



A Food Photography Guide for Everyone

Niki Achitoff-Gray, Vicky Wasik, J. Kenji Lopez-Alt, adapted from seriouseats.com

MANY THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS !

9/1 [Week #15– A]

5-8pm Pick-up

Rae Kerzner

Onudeah Nicolarakis

Alfred Rosenblatt

1pm Truck Unloading

Brian Gardner Hoashi

8pm Unclaimed Shares

Sue Izeman

9/8 [Week #16 – B]

5-8pm Pick-up

Monica Lagnado

Kimberly Riegel

Eynat Naor

1pm Truck Unloading

Valeria Vavassori-Chen

Brian Gardner Hoashi

8pm Unclaimed Shares

Jessica Pace

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Taking great photographs of food is a hard-earned skill — that's why some people are lucky enough to get paid for it. But it's also a lot easier to hone these days, no matter who you are; even a smartphone can yield gorgeous, high-quality images. Sure, professional cameras and lenses—provided you know how to use them — can make taking a great photo easier, but they're by no means necessary to the process. Just think of all the amazing Instagram feeds out there. What separates magazine-worthy photos from their less impressive counterparts isn't a fancy camera or expensive equipment. It's an understanding of what it takes to compose an appealing image. A great photograph is never a fluke—you may not know why it's special or how it came to be, but the fact remains that certain fundamentals still came together to make it happen.

The takeaway? There's just some basic knowledge and practice standing between you and some seriously mouthwatering food photos.

WHAT MAKES PHOTOS GOOD? First and foremost, a good food photo should evoke the food's best traits and its inherent deliciousness. The colors and textures of a dish should be celebrated, not muted or hidden. That means avoiding blurry snapshots, unappealing angles, and that all-too-common yellow cast at all costs. If your mouth doesn't water when editing your photos, you did something wrong. Here's what you need to up your food photography game.

GREAT NATURAL LIGHT. Good lighting is the single most important criteria for good photography, and the very best light is indirect daylight — a shady spot on a sunny day is the holy grail of natural lighting conditions. It gives your food a bright, even glow, and doesn't tint colors in the way that indoor lighting typically does.

But when it comes to natural light, you may find yourself tempted to instead move your food into that alluring patch of bright, beautiful sunlight. Don't. Direct sunlight tends to be harsh, creating dark distracting shadows and making whites and light colors so bright that they lose any discernible texture and shape. Think about it this way: in post-processing, which we'll dig into a bit later, you can usually add more brightness to a photo without many negative consequences; removing brightness, on the other hand, tends to leave an image muted and anemic.

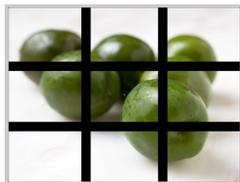
A similar rule applies to your in-camera flash. Don't use it. Never ever ever ever, no matter how bad the lighting. Flash photos of food create harsh reflections, weird colors, and glare, as well as funny-looking fall-off — your food looks like it's floating in space.

Moral of the story? If you're shooting indoors, your best bet is to set up during the day near a window — though again, outside the range of direct sunlight. In a restaurant, that may mean politely requesting a specific table; in your home, it may mean shooting in a room other than your kitchen. It can be helpful to take note of the quality of light you get in different rooms throughout the day and set up accordingly. But if your home mainly gets tons of direct light, don't despair. You can make your own indirect light by hanging a white sheet or shower curtain over the window — this light is diffused without adding any tint.

POSITIONING YOUR FOOD RELATIVE TO THE LIGHT SOURCE. Ideally, the light should illuminate the dish from a slight angle. If light comes directly behind you, it ends up casting an unwelcome shadow on your dish. Another option is to backlight the subject, which yields a moodier and often more interesting image. In this case, the light should come from above and behind the plate, maybe even a little off to the side. But figuring out where light should hit your dish ties directly to the angle and frame that you're shooting with.

A STRIKING COMPOSITION. Composition is basically an umbrella term for the arrangement of stuff in your photograph. In a well-composed photograph, you can immediately tell what the primary subject is, whether it's a person, a plate, or a single sprinkle on an ice cream cone. Composition is second only to lighting when it comes to taking a good photograph.

One helpful tool, especially when you're starting out, is the rule of thirds. It's a simple but



useful concept, and it works like this: Imagine your frame is divided into a nine-part grid (like sudoku). The rule of thirds says that your main subject — a plate, a slice of cake, an olive — should be placed either along those lines or at their intersections.

Sure enough, following those general guidelines does tend to yield images that are more familiar and appealing — our eyes are naturally drawn to those intersection points, which is why you'll notice that principle at work in everything (from films and photographs to paintings and graphic design). Offsetting your subject from the center of the frame catches the eye and can even be to used communicate motion or activity.

