

## Simple Pan Sauce

Have you ever thought about how your mom or grandma used to cook for you? Comfort foods with a cream-of-mushroom soup base or loaded with gravy. It is safe to say we do not cook like this nearly as often anymore. Many people have learned to cook more simply, healthily, and quickly.

With these simple recipes, I think we have lost the ability to make a sauce. I do not mean a gloppy, heavy concoction that is slathered all over everything on your plate. I'm talking about a perfect spoonful or two of flavorful liquid to enhance simply prepared foods.

True pan sauces are simply a reduction of liquids, flavorings (aromatics like shallots and herbs), and enrichments (such as butter or cream) to give the sauce wonderful flavor and add a little body. Making a pan sauce is much simpler than you think, so follow along to learn how.

The first step to a good sauce is using a stainless steel or cast iron pan for cooking the main portion of the meal. You could use chicken, steak, pork, fish, tofu, cauliflower steak, or even a skillet full of diced veggies. Whatever you choose, cook it until it is nicely browned and some brown food bits (caramelized sugars) are stuck in the pan.

After the food of choice has been browned nicely, set it aside on a separate plate to rest. Pour off excess fat from the pan, leaving just a thin coating. Now that the pan is empty, notice what is left. The stuff in the bottom, called fond, is culinary gold. The fond should be a nice brown color. If it turns black, you should reconsider making a pan sauce as it may taste burnt.

Delazing the pan is when you add a liquid and heat it with your "fond" to get all those delicious bits off of the bottom of the pan. You could use water for this step, but why do that when you can use something that will make your sauce more flavorful? My recommendations are stock, juice, wine, beer, or liquor. Use enough liquid to fill the pan about one-quarter of an inch. As the liquid heats, use a spatula to lightly scrape the fond. As the fond releases, it will give delicious deep, rich flavors to the liquid, enhancing the sauce.

Next, cook the liquid down to concentrate the flavor. You will want to do this until the liquid is about one-eighth inch deep in the pan or reduced by half. Remember, we are making a simple sauce perfect for adding just a tablespoon or two to your dish.

Fish with butter. A small amount does some wonderful things to the sauce. Fat is a flavor carrier, so a small amount of butter will enhance the flavor of the sauce. The butter will also thicken the sauce slightly and give it a smoother mouthfeel.

Add salt and pepper to your taste. Lastly, spoon the sauce over your sauteed food, and serve.

To enhance that basic idea, but only if you are so inclined:

- After the initial sauté and removal of browned food from the pan, add some aromatics and sauté them until soft. Aromatics, like garlic, onions, shallots, and ginger, provide a great base flavor for the sauce.

- Add spices and sturdier herbs like rosemary and thyme along with the aromatics. Add more delicate herbs like cilantro and chives right after the butter.
- Replace the butter with a different creamy ingredient. Try cream, goat cheese, or blue cheese.

Being able to whip up a pan sauce is a skill that can take weeknight cooking to a new level, make holiday dinners memorable, and even salvage a piece of meat cooked a little past the ideal temperature.

(Sources: