



## How to Read a French Fry: and Other Stories of Intriguing Kitchen Science

By Russ Parsons

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### How to Read a French Fry: and Other Stories of Intriguing Kitchen Science By Russ Parsons

Why can you stick your hand into a 450-degree oven but not into 212-degree boiling water without burning it? Why does fish taste different from meat? Why do you cook pork differently from beef? Why should you always start cooking dried beans in cold water, not warm? Why should you never cook a Vidalia onion?

What's the only kind of marinade that's really an effective tenderizer? Why is strawberry-rhubarb a good combination, scientifically speaking? And why don't potatoes fried in fresh oil ever brown completely, no matter how long they're cooked?

"Cooking is full of questions that science can help you answer, questions that can make you a better cook," writes the award-winning Los Angeles Times food editor, Russ Parsons. In this entertaining book packed with fascinating tidbits, Parsons explores the science behind such basic cooking methods as chopping, mixing, frying, roasting, boiling, and baking. You'll learn why soaking beans can't offset their gaseous effects, why green vegetables shouldn't be cooked under a lid for long, which fruits you can buy unripe and which you should buy fully ripened, which thickener to choose for your turkey gravy, which piecrust is foolproof for a beginner.

Along the way, Parsons slips in hundreds of cooking tips, provocative trivia, and touches of wit that make his scientific explanations go down smoothly. He also includes more than a hundred recipes that deliciously exemplify the principles he describes, from Tuscan Potato Chips and Crisp-Skinned Salmon on Creamy Leeks and Cabbage to Chocolate Pots de Creme and Ultimate Strawberry Shortcake.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this unique book, Los Angeles Times food editor Parsons combines complex science (rendered accessible to lay readers), workable cooking techniques, and excellent recipes. Each chapter addresses a specific culinary-scientific process (e.g., deep-frying, the secret post-harvest life of fruits and vegetables), provides a list of rules to follow therein, then offers a range of recipes that use the technique in question. In a chapter titled "From a Pebble to a Pillow," for example, Parsons explains the various ways in which grains, beans and other starches cook. He clears up myths about cooking beans and explains what makes an apple "mealy" (it's the pectin). The chapter ties up with some guidelines for preparing starch-thickened sauces, pasta, etc. Recipes include Smoky Cream of Corn Soup, a flour-thickened concoction, and a Gratin of Sweet Potatoes and Bourbon. The recipes are never gimmicky but are genuinely appealing, for instance Smoked Tuna Salad in Tomatoes and Lavender Fig Tart, and they are evidence of how a handful of techniques can turn out diverse results. Scientific information is handled in a light tone with plenty of examples. With his analyses of frying, roasting, and other processes, Parsons proves that the unexamined dish is far less rewarding than the meal we understand. (May 9)Forecasts: A truly valuable resource for the serious cook, with excellent recipes to boot, this deserves a wide audience, but its vague title may perplex potential readers.

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From Library Journal

Award-winning journalist and Los Angeles Times food editor Parsons offers this delightful book that is one part kitchen science, one part cookbook. Ever wonder why onions make people cry, or why some potatoes are better for boiling rather than baking? The author answers these questions and discusses other basic issues like cooking processes (e.g., frying, emulsifying, and roasting). Using the premise that an understanding of the basics enables people to become better cooks, the book uses science to explain process. It then demonstrates with more than 100 recipes, ranging from macaroni and cheese with green onions and ham to apricot-almond clafoutis. While the author's conversational tone simplifies complex scientific processes, it sometimes makes it difficult to glean information; thankfully, each section contains lists of cooking tips and advice for quick reference. Recommended for public and academic libraries. Pauline Baughman, Multnomah Cty. Lib., Portland, OR

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From [Booklist](#)

Cooks who want to know why they do what they do in the kitchen will find answers to many of their questions in Parsons' *How to Read a French Fry*. Parsons explains in easily understood terms the chemistry and mechanics of the art of deep fried foods. He also explicates the behavior of proteins whose physical changes when exposed to heat and moisture govern the success of everything from simple boiled eggs to roasted meats and tender pie crusts. Recipes give readers a chance to test for themselves the physics that underlie all cooking techniques. These include a fancy green goddess salad, creamy risottos, and a sophisticated lavender fig tart. *Mark Knoblauch*

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## **Users Review**

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#### **Leonard Parnell:**

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#### **Miranda Durkee:**

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