



meat: you squash the tomatoes to release their juices. Next you season them with salt and a crushed red chili and douse them with good, buttery olive oil. Unexpectedly, they're actually better in this ruffled form: slightly broken down, released of their juices, soaking in oil, they taste sweet and luxurious.

Garlic cloves, like chicken breasts, are another beneficiary of the meat pounder. (For smashing foods flat, the kind shaped like an upside-down thumbtack works best.) With a single firm whack, the cloves compress but remain intact, so that if you were to use them to flavor hot oil, they could easily be fished out or left in to become chips rather than charred bits.

Smashing firm green olives before marinating them allows the seasonings to permeate the olives' flesh. Contrary to what you see in scary grocery-store olive bins — the soggy bits of rosemary, the dregs of unidentifiable spices — you don't need much to improve an olive. Just a little minced carrot and celery leaf, garlic, a slice of lemon or two. Within a few hours, the flavors integrate, and you no longer have marinade and olives, but densely scented olives.

As enjoyable as pounding the lights out of an innocent garlic clove or olive may be, probably the most satisfying flat food to prepare is Susan Spungen's potato "tostones" (above). You steam baby potatoes until they're just tender, let them cool enough to be handled, then press them between your palms until they flatten a bit and you hear their skins begin to snap. Next, you heat up some oil in a skillet and fry the potatoes until they're nice and brown on their flat sides. Each potato is then crisp and caramelized but still moist inside. Too bad the geeks didn't know about this one years ago. With better flat food nourishing their minds, maybe we'd have had the iPhone 10 years sooner.

Flattened Chicken With Cantaloupe and Arugula

This chicken may be grilled — again, two minutes total — and is also delicious paired with the squashed tomatoes that follow.

For the cantaloupe:

- 2 cups cantaloupe balls
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- Coarse sea salt
- Pinch chili powder

For the chicken:

- 6 8-ounce skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
- ¼ cup olive oil
- Kosher salt
- 2 cups thickly slivered arugula (not baby arugula).

1. Mix the cantaloupe, oil and lemon juice in a bowl. Season to taste with salt and chili. It should be a little spicy.
2. Cut each chicken breast in half horizontally and place between two

sheets of plastic wrap. Using a heavy meat pounder, evenly flatten each piece to ¼-inch thick. Brush the chicken with oil, season with salt and set aside for at least 5 minutes.

3. Place a large skillet over high heat. Add the chicken pieces in batches to avoid crowding and cook for 1½ minutes. Turn and cook for 30 seconds. (This side may not seem cooked through, but it will continue to cook as it sits.) Lay the finished pieces side by side on a baking sheet to cool slightly. Transfer to a serving plate and pour the cooking juices over the chicken. Serve topped with arugula, cantaloupe and cantaloupe juices (or with squashed tomatoes and their juices). *Serves 6. Technique adapted from "Cucina Simpatica," by Johanne Killeen and George Germon.*

Squashed Tomatoes

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| 2½ pounds large cherry tomatoes | 1 dried red chili, crumbled |
| ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil | 6 slices country bread (optional) |
| Sea salt | 1 clove garlic (optional). |
| Freshly ground black pepper | |

1. Heat a broiler or grill. Set the cooking rack 3 inches from the heat.
2. Place the tomatoes on a rimmed baking pan. Broil until they soften and the skins start to blister and split, about 2 minutes. Using tongs, flip the tomatoes and broil until blistered but not totally soft, 2 minutes more.
3. Transfer the tomatoes to a serving dish and lightly squash with a fork so some of the juices run out. (Be careful to avoid splattering.) Sprinkle with oil, salt, pepper and chili and fold gently to combine. Serve with flattened chicken or over toasted country bread that has been rubbed with a garlic clove. *Serves 6.*

Seasoned Olives

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| 3 cups firm whole green olives (like lucques) in brine, drained | 3 tablespoons finely diced carrots |
| ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil | 3 paper-thin slices lemon |
| 2 tablespoons chopped celery leaves | Freshly ground black pepper |
| ½ teaspoon minced garlic | Salt. |

Using a meat pounder, crack the olives one by one, leaving the pits intact. Place the olives in a bowl. Stir in the oil, celery leaves, garlic, carrots and lemon. Season to taste with pepper and a dash of salt. Let sit for at least an hour. Serve at room temperature. *Serves 6. Adapted from Gabriella Becchina, co-owner of Olio Verde olive oil.*

Potato "Tostones"

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| 2 pounds small potatoes (about 20), like Yukon gold | Olive oil |
| 1 teaspoon kosher salt | Coarse sea salt. |

1. Place a steamer basket in a large pot filled with an inch of water and add the potatoes and salt. Cover and bring to a boil over medium heat. Steam until the potatoes are just tender when pierced with a paring knife, about 25 minutes. (Don't overcook: they won't hold together when flattened.) Remove the basket and let the potatoes cool enough to be handled.
2. Gently squeeze the potatoes, one at a time, between your palms so that they flatten slightly but remain in one piece (some will break, but they can still be used). Pour ¼ inch of oil into a medium frying pan set over medium-high heat. Add the potatoes in batches to avoid crowding, and fry on both sides until crisp and browned, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Drain on a plate lined with paper towels. Arrange on a platter and sprinkle with sea salt. *Serves 6. Adapted from "Recipes," by Susan Spungen. ■*