

[Print this page](#)[Return to Article](#)

tasteofhome

Perk Up Party Platters with Pretty Produce

When planning a menu for a special occasion, the focus is often on what foods to feature. But how the foods are displayed or served can really make a statement.

Vegetable garnishes can add just the right touch to a meat and cheese tray at a large graduation party or to individual dinner plates at an intimate gathering to honor mom or dad.

Making garnishes doesn't take a lot of time once you get the hang of it. And most can be done ahead of time so there's no last-minute fuss.

Choosing the Right Tools

The key to successful garnishes is a sharp knife. A sharp knife enables you to control the depth and direction of your cuts. Because you must use more force with a dull blade, you're more likely to slip and make unwanted cuts.

A small paring knife works best for most garnishes. Knives with serrated blades are not recommended because they are angled on only one side of the blade and may veer off in that direction.

A standard vegetable peeler with a blade that swivels is another useful tool. It's best to avoid peelers that do not swivel because they can dig too deeply into the food. If you don't have a peeler, a cheese slicer can be used for some garnishes, like the zucchini asters shown in "Creating Garnishes," the next section of this story.

Working with Vegetables

Choosing the right produce is also important. For best results, use ripe, firm, unbruised vegetables. To prevent vegetables from splitting or cracking when cutting and shaping, work with items that are at room temperature.

You can vary the color of some garnishes by substituting similar vegetables. For example, yellow squash can be used instead of cucumbers when making fans or spirals.

While crisp garnishes add a fresh look to foods, the firmness of some vegetables can make it difficult to bend and shape them.

Sprinkling salt on cut surfaces of vegetables, then letting them sit for 2-3 minutes will help remove some water and make the vegetable slices softer and more pliable. Be sure to rinse the salt off before finishing the garnish.

Properly Storing Garnishes

Soaking completed garnishes in very cold water will help maintain their freshness and enhance their appearance. For instance, soaking zucchini asters will cause them to absorb some water, swell and expand to complete their shaping.

Cold water also is what enables vegetables like carrots and green onions to curl. If garnishes begin



to wilt while being displayed, mist them with cold water to keep them fresh and bright.

Most garnishes can be made up 2 days in advance. Once completed, gently wrap or cover garnishes and refrigerate until ready to use. Air and heat cause garnishes to wilt and dry out.

If you would like to save a garnish to use again in a day or two, soak it in cold water for a half hour before wrapping and refrigerating it. In general, the larger and less delicate a garnish is, the longer it will stay fresh and reusable.

[Print this page](#)

[Return to Article](#)