

KITCHEN HACKS

FOR SCHOOL NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS

Kitchen Hack - a tool or technique that makes YOUR life easier when preparing food! Who doesn't want to learn some fun useful kitchen hacks?

Challenge: The cutting board slips around on the prep table.

Hack: Place a clean dampened reusable or disposable towel under the cutting board. It will anchor it in place!

Challenge: It takes forever to peel vegetables.

Hack: If you are using a standard peeler, your blade is actually sharp on both sides. Instead of doing a long, dragging motion in one direction, you can move the peeler back and forth, cutting your peeling time in half!

Challenge: It takes all day to remove grapes off the stem.

Hack: Grab a bunch of grapes and rub them back and forth between your two gloved hands. The grapes will fall right off the stem!

Challenge: Apple wedges brown, and soaking them in lemon juice makes them too sour.

Hack: Place apple wedges in an equal combination of pineapple and lemon juice. There is still enough acid to prevent browning, and the pineapple juice balances the sourness of the lemon!

Challenge: Cutting cherry tomatoes in half looks nice, but it can be a lot of effort.

Hack: After washing and drying cherry tomatoes, grab a handful and place them on your cutting board. Place a flat tray or plate on top of the cherry tomatoes, pressing firmly enough to hold them in place, but not so hard as to squish them. Using your chef's knife or a long, serrated knife, turn it horizontally between the cutting board and flat tray/plate and carefully cut through the centers of the tomatoes. Now instead of cutting one at a time, you can cut multiple at once!

Challenge: The vegetables are not cooking fast enough or evenly in the steamer.

Hack(s):

1. Defrost frozen vegetables before you steam them to cook them quickly.
2. Use a 2" perforated steamtable pan; the holes in the pan allow for steam to hit all sides of the vegetables.
3. Do not overload the pan. For example, use 4 pounds of frozen broccoli florets or 3 pounds of fresh broccoli florets. If you overload the pan, it will take double the time because the steam won't be able to reach the vegetables in the middle easily!

Challenge: The raw vegetables look dried out and/or are too bitter for the kids.

Hack: Try blanching! Place your fresh vegetables in a 2" perforated steamtable pan, and place in the steamer for about 45 seconds or just until the color pops and the vegetable turns vibrant in color! Remove from the steamer and place immediately on a pan of ice, then put the pan in the refrigerator. Once cool, they are ready to use in veggie cups and salads.

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Challenge: Boiling eggs to prepare hard cooked eggs is too time consuming.

Hack: Place eggs in perforated steamtable pan and steam for 13 to 15 minutes.

Challenge: Freshly cooked hard-boiled eggs are difficult to peel.

Hack(s):

1. Use older eggs if possible. They allow for easier peeling.
2. Once cooked immediately submerge in an ice bath, and leave the eggs in the iced water until cold. This helps to separate the shell from the egg.
3. When ready to peel, place eggs all together in a 4 or 6-inch-deep steamtable pan, and shake back and forth to crack the shells all at one time!

Challenge: Chopping hard boiled eggs can be tedious.

Hack: Place a cross-wire grid grated cooling rack over a container, and press the eggs horizontally through the grates to create instant diced eggs!

Challenge: Pasta does not hold well, and it is difficult to batch cook in the tilt skillet or steam jacketed kettle.

Hack: Try cooking pasta in the steamer! Place a 4" perforated steamtable pan inside a 4" solid steamtable pan. Place 2 to 3 pounds of pasta in the pan(s) and cover with water; it should be about 1 to 2 gallons of water. Place in the steamer and cook until al dente. The time it takes to cook in the steamer is usually comparable to the time it takes to boil. Once cooked, immediately pull the perforated pan out of the solid pan for instant draining!

Challenge: The refried beans are difficult to get out of the can.

Hack: Open the can, cover with film wrap and place in the steamer for 3 to 4 minutes.

Challenge: The refried beans get crusty and dried out on the serving line.

Hack: Before heating the beans, add some salsa for moisture, and be sure to mix one last time before placing them on the line and covering with cheese! One cup of salsa to 1 bag or can of beans usually does the trick.

Challenge: The roasted veggies aren't cooking properly - they seem to get steamed instead of caramelized or aren't cooking evenly.

Hack(s):

1. Make sure not to overcrowd the pan when roasting vegetables. There shouldn't be more than approximately four pounds of produce per full size sheet pan and it should be spread out in a single layer.
2. Be sure the produce is cut into evenly sized pieces and that all pieces are evenly coated with oil.
3. Ensure the oven is preheated to at least 350 °F - 400 °F convection depending on your recipe.
4. When removing the vegetables from the oven, allow them to rest on a speed rack with space in between each sheet pan to prevent them from steaming. No sodium seasoning can be added once removed from the oven for extra flavor!