Picking the main subject to place in the grid is often easy and obvious; at other times, you may want to pick a specific part of a subject to highlight—say a drip of melting cheese rather than a whole grilled cheese sandwich—in which case you'll want to adjust your frame accordingly.

But framing your food is just one element of composition—you'll also need to decide what angle best suits your subject. A flat, round pizza will usually look best shot from directly above, while a tall dish of ice cream might benefit from a 45° angle to keep the focus on the three-dimensional contours of the scoop. Meanwhile, a burger stacked tall with all the fixin's will look great directly at eye level, so bring your camera down close to the table. Just make sure you have something in the background

This deserves a mention: informal photos on one's FB page for one's friends are always better when they feature or are accompanied by images of happy people enjoying the food.

- Judith Mermelstein, TUV HA'ARETZ

like a wall or a board to block out unwanted items in your kitchen. And remember, even food wants you to capture its good side. One side of a burger might look more appetizing than the other, and you might want to focus on the side or top of a roast turkey rather than, say, its backside. The best way to learn? Shoot from multiple angles until you've honed your instincts.

Decide whether your photo might benefit from zooming in or out. Will your image be better served by seeing the whole plate and some context, or just getting nice and tight into a specific part? Sometimes the single component of a dish is more exciting than the whole shebang. Zooming in on one cute little dumpling rather than a distractingly busy basket of six can be much more compelling. At the same time, a zoomed-out bird's-eye view of a table filled with different plates can paint a more diverse story than showing a single dish.

MAKING IT BETTER. Learn to use editing software — whether you prefer simple (like built-in camera tools) to complex (like Photoshop) — to remove hues and colored tints and casts (“white balance”) and to adjust brightness, contrast, etc. Crop to improve the photo, not to stoke an ego. And follow the rules of composition when doing so.

As with everything, practice and learn. Look at photos you admire and try to replicate the things you like about them. Most of all, have confidence in your (drool-worthy) artistic vision!

The Serious Eats authors: Niki Achitoff-Gray is the Features Editor and a graduate of the Institute of Culinary Education. She's pretty big into oysters, offal, and most edible things. | Vicky Wasik – born and raised in Greenpoint – is the Visual Editor. | J. Kenji Lopez-Alt is the Managing Culinary Director, an MIT grad, and chef. He has a fanatical following for his blog, the Food Lab at seriouseats.com.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX??

Swiss Chard, Red Beets, Red or Orange Long Peppers, Yellow Potatoes, Red Tomatoes, Green Beans, Red Onions

FRUIT: Peaches, Donut Peaches

SALAD OF SWISS CHARD, GREEN BEANS, POTATOES, COOKED TOGETHER

Adapted from a recipe in *getlista.com* | Serves 4

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|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 bunch swiss chard, stems and leaves separated | 1 red onion, diced |
| 4 leaves basil, or 1 tsp dried | 1 tsp Dijon mustard |
| 1 lb small potatoes, cubed and cooked | 1 tsp chopped capers or olives |
| ½ lb green beans, trimmed and chopped to 1" size | 2 tbsp red wine vinegar |
| | ½ tsp vegetable oil |

Chiffonade / slice the chard leaves and basil. Dice chard stems similarly sized to onions and potatoes.

In a small bowl or jar, mix the vinegar, mustard, and capers/olives together. Set aside.

Heat oil in skillet over high heat, and sauté the beans and chard stems till brightly colored. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add onion, and then chard leaves in handfuls and let them wilt in the hot pan, seasoning as you go. Toss in the cooked potatoes, and add the reserved mixture of vinegar, mustard, and capers. Stir well and serve hot or at room temperature.

Volunteer and do your work-out:

TRUCK UNLOADING mid-day!

We need volunteers for September and beyond. This is wonderful shift for those who want a mid-day task, from 1-2pm on Tuesdays or Thursdays (depending on pick-up schedule). Even if you've already fulfilled your mandatory volunteer commitment, please consider taking on an extra task – thank you for your help!

Contact: Alexa ALEXAWITZMAN @ GMAIL.COM

VEGETABLE HUNGARIAN LECSO

Aileen Galleano | Serves 2-4

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2 lbs mixed bell peppers | 2-3 tbsp smoked paprika |
| 1 lb tomatoes | salt / pepper, to taste |
| 1 very large onion – sliced | sour cream - garnish (optional) |
| 1 lb string beans | |
| 2-3 tbsp vegetable oil | |
| 3 cloves garlic - minced | |

Cut the peppers, tomatoes, onion, and string beans to the same size – whether you slice or dice, make them even.

Heat oil in heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat, and sauté onion until translucent. Add garlic, cook until fragrant. Turn off heat and stir in paprika.

Turn the heat to med-low and return pot to flame. Stir in peppers, tomatoes, string beans, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover and simmer about 30 minutes until it's stew-like. Add a little water if needed to keep a nice sauciness.

Serve over spaetzle or egg noodles, and top with a dollop of sour cream, if desired