A Word on Stewing, Braising, & Steaming

Stewing and ***braising*** are a combination of both dry-heat and moist-heat cooking methods. Proteins and vegetables are first usually browned or seared in fat, then simmered in a flavorful liquid. When stewing, items are completely submerged in the liquid and cooked until tender. When braising, items are covered about a quarter to halfway with liquid and cooked until tender. Most of the time, the cooking liquid becomes the sauce for the dish.

Large cuts of proteins braised whole, sliced & served with a sauce or gravy are sometimes called *pot roasts*. Braising individual-portion cuts of meats (such as short ribs, shanks, tails, chops), is sometimes referred to as *swissing*. When the protein(s) or vegetable(s) are cut into small pieces & completely submerged in the cooking liquid, they are called *stews*.

During these cooking processes, meat proteins go from raw, to tender, to tuff, and then back to tender again. The return to tenderness is a result of the cooking liquid and heat melting the connective tissues surrounding the muscle fibers; essentially "shredding" the muscle fibers making them softened and more tender. The size of the pieces of meat will help to determine how long the process will take (typically 1-3 hours). Tougher cuts of protein or those with a lot of fat and connective tissues are good candidates. Produce can be stewed or braised in much shorter times than meats.

Considerations:

- Items can first be seared or sautéed to add the effects of Maillard reactions.
- Dredging proteins in flour before stewing will help enhance the Maillard reactions and can build some roux in the pan.
- Stewing and braising can be done stovetop in a covered pot or in the oven. Temperatures of 275-350°F work well for maintaining a simmer without boiling.
- Sauces can be thickened using roux, starch slurries, or reduction.

Steaming is using the moist heat of steam produced by a boiling liquid (water or a more flavorful liquid) to gently cook an item until tender. The item is placed over (or into) the steam, covered, and cooked until desired doneness. Cooking by steaming takes longer than simmering but will help the item to retain maximum nutrients. Vegetables, lean cuts of proteins, and a variety of dumplings are well suited for steaming. To add the flavors of the Maillard reactions, items can first be seared before being steamed.