

What Can You Use as a Background in Food Photography?

Images of food are everywhere around us. You can gaze at a delicious burger or a delicate beet and spinach salad any time of the day, on Instagram, in advertisements, and around the internet. It's not an accident that we find it so enjoyable to look at pictures of food, as our sense of sight has been evolutionarily vital [since we were hunter-gatherers](#).

These days, you don't have to wander around the woods looking for food. You can, however, delight your visual senses whenever you please.

People make decisions about what they will eat based upon how it looks to them aesthetically, at least in part. When you have a restaurant, a food blog, or a popular Instagram account, creating the perfect compositions is essential to drawing in your audience.

An important part of food photography is the props and backgrounds you use to complement the visual presence of the dish. Let's take a look at how you can create professional looking photographs every single time.

Food Photography Props and Backgrounds

It's a good idea to sit down and brainstorm what your desired aesthetic and style are before you start shopping around for props and backgrounds. Whether you are running a food blog or marketing your restaurant, you should have a general sense of your [brand identity](#) and image before you head to the store, or consider starting off with props and objects you already have at home.

You can find handmade, vintage, and unique props on sites like eBay and Etsy as well as in thrift stores and second-hand shops.

Painted Wooden Backdrops

You can purchase wooden food photography backdrops, but it can be very easy and inexpensive to paint your own. You can head to a home improvement store and buy thin sheets of plywood, cut down to no smaller than 2x3 feet.

To create a backdrop with depth, choose a handful of colors that are in the same family and spread them across the board at the same time with a large brush or sea sponge.

You can then finish your backdrop with a water-resistant sealer. Be sure to choose a matte finish so that it does not create a glare during the photography session.

Ceramic Flooring Tile

Ceramic or porcelain tile can also be used to create an elegant backdrop. It's best, though, if the tile isn't too reflective and shiny, as this can create a distraction through glare.

You'll also want to avoid orange-toned neutral colors that can create an unflattering picture of food. Black, grey, and white are the best choices, but you can also incorporate some brown tones. When you used a more cool-toned or neutral background, it helps to enhance the subject of the photography. Food is, in many instances, warm in tone, so this provides a welcome contrast.

Wooden Cutting Board

Cutting boards can work as both props and backgrounds, depending on their size and the food you are photographing. You will want to find a cutting board that is cool or neutral-toned rather than warm. A coarse grain is also preferred to provide the best outcome.

Feel free to look for unique wooden cutting boards to use as props in your pictures. Slabs of wood can also add a wonderfully natural vibe to your photos.

Painted Canvas Backdrop

A very affordable way to create a classy, professional-looking background is by painting canvas. You can find a canvas dropcloth in the painting section of any hardware store. You can then cut your dropcloth down into a number of different food backgrounds.

You might choose to use a primer on the canvas before painting. Canvas is very porous and soaks up a lot of paint. Doing an initial coat or two of primer can help make the process more efficient in the long run.

Craft or Construction Paper

If you're looking to create a bold, one-dimensional background for your food photography, large sheets of construction paper can be perfect for the job. You'll want to make sure that any pieces you get are big enough for your planned shots.

Getting a basic sense of [color theory](#) can be helpful when designing your compositions.

Vinyl Contact Paper

The same material that you use to line the shelves in your kitchen can also make an awesome backdrop. As mentioned above, with warm-colored foods, you'll want to choose a neutral or cool-toned background.

To create a solid background, you can glue this paper to foam core or a thin piece of plywood. One of the drawbacks of vinyl is that it tends to be glossy. This means that the photographer will have to be mindful of the angles they use.

Vintage Trays

Whether you find them at a flea market, an antique store, in your garage, or in your cabinet, vintage trays can be great props and backgrounds. Vintage metals often have a wonderful-looking patina that can help make your photographs more compelling. At the same time, they aren't too distracting because of their often dense textures.

Marble Slab

One awesome way to illuminate your dishes is with a marble slab. Almost anything will look elegant if you place it on a slab of marble. This can be the perfect prop for showcasing breakfast recipes or individual ingredients.

Marble has been seen as impossibly classy for thousands of years. If you don't believe us, ask the ancient Greeks, for whom marble was the [stone of choice](#) for sculptures.

Cloth Napkins

If you are looking to add some visual interest to your composition, cloth napkins can be a great option. White cloth napkins can help to brighten up the image because of the way they reflect light. Choosing a neutral or white cloth napkin can be a great choice when baked goods are the subject in question. For dishes that are more neutral or subtle in color, colorful cloth napkins can really help to brighten up the dish. This is a great way to add visual interest. Using the colors in the napkins to bring out the colors in a food, you can create professional-looking photography no matter how low-budget your operation is.

Plates and Bowls

It's a good idea to have a variety of different bowls and plates to help keep your photography interesting. Of course, you might make a stylistic choice to have complete consistency between photographs as a part of your brand image, and there are some good reasons for doing that too. However, if you don't have a strict sense of your brand's aesthetic composition, start collecting interesting-looking bowls and plates to use as photography props. Build a collection of clear glass, wooden, and white bowls, as they're quite versatile.

Utensils

It's easy to overlook the utensils in the shot when you are considering your subject matter. However, building a collection of wooden spoons, intricate silverware, and other interesting utensils can help make a big difference in the outcome of your photographs.

Tips For Taking the Best Food Photography

Having the right camera and lens is important to take professional photography, but that alone won't necessarily be enough. You'll want to learn how to adjust yourself to find the best lighting and angle for the dish to create high-quality food photographs.

Use Natural Light Whenever Possible

Many photographers prefer shooting using natural light, and for good reason. So much of what makes food photography look professional is with paying attention to how the light is hitting the food.

Find the Best Source of Light

Whether you are taking photographs of dishes at your restaurant or home-cooked delicacies to post to your Instagram, you'll want to find the best source of light in the building and go to it. The best light in the home will move around throughout the day, so consider experimenting with different rooms at different times.

Try Multiple Different Angles

You want to capture the best perspective of the subject regardless of whether you are photographing food or a person. When you're taking food and drink photos, you'll want to move around and take photographs from several different angles. This is especially important when you're first starting out, as it can help you understand the way different foods are portrayed from different perspectives.

Keep It Simple

You will want to minimize clutter in your composition. Everything that is in the shot should purposefully be there, and make sure that the subject of the photo isn't getting drowned out by all the visual noise. Take a moment to consider whether that busy background, napkin, or spoon is actually distracting from the most important part of the photo.

Is It Time For You to Take Your Food Photography to the Next Level?

It doesn't matter how small your restaurant is, how new your blog is, or how few followers your Instagram account has. Taking professional food photography is within reach for everyone these days. While making investments into cameras, lenses, and other equipment can help you get the results you are looking for, it isn't entirely necessary to create the highest-quality photographs every single time. Looking for more tips and tricks for taking the best photos? Sign up for our digital photography newsletter here!