

PUT YOUR OIL TO THE TEST

In Five Easy Steps



How to Conduct a Cooking-Oil Taste Test

You can use the best ingredients in the world, but if your cooking oil isn't up to par, your efforts might not reach their full potential. Selecting the right cooking oil isn't an exact science, but it isn't a total crapshoot, either. The correct oil will enhance your foods' taste, texture and appearance. The wrong oil will leave you falling short of perfection. When preparing fried foods, it's crucial to deliver a product that appeals to consumer tastes for crispy texture and crave-worthy flavor to keep them coming back. With so many different options in cooking oil available, it's important to choose the type that best complements your cuisine and your operation.

To determine whether your oil is performing at optimal levels, regular testing should be conducted. For the best results, follow a consistent procedure and perform a thorough, unbiased evaluation in order to discover which oil can best suit your needs.

This comprehensive guide provides five essential steps to follow when testing cooking oils.

Step 1: Determine Testing Criteria

The first step is to develop the testing criteria. Fried food is typically evaluated on the following four criteria:



TASTE

The oil should have a light intensity and pleasant aroma that doesn't mask the food's flavor.



TEXTURE

The food should not be too limp or too crunchy. It should have a crisp, tender bite.



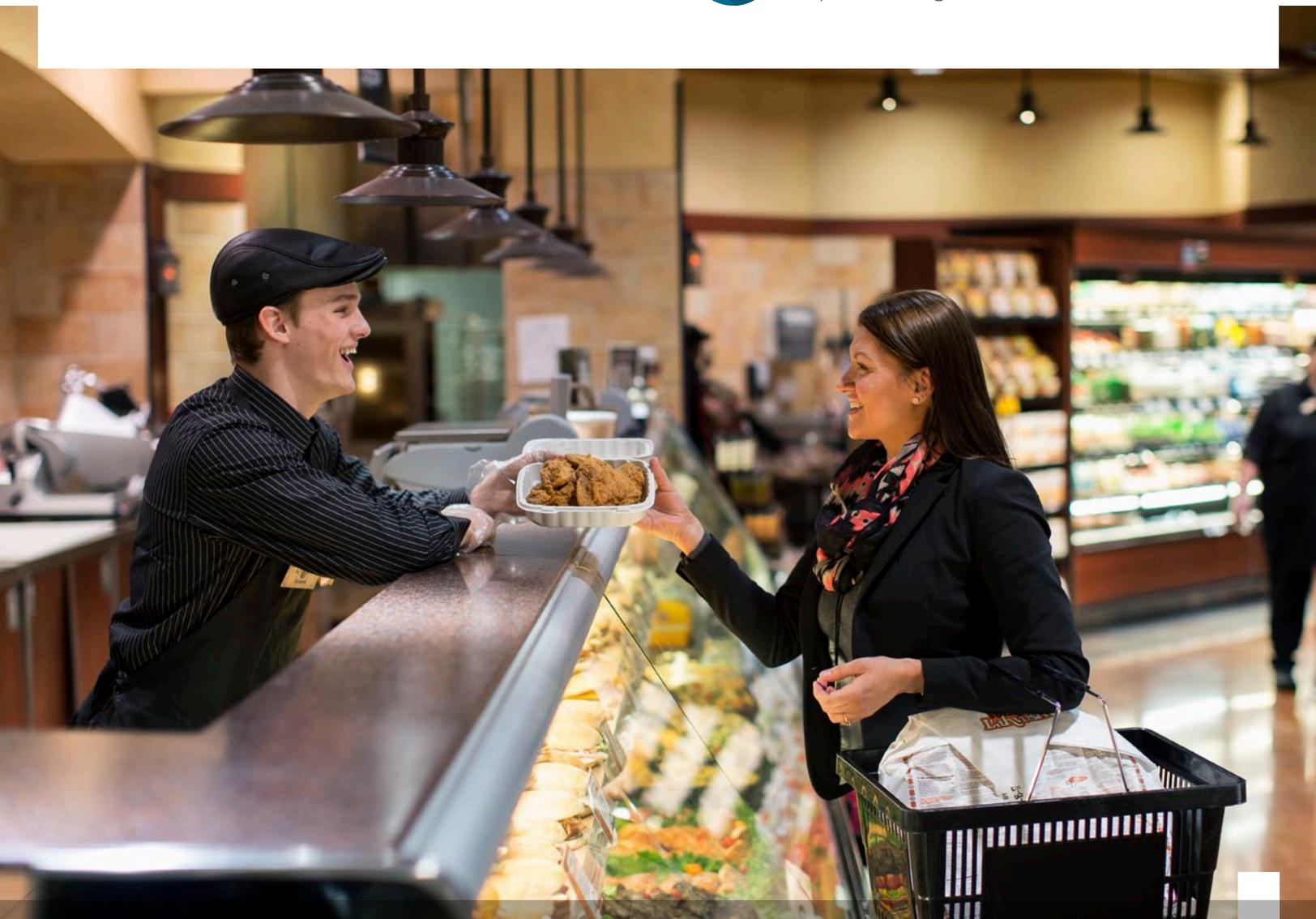
APPEARANCE

Food should not appear too light or too dark, but have a golden color.



DURABILITY

The final product should not crumble or fall apart after being fried.



Step 2: Create a Report Card

With the testing criteria in mind, develop a report card of sorts that testers can use to record their impressions and feedback. You can create the form yourself by making a spreadsheet or simple Word document, or you can hire a third-party vendor specializing in guest satisfaction to produce the report card for you. Use the sample report card below as a template.

Chicken Nugget Evaluation

Store #: _____ Date: _____ Time of Day: _____ Vat/Day of Fry Life: _____ Evaluator: _____

CHICKEN NUGGET COLOR	CHICKEN NUGGET SURFACE APPEARANCE																				
