Extension News You Can Use
Stir-Fry Tips and Techniques

First things first, keep the pan HOT! The technique of stir-frying relies on browning to impart flavor to both the protein and vegetables. To do this, it is necessary to keep the pan hot. This can be done by:

- **Choosing the right cooking vessel.** Use a flat-bottom, large skillet on a kitchen stove to allow more of its surface area to come in direct contact with a flat burner. Woks work better on stoves where flames come in contact with both the sides and bottom of the pan.
- **Using plenty of heat.** Heat skillet over medium-high to high heat. Have food ready to go in the skillet as soon as oil gets hot but before it smokes.
- **Cooking food in small batches.** Piling food up in the skillet keeps it from browning. Cook meat or tofu and vegetables in batches. Cook slow-cooking vegetables first, then add those that cook quickly.
- **Removing excess moisture.** Pat meat/tofu and vegetables dry before adding to skillet.

Prepare Ingredients for Quick Cooking
Make sure when stir-frying that you have prepared all the ingredients you will need before you begin cooking. The following are tips that will ensure your ingredients will be ready.

- Make sure you have all ingredients beforehand and within reach.
- Freeze meat for about 15 minutes to make slicing easier. Slice across the grain to shorten long, tough muscle fibers and make it easier to chew.
- Slice extra-firm tofu into thick slices. Press slices between paper towels. Use a plate on top-weighted down with a heavy pot, can or book. Let tofu sit for 30 minutes to press out water. Cut into ½-inch pieces.
- Wash the vegetables ahead of time to ensure they have drained and are not too wet.
- Cut food pieces about the same size for uniform heating.

As Soon as the Oil Hits the Pan, Stick with it!
Stir-frying happens quickly, so don't walk away from the skillet. Keep an eye on the ingredients for proper color and texture as they cook.

1. Coat skillet with a tablespoon of vegetable oil. Heat for a few minutes until hot.
2. Spread about one cup of meat in skillet. After a few seconds, turn meat over and toss. Remove the meat from the skillet when it no longer appears red. If it foams instead of browns, then you have added too much meat at one time.

3. If using tofu instead of meat, cook until brown and crispy.

4. Stir-fry vegetables next starting with those that take longer to cook, such as broccoli and carrots. Then, add vegetables that cook more quickly, such as peppers and snow peas. Move vegetables around in skillet.

5. If using meat, add back to vegetables.

6. Push vegetables and/or meat aside in skillet to form a well. Add garlic and/or fresh ginger to the middle of the skillet and cook. Add a small amount of oil if needed. After cooking 15 – 20 seconds stir back into vegetables and/or meat.

7. Mix about a teaspoon of cornstarch in cool water before mixing with soy or other sauces. Slowly add stir-fry sauce to vegetables and/or meat and heat until thickened.

Marinate the Meat
Marinating chicken, beef, pork and lamb provides flavor and also helps ingredients brown. It does not need to be overnight. Toss meat in a marinade for about five minutes. The following are some tips on using marinades for stir-frying.

- Use a little cornstarch in your marinade to lightly coat the meat. This prevents overcooking and tough meat. It also binds other ingredients to the meat.
- Add soy sauce for a savory flavor boost.
- Mix in a little sugar. It is a flavor enhancer and helps with browning.
- Try a teaspoon or two of roasted sesame oil or vegetable oil to lightly coat meat. This makes them more tender and prevents chicken from becoming too dry.

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