

Forum (NEW!!)**Garde Manger | An Experienced Perspective.****Home****History****Salad Greens****Cheese****Aspic****Charcuterie****Caviar****Chaud Froid****Carvings**

Garde Manger is considered by many to be the most demanding station/job in any kitchen. Garde Mangers need to be able to apply proper seasoning to food that is going to be served cold and in other cases, season food that is going to be served hot. Many chefs have the ability to season hot food, but lack the ability to season both correctly.

Garde Manger Chefs must be experts at seasoning, poaching, simmering, searing, roasting, frying, curing, drying, smoking, marinating, grinding, pureeing, forming, molding, piping, spreading, slicing, cutting, carving, rolling, crimping, tossing and finally presenting. Even though all the skills mentioned precede the actual plate or platter presentation, it's usually the plate presentation that gets all the attention.

It must be stressed that a great presentation will only go as far as the quality of the food being served. Garde Manger Chefs have to constantly be focused on wholesomeness, sanitation, seasonings, time and temperatures. Many items prepared in a Garde Manger kitchen have to be seasoned, cured, dried and smoked. In these instances the utmost care has to be taken to insure a quality product throughout the entire process. Seasonings need to complement the item being cured and not dominate. Curing times and temperatures need to be closely monitored to insure a wholesome and safe environment. Smoke intensities and flavors need to be balanced with time and the volume of food being enhanced. Chicken or salmon sitting in a smoker for too long a period of time or being exposed to an extremely intense level of heat or smoke will cause the main flavor to lose its identity and possibly dry out. Maintaining a keen eye on detail is a key characteristic in the complexion of a successful Garde Chef.

When preparing pates and terrines, Garde Mangers have to balance the types and amounts of proteins and fats naturally occurring in meats with the amount of fat that may need to be added to a recipe. These decisions can be based on whether the protein is meat, poultry or fish; whether it is to be pureed or ground; whether it is to be poached or roasted; whether it is to be wrapped in cheesecloth or plastic wrap; and whether the final product is to be served hot or cold. Garde Manger work goes well beyond the scope of sauteing chicken in a pan and saucing it as it is picked-up by a waiter. In many instances, Garde Mangers are the most versatile individuals in any kitchen, possessing skills and abilities far beyond those possessed by many Executive Chefs, Pastry Chefs or line cooks.

Let's consider the salad station of a restaurant. Many foodservice operations discount the importance of balancing the flavors and textures of salad greens with the flavors and textures of the oils and vinegars being used to dress them. Many do not realize that different oils have different flavors and that not all vegetable oils are created equal. Colors, flavors, textures and aromas all play a role in the assembling of a properly coordinated salad. Consider the vast array of vinegars available on the market; from the tart Balsamic to the sweet Rice vinegar and all the flavor combinations and levels of acidity in between. Consider the moderately flavored and hearty Romaine lettuce and the delicate mache leaf. Consider the sweetness and delicate consistency of hydroponic Boston lettuce and the moderately crisp texture and slightly nutty flavor of Kentucky grown Bibb Lettuce. Consider the moderate texture, earthy flavor and vibrant colors of lolla rossa and the flat, flavorless rusty looking red oak leaf. All these characteristics are the tip of the iceberg for a restaurant pantry line cook to consider. Yet this position is filled many times by an individual with limited experience. The position is treated as an entry level, yet all these considerations have to be taken into account for a simple salad that is going to be the first presentation that the customer sees and the first flavor combination that they are going to experience. The new employee should be tossing precooked pasta in a precooked sauce... make sure the pasta is drained.

To say the least, Garde Manger work goes well beyond the final plate presentation. Starting with the initial determination of quality and ending with the final sprinkle of biased-cut chives on a plate, Garde Manger work is constant attention to detail. True Garde Manger Chefs have a distinct passion for their work. They are able to traverse the canyon between classical and modern cuisine, because in order to be successful in today's market they have to understand the fundamentals that today's cuisine is built on. Every culinary professional should understand this. There is no substitute for education and experience.

A true Garde Manger has it all, including the ability to present beautiful plates and platters on an artistically arranged buffet accented with fruit, vegetable, tallow and ice carvings. Once again, easily the most versatile individual in a kitchen.

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