



# A list of foundation French cooking techniques

Once a few of the French cooking basic techniques are mastered, your repertoire for fancier forays into 'la cuisine Française' can be extended. French cuisine dishes are created by the harmonious building of flavours, layer by layer, to enhance a main ingredient. Each technique has a purpose, and each purpose has an application which brings out the best results for each ingredient. Below are some common French cooking techniques:

- Coulis
- Roux
- Reduction
- Galette
- Confit
- En Papillote
- Emulsification
- Braise
- Mirepoix
- Saute

We also encourage students to explore other French cooking techniques as well.

## French Cooking Techniques Explained

**Coulis-** (pronounced koo-LEE) is French for a thick sauce that's made from puréed and strained vegetables or fruits. The original, classical use of the term was a meat sauce that was reduced three times. These days, savoury coulis is made from puréed veggies and sweet coulis, from just about any kind of fruit.

The difference between a **purée** and a coulis is refinement: to make coulis, the purée is strained. Use a rubber spatula to push the purée through a mesh strainer or **chinoise** (SHEEN-wahz) or a fine sieve, which removes the seeds and skin. The purée is now a coulis.



Something that distinguishes coulis from other sauces is that the purée is not cooked. You might cook the fruit or vegetable first, if it's necessary to soften it, but once it's soft you add optional ingredients then purée and strain.

**En Papillote-** French for "enveloped in paper" (al cartoccio in Italian), refers to a cooking method where ingredients – often including fish – are placed in a bag made of baking paper before being sealed and baked in an oven. This cooking method uses steam to gently cook chicken, vegetables, and fish. En papillote offers a self-contained, dynamic presentation opportunity. Consider that other cultures use this method also ie Italians cook pasta al cartoccio.

**French Mother Sauces-** The five French mother sauces are béchamel, velouté, espagnole, tomato and hollandaise. Developed in the 19th century by French chef Auguste Escoffier, mother sauces serve as a starting point for a variety of delicious sauces used to complement countless dishes both sweet and savoury from all around the world (considered) as unofficial extended relatives of these five sauces.

Three techniques are used to create the 5 : Beyond flavour, the most important element of any sauce is its ability to suit its purpose, to smother and cling to whatever it gets drizzled, dolloped, or poured on. That means choosing the right sauce and making the sauce stable and the right thickness with one of the three techniques; a **roux**, an **emulsification**, or a **reduction** (liquid that's slowly cooked down until thick).

**Roux-** Is a shortening of the term, beurre roux, which in French translates as "brown butter." To use flour for thickening, you'll first need to make a roux—an equal mixture of flour and melted butter cooked over medium heat, then a liquid gets added ( milk, cream, stock). This mixture then boils, thickens (reduces), and becomes the base of many sauces.

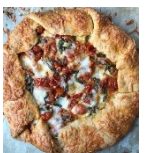
1. **Béchamel:** Roux + Dairy (traditionally milk or cream)- This is the most basic and once you have tasted homemade macaroni & cheese you won't look back. Create other sauces: Mornay is made by adding Gruyère or Parmesan, and mustard sauce is made by adding mustard. Croque monsieur is a classic French sandwich filled with ham and bathed in a warm, cheesy béchamel sauce. Add a fried egg and you've got croque madame. What else can be added? Try adding a dash of a umami flavour boost from another cuisine ie miso or soy, or vegemite??
2. **Velouté:** Roux + White Stock (traditionally chicken, but also vegetable or fish)- Technically not a finished sauce, it's used as a flavourful starting point for gravies, sauces and other dishes. Consider soups, pie fillings and seafood sauces.
  - Make Velouté with veal/ beef stock, and use it to make Swedish Meatballs.
  - Smother savoury egg dishes with a herby gravy for breakfast.
3. **Espagnole:** Roux + Brown Stock (traditionally veal or beef)- Also known as brown sauce, Espagnole begins with a **mirepoix** (carrots, celery, and onions), beef stock, and deglazed brown bits (fond) from beef bones. From there, the sauce can be built on with additions like tomato paste and spices. Consider tamarind paste, known as an Asian cuisine ingredient with a tart, sweet, or sour taste, which can cut through the fattiness in a stew or the meat the sauce is being served with. **demi-glace**, a rich French brown sauce, combine the Espagnole with more beef stock; to create Bordelaise, a red wine sauce that pairs well with steak and mushrooms, mix the demi-glace with red wine and herbs.
4. **Tomato:** Roux + Tomatoes (or, the Italian style, skipping the roux and simply reducing tomatoes over medium-low heat, relying on the reduction to build flavour and create thickness. Probably the first mother sauce you have ever tasted served over pasta, (known as a Napoli sauce in Italy). Tomato sauce is often a mixture of just onions, garlic, and tomatoes. Tomato sauce can be used creatively, with any cuisines outside of French- think middle eastern, Indian, Italian, Eastern European ....
5. **Hollandaise:** Egg Yolks + Clarified Melted Butter + Acid (like lemon juice or white wine) -Think of Hollandaise as a fancy mayonnaise that uses clarified butter in place of oil and is drizzled over asparagus and eggs without judgment. Hollandaise takes patience, as mixture needs to be tempered so that the eggs do not curdle. The sauce can break easily, but you can patch things back together by adding a little heavy cream and whisking until the sauce returns to its smooth state. Instead of using a roux or a reduction, Hollandaise uses the method of **emulsification** an opportunity for a tasty "food science" experiment or conversation re where else emulsifications in food occur. ie vinaigrettes (salad dressings). Also, how to rescue a hollandaise emulsification.