<table border="0"><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>Too light</td><td>Slightly too light</td><td>Just right</td><td>Slightly too dark</td><td>Too dark</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	Too light	Slightly too light	Just right	Slightly too dark	Too dark	<table border="0"><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>Too dry</td><td>Slightly too dry</td><td>Just right</td><td>Slightly oily</td><td>Too oily</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	Too dry	Slightly too dry	Just right	Slightly oily	Too oily
1	2	3	4	5																	
Too light	Slightly too light	Just right	Slightly too dark	Too dark																	
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Too dry	Slightly too dry	Just right	Slightly oily	Too oily																	
OIL FLAVOR / INTENSITY	OVERALL NUGGET FLAVOR																				
<table border="0"><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>Much too weak</td><td>Slightly too weak</td><td>Just right</td><td>Slightly too strong</td><td>Too strong</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	Much too weak	Slightly too weak	Just right	Slightly too strong	Too strong	<table border="0"><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>Much less flavorful than usual</td><td>Slightly less flavorful than usual</td><td>Just right</td><td>Slightly more flavorful than usual</td><td>Much more flavorful than usual</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	Much less flavorful than usual	Slightly less flavorful than usual	Just right	Slightly more flavorful than usual	Much more flavorful than usual
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1	2	3	4	5																	
Much too limp	Slightly too limp	Just right	Slightly too crisp	Too crisp																	



VS.



Step 3: Select the Location and Testers

It's important to consider the physical location where the testing is going to take place. If you conduct the testing in your restaurant or store and you have more than one location, select the store that best represents your typical footprint in terms of average oil volume, menu mix, customer demographics and kitchen staff.

Next, choose one or two staffers to participate throughout the entire test period — they should be senior-level district, kitchen or general managers who have responsibility for ensuring the success of the operation. During the testing process, these individuals should certify that the current oil and the comparison oil are cared for in an identical, consistent manner.

