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How to develop your cooking philosophy

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A practical way to turn everyday kitchen choices into principles you can test and refine.

Decide what you want diners to notice

Choose one quality you want diners to recognise in your food, such as clear flavours, restrained seasoning or seasonal produce. Turn it into an observable decision. If you want the vegetables to stand out, test what the dressing does to a bite that actually contains the vegetables.

Make the principle useful in the kitchen

Write a short rule that can guide a decision, such as ‘adjust the dressing after tasting the main ingredient’. Record how you applied it to one dish, what you changed and the effect it had. When ingredient quality or season changes, adapt the decision while keeping the principle.

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Run a comparison at the table

Prepare two samples of the same salad and change only the acidity in one. Ask tasters to describe what they noticed before giving a preference. Compare their descriptions with your original aim and choose the version that makes the intended quality apparent.

Turn the idea into a criterion

‘I want clear flavours’ can mean several things. Write an observable criterion, such as ‘a taster can identify the mint after the dressing is added’. Specify what will stay the same, including portion weight and service conditions, and what will change.

Set up a simple comparison

Prepare both samples from the same batch and use codes instead of describing one as stronger or better. Serve at the same temperature and weight, and vary the serving order among tasters. Ask for descriptions before preferences to reduce the effect of expectations.

Decision sheet

Item	What to record
Principle	highlight the main ingredient
Observation	mint clarity, acidity intensity, lingering flavour
Decision	adopt the version or adjust it and repeat

Practical exercise

Serve two 40 g samples to each taster. Ask for a short description, then have them score how clearly they can detect mint from 1 to 5. Collect descriptions and scores and note the number of tasters. If preferences differ, return to the criterion you set before the comparison.

Limits of the exercise

This is a training comparison on one batch. Record what happened and use it to inform the

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next decision, particularly if the produce or season changes.

Further reading — University of Szeged — Sensory Evaluation in Food.

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