

# Steps to Caramelizing Onions

Caramelizing brings out the naturally sweet flavor of onions. The key is to cook them slowly at the right temperatures. The result? A savory ingredient to use in soups and sauces or to top sandwiches, pizzas, steaks and chops.



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STEP 1

Onions may be diced or cut in julienne slices with the grain or against the grain for caramelizing. The cut will alter cooking time and texture, see sidebar for details. In the following steps, onions cut with the grain are shown.

**TIP:** The all-purpose yellow onion is best for cooking.



STEP 2

Add a small amount of oil or butter to coat the bottom of a sauté pan. Place onions in pan. Over low heat, sweat the onions by covering the pan with a lid to keep the onions moist and slow down browning.



STEP 3

When onions are soft and translucent, uncover the pan, and increase heat to medium. Sauté until onions on the bottom of the pan start to brown.

**TIP:** If the onions start to look dry or stick to the pan, add small amounts of water to moisten and dissolve the burning sugars.



STEP 4

Lower the heat and continue to cook slowly, stirring occasionally until the onions are limp and have turned dark golden brown.

**TIP:** The thicker the cut, the lower the heat should be in the final stage of caramelizing.



STEP 5

Serve caramelized onions warm as a savory side or use in pastas, sauces and soups or to top your favorite steak or chop.

**TIP:** Caramelized onions can be prepared ahead and refrigerated up to 5 days in an airtight container.



## Caramelization

What causes onion texture, color & flavor to differ?

Sautéed and caramelized onions have a noticeably different texture, color and flavor. Full caramelization happens when the naturally present sugars oxidize. Onions contain sucrose which is a disaccharide. When heat is applied, sucrose breaks into fructose and glucose (both monosaccharides). Fructose begins to caramelize at 230°F and glucose begins to caramelize at 320°F. Fructose causes the highest degree of color development.

The cut of onion also affects texture. When identifiable onion texture is desired, cut with the grain. Or, skip sweating and start by sautéing on medium heat. For less noticeable texture (i.e. for thickening soups, sauces) and added depth of flavor use onions cut against the grain. A combination of cuts may be desirable in some dishes (i.e. French onion soup).

Caramelization takes time - exactly how much time will vary based on the water content, cut of the onion and the volume.

- Spring/summer varieties are higher in water content, which will increase the cook time in comparison to fall/winter varieties.