These 5 secrets are just good cooking habits that anyone can adopt and mostly, just involve using your senses in addition to following the recipe to get the best results. They’re all simple and easy, but will have everyone asking, “Wow, how did you know to do that? It wasn’t in the recipe.” And that’s when you know you’re a real cook, and not just a recipe follower.

SECRET 1

Season beyond what the recipe calls for

Recipes never explicitly state all the times you should be seasoning your dish, so add a small pinch of salt every time a new ingredient is added to the dish. Flavors take time to build and the earlier you start seasoning, the deeper and more concentrated your flavors will become in the final product. For meats, salt & tenderize with a fork the night before. For pasta, salt the water generously.

SECRET 2

Heat is a critical part of cooking

Heat is a critical part of cooking. Oil should be hot when you add ingredients; otherwise they’re just sitting in oil vs. getting cooked in oil. Tip pan back & forth; oil is hot when you see striations in it (like legs in a wine glass) and it shimmers. Use oils with high smoke points, like avocado, coconut, or grapeseed for high-heat cooking.
SECRET 3

Liquids can add flavor and prevent burning

Sometimes your pan might dry up. This is OK! Add a few drops of water, broth / stock, or wine. This will scrape up any brown bits that have formed on your pan, add flavor, and keep your food (and pan) from burning. Remember, sight is a key part of cooking!

SECRET 4

Taste and adjust

You’ll never experience a bland dish if you learn to trust your taste. If something tastes bland, add some salt or spices. If it’s too tart, add some sweetener, like sugar or honey. If it needs some zing, add some acid or something spicy, like hot sauce or a pinch of cayenne. Remember, recipes are just meant to be guides; you’re the chef, and you get to determine how the final product tastes.

SECRET 5

Acid can transform your dish

Acid or sourness has the effect of highlighting other flavors, which can make the tastes of a dish so much more powerful and dynamic. Always keep lemons and a selection of vinegars around, and finish a dish with a few drops of acid. Do this at towards the end of cooking as heat can dull the effect.