



## Common Cooking Terms

Do you know what it means to blanch a vegetable? What about to purée soup? Cooking has a vocabulary all its own, and here are some common terms to expand your culinary knowledge.

**Al dente** – An Italian phrase meaning “to the tooth”, used to describe pasta or other food that is not overdone but cooked just until it offers a slight resistance when bitten into.

**Bake** – To cook in the oven, causing the natural moisture to evaporate slowly and concentrating the flavor.

**Baste** – To spoon or brush food with liquid as it cooks, adding flavor and moistness.

**Batter** – A mixture of flour, fat, and liquid that has a thin consistency such as for cakes and pancakes. A batter is different than a dough, which maintains its shape.

**Beat** – To smooth a mixture by briskly whipping or stirring it with a spoon, fork, wire whisk, rotary beater, or electric mixer.

**Blanch** – To plunge food (usually vegetables and fruits) into boiling water briefly, then into cold water to stop the cooking process. Blanching is used to loosen skins (as with peaches and tomatoes) and to heighten and set color and flavor (as with vegetables before freezing).

**Blend** – To mix or fold two or more ingredients together to obtain equal distribution throughout the mixture.

**Broil** – To cook directly under or above the heat source.

**Broth or stock** – A flavorful liquid made by gently cooking meat, seafood, or vegetables often with herbs and/or seasoning in water.

**Brush** – Using a pastry brush to coat a food such as bread or meat with melted butter, glaze, or other liquid.

**Chiffonade** – A French term for cutting narrow strips of fresh leaves such as basil or spinach.

**Chop** – To cut into irregular pieces.

**Coat** – To evenly cover food with flour, crumbs, or batter.

**Combine** – To blend two or more ingredients into a single mixture.

**Core** – To remove the non-edible centers of fruits, such as apples or pineapples.

**Cream** – To beat butter or margarine with or without sugar until light and fluffy. This process traps in air bubbles.

**Dash** – A measurement equal to about 1/16 teaspoon.

**Dice** – To cut into cubes.

**Dough** – A combination of ingredients including flour, water or milk, and sometimes a leavening agent, producing a firm mixture for making baked goods.

**Dredge** – To cover lightly and evenly with sugar or flour.

**Drizzle** – To pour a liquid such as a sweet glaze, melted butter, or melted chocolate in a slow, light trickle over food.

**Dust** – To sprinkle food lightly with spices, sugar, or flour.

**Emulsion** – A mixture of two liquids that normally do not mix smoothly, such as oil and water. Emulsifying is done by slowly adding one ingredient to another while mixing rapidly.

**Fold** – A technique used to gently combine a light, airy mixture (such as beaten egg whites) with a heavier mixture. The lighter mixture is placed on top in a large bowl; starting at the back of the bowl with a rubber spatula, cut down vertically through the two mixtures across the bottom of the bowl and up the nearest side to blend.

**Grate** – To cut down food into fine pieces smaller than shreds.

**Grind** – To mechanically cut a food into small pieces.

**Knead** – A technique used to mix and work a dough to form it into a cohesive pliable mass. During kneading, the network of gluten strands stretches and expands, enabling a dough to hold in the gas bubbles formed by leavening, which allow it to rise. Kneading can be accomplished either by hand or by machine. Well-kneaded dough is smooth and elastic.

**Marinate** – To coat or immerse foods in an acidic-based liquid or dry rub to tenderize and add flavor before cooking.

**Mash** – To beat or press a food to remove lumps and make a smooth mixture.

**Mince** – To chop food into tiny irregular pieces.

**Poach** – To cook food gently in a liquid just below the boiling point.

**Puree** – To grind or mash food until it is completely smooth. This can be done with either a food processor or blender, or by forcing the food through a sieve.

**Reduce** – To boil a liquid until the volume is reduced by evaporation, thereby thickening the consistency and intensifying the flavor. Such a mixture can be referred to as a reduction.

**Roast** – To cook uncovered in the oven.

**Sauté** – To cook food quickly in a small amount of oil in a skillet or sauté pan over direct heat.

Scald – Cooking a liquid, such as milk, to just below the boiling point.

Sear – Sealing in a meat's juices by cooking it quickly over very high heat.

Set – Let food become solid.

Shred – To cut or tear into long narrow strips, either by hand with a shredder or with a food processor.

Sift – To aerate or remove lumps from flour or confectioner's sugar by passing through a fine mesh.

Simmer – Cooking food in a liquid at a low enough temperature so that small bubbles begin to break the surface; a very low boil.

Steam – A method of cooking where food is placed in a steamer basket over boiling or simmering water in a covered pan. Steaming retains the food's flavor, shape, texture, and many of the food's vitamins and minerals.

Stir-fry – The fast frying of vegetables and/or meat over high heat with continual and rapid stirring.

Toss – To thoroughly combine several ingredients by mixing lightly.

Whisk – To mix or fluff by beating; also refers to the utensil used for this action.

Zest – The thin brightly colored outer rind of citrus fruits. They contain volatile oils, which can be used as flavoring in cooking.