delicata squash in a metal pan, allowing the outer edges to brown and caramelize. Although a Pyrex or ceramic pan will also work, I've found that I get better browning when I use a metal pan. Foil will give you a similar effect. The caramelization creates an almost sweet potato-like flavor. This is an all-time favorite winter home court recipe.

Roasted Delicata Squash

SERVES 2 TO 4 AS A SIDE DISH

2 to 4 delicata squash, depending on size (about 1½ pounds)

2 tablespoons olive oil

Salt to taste

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Clean the delicata squash by running them under warm water and scrubbing away dirt with a vegetable brush. If there are any hard spots on the squash, you can scrape them off with a butter knife.

With a sharp knife, cut the delicata in half lengthwise. This should be easy and not require any crazy hacking. With a spoon scoop out the seeds and discard (or save these and prepare them like pumpkin seeds if you wish).

Cut each delicata half into ½-inch segments, creating moon-shaped pieces that have slight bumps around the curve. Toss and coat the squash pieces in the olive oil, then arrange the pieces in a single layer in a metal baking pan. Too much oil can make the squash soggy. Salt gently. It's okay if the pieces are a little crowded, but try to maximize the surface area of the squash touching the pan. The browning only occurs where the squash and pan meet.

Place the pan in the oven and roast 10 minutes. Using a spatula (I use tongs for most veggies, but delicata squash are easily squished and hold up better if you don't pinch them), turn the squash in the pan so that the light sides are now touching the pan and the brown sides are facing upward.

Continue roasting, turning every 7 to 10 minutes until both sides of the squash pieces are golden brown and the texture is creamy to the teeth all the way through, about 25 to 30 minutes. Adjust salt. Serve as a side dish with the rest of your dinner.