Other hollandaise variations-

- Involve the folding through of whipped cream for a light and airy coating sauce.
- Use flavoured butters- burnt or miso.
- **Bearnaise** is a close relative flavoured with lemon and tarragon with white wine vinegar.
- Consider serving a plant based green tomato **Benedict** or **Florentine**.
- Chilli spiked replacement for traditional Mayo in a Bahn Mi.

**Braise-** Braise when your goal is deep levels of flavour and soft, melty caramelized texture. Braising doesn't have to be hours long in preparation. Depending on the protein or vegetable, quick braises can be achieved eg Ratatouille, like other braises, is a rich mixture of eggplant, zucchini and capsicum cooked in a garlicky tomato sauce. Consider the time to achieve this level of flavour with vegetables vs meat. This can also be a delicious main course by cracking eggs into the stew to poach gently while on the stove. Also consider a pressure cooker to gain time back when developing recipes.

**Galette-** Is simply a flat, round cake made of pastry dough or bread. Ranging from pancake-like pastries to what looks like a rustic freeform pie, the openness to creative interpretation and individualistic freedom make galettes an approachable culinary skill for all to enjoy. They can be made with sweet or savoury pastry and fillings.



**Mirepoix-** A mirepoix plays an important role in flavouring soups, stews, casseroles, braised meats, and marinades. Mirepoix (pronunciation: meer-PWAH) is the aromatic flavour base made by lightly cooking onions, celery, and carrots. The vegetables are cooked slowly in butter or oil in order to develop the flavours without browning or caramelizing them. There are many versions across many cuisines.



**Confit-** The French word “confit” ( con-fee) literally means to preserve. Food must be cured in salt (when necessary) and slowly cooked in fats like duck fat, chicken fat, olive oil, or sugar syrup (most commonly used to confit fruit or citrus peels) at low temperatures.

- Vegetables and herbs such as eggplant and garlic confit
- Meat (most often made from the bird’s legs)
- Fruit confit (like candied citrus and preserved cherries)
- Condiment confit (commonly onion and chilies)

**Sauté-** The word is culinary-language for browning or cooking a food quickly over fairly high heat, using a small amount of fat in a wide, shallow pan with curved edges. The curved edges allow you to flip the food in the pan. “sautéé” comes from the French verb “sauter,” meaning “to jump.” This term is used for two reasons: first, food tends to “jump” around in a hot pan when it’s cooked in a small amount of oil. Second, the technique often uses wrist action to toss food in the pan, making it look like it’s jumping. This is a useful skill to have.

To sauté, you only need a skillet and some cooking oil. However, one important thing to keep in mind is the **smoke point of the oil** you use.

The technique is fast and results in healthy, tasty meals due to the small amount of oil needed.

You can learn how to sauté correctly by following a few simple steps. Rather than stirring constantly, let your food cook without agitating it before you flip it. You should only need to flip a few times at most. You don’t want to over-stir, as getting a thorough cook on each side is what the sauté technique is aiming for.

When your food has sautéed enough on one side, grab the skillet by the handle. Tilt it slightly away from yourself and flick it upwards quickly. The food should “jump” in the air as you toss it and then you’ll catch it again in the pan.

Practise your flipping with no heat or oil and raw vegetables only.



**RESOURCES -** Larousse Gastronomique, The rules to French cooking are laid out in this encyclopaedic resource. Google any of the terms or dishes mentioned in this list to go down a rabbit hole of delicious food

## French Cooking Terms

**Bouquet Garni-** is what the French call a little bundle of bay leaves, sage and thyme. It goes well with chicken, these “hard” herbs are added to release their flavour in sauces and soups over the cooking time. The bouquet garni is one way the French layer flavour in sauce dishes.

### Basic French knife skills:

Brunoise, Dice, Julienne, Batton, Chiffonade

