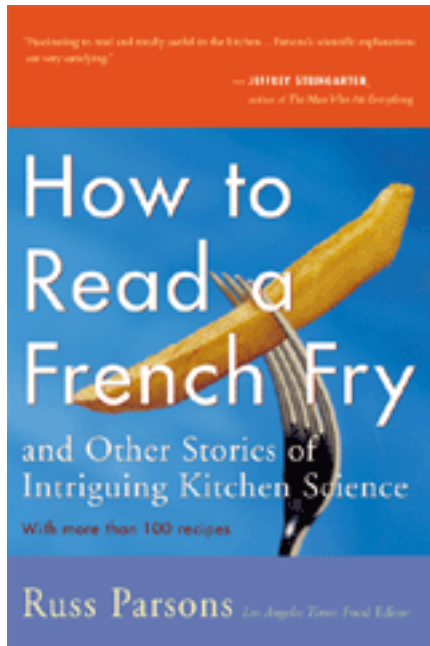


Press Release

How to Read a French Fry

by Russ Parsons

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“Russ Parsons knows that the best cooking comes from a genuine understanding of basic techniques, and he illuminates them here with lively writing and smart recipes. This is an unlikely creation: a kitchen-science book that makes you hungry and a cookbook that teaches, from an authority on food and cooking.” —Thomas Keller, chef and owner of the French Laundry and author of *The French Laundry Cookbook*

"Fascinating to read and totally useful in the kitchen . . . Parson's scientific explanations are very satisfying." — Jeffrey Steingarten, author of *The Man Who Ate Everything*

Introduction

Don't you miss having Mom around to answer those kitchen questions whose answers were second nature to her? Russ Parsons—food editor of the *Los Angeles Times*—brings us the kind of understanding Mom had in his first book, *How to Read a French Fry and Other Stories of Intriguing Kitchen Science* (Houghton Mifflin Company, May 9, 2001). It explains why foods cook the way they do, and has tons of tips and recipes.

"You can think of this book as a kind of modern cooking class, one that uses basic scientific principles to explain culinary truths—and, most importantly,

does so with only a minimum of technical language," writes Parsons in the Introduction.

How to Read a French Fry

How to Read a French Fry is filled with so much practical advice that you might want to think of it as an "anti" cookbook. Its intention is to get you to step back and examine some of the most important processes in cooking (frying, roasting, boiling, and baking). It then explains the science behind them and tells you how to use this knowledge to improve your own cooking. The chapters conclude with dozens of applied cooking tips, and the book contains more than 100 delicious and straightforward recipes that drive Parsons's points home. You'll learn how to get the cooking results you want and how to adjust the recipes to suit your tastes.

Parsons explores the chain of chemical reactions that makes you cry when you chop an onion or salivate when you eat a perfectly grilled piece of meat. He even tells you how to judge the freshness of a restaurant's cooking oil by looking at the french fries on your plate. In the process, he drops irresistible pieces of trivia -- telling us, for instance, that there's little difference in taste between the pure protein of whale meat and that of beef; it's fat that makes the difference. He explains complex concepts with engaging metaphors. (An emulsion, he says, is a combination of two normally antagonistic substances, "kind of like a friendly, functioning Congress.")

Once you understand the fundamentals of frying, for example, you can try cooking some of Parsons's awesome recipes for fried foods: Tuscan Potato Chips, Fried Little Fish, Sautéed Green Beans with Garlic and Sage. The chapter called "The Second Life of Plants" gives a lesson on plant respiration and proper storage. "Though we may think of fruits and vegetables as cheerfully inanimate, their lives don't stop at harvest," Parsons writes. You can try out your newfound knowledge by making a knockout Spring Vegetable Stew of Snap Peas, Lettuce, New Potatoes and Artichokes or the Ultimate Strawberry Shortcake.

You'll learn all about meats and what makes chicken different from fish and pork different from beef. You'll find out how knowing about muscle fiber and animal locomotion can help you prepare a great dinner. You'll be able to show off your skill with Sautéed Chicken Breasts with Fresh Tomatoes, Green Olives and Rosemary or Oven-Steamed Salmon with Cucumber Salad.

Similarly, Parsons shows how an understanding of starches can help you decide which kind to use to thicken a gravy, which kind of rice to choose for a dish and whether to use red or russet for a potato salad.

Science, Parsons reminds us, "is nothing more than a way of answering questions about the things that happen to us every day." *How to Read a French Fry* will help you answer some of those questions -- and make you a better cook in the process.

About the Author

Russ Parsons is food editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. He has won many awards for his journalism, including the Bert Greene Award and two James Beard Awards.

Cooking Tips

- Really fresh oil will not work as well for deep-frying as oil that has been broken in a little. If you're using fresh oil, be prepared to toss out the first batch of food: it will probably be lighter in color than you want and it may not have cooked all the way through. It's worth it to keep a little old oil in the pantry if you fry a lot.
- Boil green vegetables either without a lid or for less than 7 minutes. Much longer than that, and acids freed by cooking will begin to condense on the lid and rain back down on the vegetables, spoiling the color.
- Once you get vegetables home, they should go straight into the refrigerator. The only exception is the tomato, which is a fruit, not a vegetable. Never refrigerate a tomato.
- Buy the following fruits fully ripe: berries, cherries, grapes and citrus. All can be refrigerated, except berries, which will lose their flavor.
- The following fruits will soften and develop more complex flavors after picking: apricots, melons, figs, peaches, nectarines, plums and persimmons.
- You can refrigerate fruits such as apples, pears and mangoes as soon as you buy them.

- If you want a vinaigrette to remain stable longer, add some prepared mustard before you shake it. The mustard will prevent the oil from separating.
- The cardinal rule of cooking any pasta is to use plenty of water. This is especially true of dried pasta, which cooks for longer and throws off more starch.
- When using long-grain rice, always rinse it well under running water before cooking it. This does remove a very small amount of nutrients, but it also washes away a lot of excess surface starch that can make rice clump.
- You don't need to soak dried beans before cooking them. Soaking will speed their cooking time, but it will diminish their flavor.
- Use baking potatoes when you want to thicken something or when you want a smooth puree. Use boiling potatoes when you want potatoes that will hold their shape.
- While marinades can contribute a lot of flavor, as a general rule, they affect only the surface of the meat and do nothing for the texture.
- All meats, whether grilled or roasted, benefit from a 10-to-20-minute rest at the end of cooking to allow the moisture and the temperature to equalize within the interior of the meat.
- Adding an acid, such as vinegar, and a little sugar can make a piecrust more tender. It doesn't take much of either ingredient -- 2 to 3 teaspoons of acid or up to 2 tablespoons of sugar.

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