

The Art of Portion Control

You can control your portions and still feel full -- it's easier than you think.

Recently, I ate an eight-course meal without ever feeling overstuffed. How? Well, I was at the Culinary Institute of America's campus in Napa, where they have a restaurant called the Conservatory. At the Conservatory, I enjoyed beautiful and elegant dishes that were perfectly portioned. From that delicious meal, I distilled 3 tips that people can use to present food in an attractive way -- without loading down their plates.

Portion Control Approach #1: The Tiny Terrarium

You can build a tiny terrarium that features small and vegetarian treats. A tiny radish, a sliced roasted carrot, toasted pureed chickpeas, compressed farm celery, wild fennel, and a swipe of herb mayonnaise came together to perfectly compose this dish. It reminded me of a terrarium, and each tiny piece was absolutely wonderful.



Portion Control Approach #2: Docked by the Sea

Your protein doesn't have to take up the entire plate in order to be filling. Start with a 2-ounce piece of fish, then build a wall of mashed potatoes and swirl some sauce between the fish and potatoes, as pictured below. The plate looks full, gorgeous, and balanced, yet there's definitely not too much food on it.



For a similar effect, you could also make a small ring out of rice or pasta instead of potatoes. Either one would still be able to hold the sauce in place. Consider arranging the piece of protein on a bed of veggies or greens too. The Conservatory's plate features shaved veggies, delicately flavored and snuggled beneath their protein. On this plate, flavor is large, but portions are small.

Portion Control Approach #3: The Trio

It's hard to avoid overdoing it on dessert. You don't want to offer huge portions, but how do you serve a small amount without feeling stingy? The answer lies in good presentation. When it comes to dessert, 3 small bites can be far more attractive than a large hunk of cake, especially when each bite is artfully arranged.

Fruit can add a bright pop of color to any plate, and fruit treats are much lower in calories than cream-based desserts.

Try making a fresh fruit salsa and a compote of cooked fruit. These two elements can be served individually, or paired with a bit of ice cream, a chocolate-dipped strawberry, or a piece of candy. Seek out complementary flavors and see what options work well together.

In the dessert I had at the Conservatory, a small serving (less than 2 ounces) of ice cream was molded in a ring and topped with crunchy toasted nuts. The drizzle of strawberry rhubarb compote added both flavor and color.