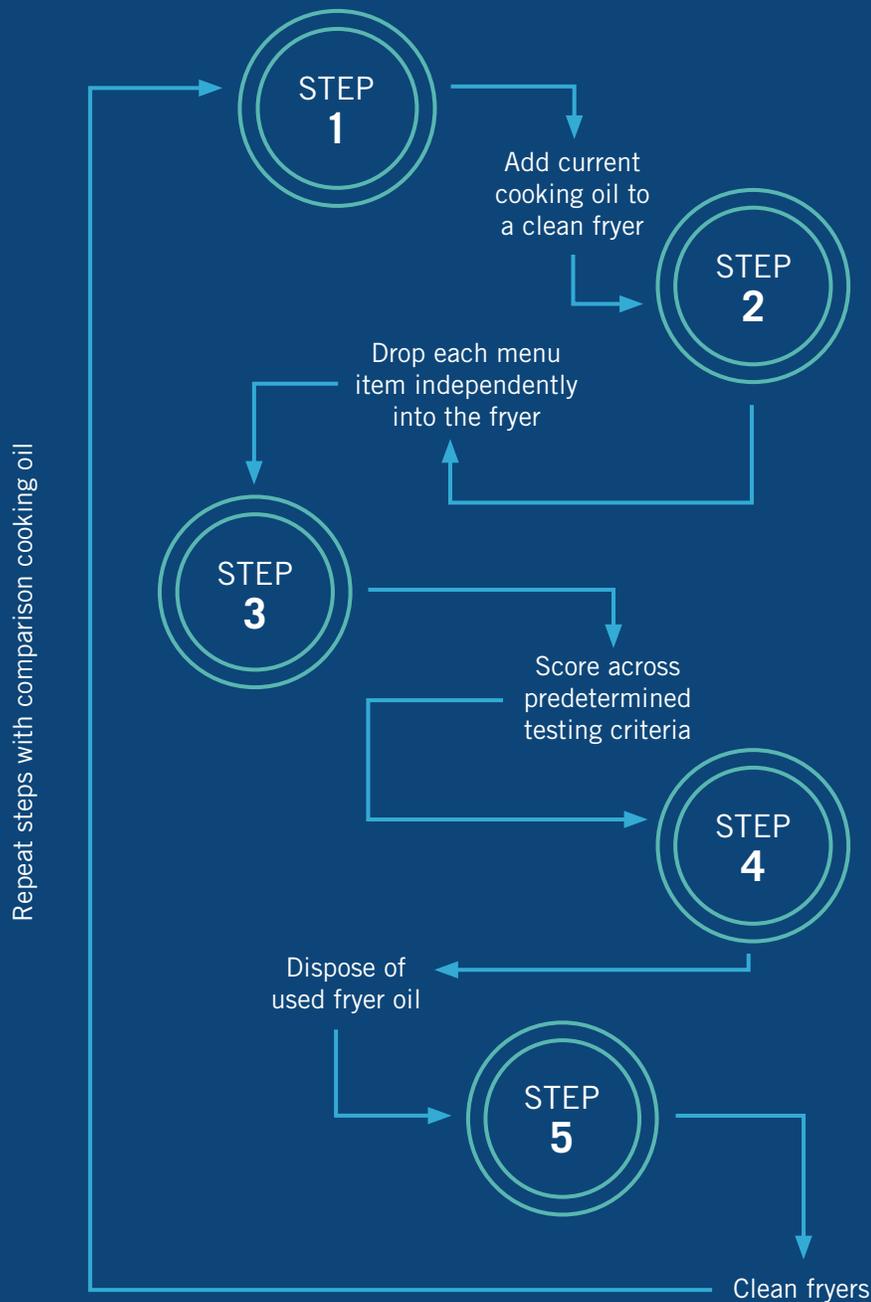
When it comes to selecting the test participants, enlist restaurant staffers or guests to taste the food and record their scores on the report cards you created. You can also perform a blind taste test, wherein you randomly select patrons to sample fried food products prepared with both oils and ask them whether they can tell a difference. If they are able to detect a difference, ask their preference. Since this route involves collecting verbal feedback, make sure you record their preferences for comparison.

If you lack the time or resources to administer the test on your own, a professional test kitchen can provide a controlled environment for professional testers or company personnel to conduct any tests.



Step 4: Conduct the Test

Start with your current oil. For best results, test all menu items that are typically fried, whether it's chicken, fish, French fries, calamari, etc. Follow these steps:



Proper Testing Protocol

When conducting the test, use clean vats located side by side with the same volume of oil in each. One vat should be filled with the oil you're currently using and the other with the comparison oil. Both vats should be heated to identical temperatures and should contain the same fried food.

If the duration of testing goes beyond several hours or a day, it is imperative that both oils are managed in the exact manner over the period of the test. For instance, if the current oil is disposed of, skimmed or filtered, or if the fryer is turned off or the temperature is turned down, the same activity must occur with the comparison oil being tested to achieve consistent results.

Step 5: Tabulate the Results

After conducting the test, collect all the report cards from testers and tally the scores. If the taste test reveals a perfect score based on the criteria, you're using the best oil for the job. Chances are, however, that the test will reveal areas for improvement. Share the total scores with your oil vendor, who can then provide guidance for selecting the right oil.

By putting your oil through a comprehensive battery of tests, you can make any necessary adjustments to ensure you continue to serve the consistent, quality product your customers expect.

To learn more about your options when it comes to cooking oil, read the eBook, “Does Your Kitchen Need an Oil Change? A Guide to Selecting the Right Cooking Oil” or contact a Restaurant Technologies representative.

[READ THE EBOOK](#)

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Restaurant Technologies

2250 Pilot Knob Road, Suite 100

Mendota Heights, MN 55120

www.rti-inc.com • 888-796-4997

