

Ask Cook's Country

WE TRY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTION YOU THROW AT US!



YELLOW VERSUS WHITE ONIONS

Aside from color, what's the difference between yellow onions and white onions?

Rebecca Molanphy
Maple Grove, Minn.

In our recipes, unless otherwise specified, we use yellow onions, the kind that comes in 5-pound bags at the supermarket. But your question intrigued us, so we decided to hold a blind tasting of yellow and regular white onions (not sweet onions, which are also often white). We tried both kinds raw in *pico de gallo* (an onion relish), cooked in a simple tomato sauce, and slowly caramelized. Of a dozen tasters, more than half confessed that they could not detect a difference in the preparations; the others tasted only minor variations in sweetness and pungency. Our recommendation? Go ahead and use white and yellow onions interchangeably in any recipe that calls for "onions."

USING DRIED HERBS

During the times of year that some fresh herbs are not available, I find myself with the dried supermarket stuff. How do I know how much of a dried herb to substitute when a recipe calls for fresh?

'noodletrail' Via e-mail

We are not fans of most dried herbs, which have a dusty, stale quality than can ruin a dish. In fact, in a comparison tasting of nine common herbs, we found only oregano, rosemary, sage, and thyme to be usable in dried form, and then only in slow-cooked soups and stews rather than quick-cooked sauces and dressings. The other dried herbs we tried—basil, dill, chives, parsley, and tarragon—were unpalatable in all applications. Because fresh herbs are mostly water, their dried counterparts have a more concentrated flavor. If you have to substitute dried herbs for fresh, use only half the amount called for and stick with long-cooking recipes.

THE BEST WAY TO ROAST GARLIC

How do you roast garlic so that it's sweet, tender, and easily spread on crusty bread?

Gary Bacchetti Boston, N.Y.

We love the smooth texture and sweet, rich flavor of roasted garlic spread on a piece of bread, mashed into potatoes, stirred into soups, and blended into salad dressings. Our research turned up a number of different methods for "roasting" garlic, including baking, steaming, and even microwaving. With the exception of the microwave, which turned out bland, pallid garlic, all the methods we tried worked. But we had the most flavorful results with the garlic

we roasted uncovered rather than wrapped in foil, a common suggestion. The uncovered garlic not only mellowed and softened but caramelized as well, thus developing even more flavor.

Here's how to do it: Remove the papery outer layers from one head of garlic and cut off ½ inch from the top (not the end with the little roots). Drizzle the cut portion with 2 teaspoons olive oil and sprinkle with a little salt. Roast on a baking sheet or small baking dish at 400 degrees until soft and golden, 30 to 40 minutes, depending on the size of the head.

To remove the cooled garlic from the skin, use your fingers or a pair of tongs to gently squeeze the root end; the cloves should slip out easily. Any stubborn cloves that remain can be squeezed out individually. Mash the garlic with a fork to form a paste. Use it immediately or cover tightly and refrigerate up to one week.

EASIER FLIPPING?

My husband, the king of grilled sandwiches in our house, is enthralled by the Grip 'n Flip commercials. Looks pretty silly to me, but he won't stop talking about it! Have you tried it? If it makes him happy enough to make me another grilled cheese sandwich, I might break down and buy it for him.

Kara Watson Via e-mail

The Grip 'n Flip is a plastic utensil that is a cross between a spatula and a pair of tongs. One arm is a flat spatula, the other a U-shaped, two-pronged fork. Our first tests focused on the Grip 'n Flip's purported ability to flip fried eggs. The U-shaped arm is designed to fit snugly on either side of the yolk, supposedly to allow easy flipping and to prevent breaking the yolk. Unfortunately, it failed on both counts; limited maneuverability and awkward design resulted in torn eggs and many a broken yolk. We then tried the Grip 'n Flip on grilled cheese sandwiches and were pleasantly surprised. In fact, we loved it. We were able to flip the sandwiches neatly and easily with just one hand rather than having to hold the sandwich together with one hand and flip it with the other.

The Grip 'n Flip also worked as promised on bacon, allowing us to turn three slices at a time. While the \$19.95 price tag is a little steep, it's certainly worth-while if it will get

Though the Grip 'n Flip failed to produce intact eggs over easy, it did successfully grip—and flip—grilled cheese sandwiches.



more grilled cheese sandwiches out of your husband. Available at www.gripnflip.com.

MESS-FREE SLOW COOKING

I recently saw Reynolds Slow Cooker Liners at the supermarket and wondered if you had tried them. I use my slow cooker at least once a week.

Brian Chang Narberth, Pa.

Having spent far too much time scrubbing remnants of 10-hour chili out of our slow cooker, we were excited to try these new liners, which are bags that fit much like garbage bags, coming up over the rim of

the pot to be secured. The bags look like plastic, but they are actually made from nylon resins, the same materials used to make oven bags, so they are food- and heatsafe. After trying them, we can gladly say goodbye to our dishpan

hands. Even with some serious digging with a ladle, the bags stayed intact throughout the cooking and serving process. Best of all, cleanup was as easy as promised. We just gathered the top of the bag and tossed the whole thing in the trash. Though not all slow-cooker dishes leave a mess behind—after a simple beef stew, for example, the crock will need only a quick wash—we'll keep some of these bags on hand for those slow-cooker favorites that require serious scrubbing, such as chili, baked beans, or a meaty pasta sauce.

'SHAKE 'N BAKE' CHICKEN?

My family loves your Quick and Crunchy Pork Chops (April/May 2005), and we all thought the coating would be good on chicken cutlets. What do you think?

Lucille Yip Lahaina, Hawaii

We thought it sounded good, too, so we headed to the kitchen and found that you can substitute boneless, skinless chicken breasts for the pork chops in the recipe with a few small changes: Chicken breasts are thicker at one end, so you'll have to pound them to an even thickness to ensure even cooking. They're also bigger than pork chops, so you'll have only enough coating for three chicken breasts (the recipe doubles easily). Finally, the proper internal temperature for a chicken breast is 165 degrees. The chicken breasts should reach this temperature after 20 to 25 minutes in a preheated 425-degree oven. Go to www.cookscountry.com for our Quick and Crunchy Chicken Cutlets recipe.

To ask us a cooking question, write to Ask Cook's Country, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. See if you can stump us!