

Kitchen Basics

How to avoid most kitchen slip-ups

Before you open the cupboards or refrigerator, always read through the entire recipe. Then, put out all the ingredients so nothing is forgotten. (Shall we tell you about the time Rita left the tuna out of a tuna casserole or the sugar out of the pumpkin pie? No!)

Timing is everything

Invest in a digital kitchen timer -- invaluable! And buy a good oven thermometer.

Butter

Use salted butter unless the recipe specifies unsalted.

Eggs

The recipe standard is large eggs unless another size is noted.

Salt

In recipes, we assume that "salt" means table salt, unless kosher salt is specified. Table salt is saltier, with about twice the amount of sodium as kosher salt.

Our salt mantra: You can always add more salt, but you can't take it away.

Measuring & Mixing

Measuring Ingredients

- Use liquid measuring cups for liquids (usually made of clear glass or plastic with pour spouts).
- For dry ingredients, use metal or plastic level measuring cups (no pour spouts).
- For thick wet ingredients, such as ketchup or molasses, use liquid pour-spout cups or level (flat) cups.
- Use measuring spoons, not tableware, when a specific measurement is called for in a recipe.
- For dry ingredients, 1/2 cup or 1 teaspoon means a level 1/2 cup and a level teaspoon--not rounded.

Measuring Flour

The preferred and most accurate way to measure flour is to spoon it into a level measuring cup so it's piled above the rim, then use a knife or spatula to scrape off the excess--without pressing down on the flour or tapping the cup. Proper measurements are especially important for baked goods, when too much or too little flour, leavening, sweetener, buttermilk et al, can ruin a cake, quick bread, or muffins. Serious bakers usually weigh flour!

Now, all this said, there is flexibility when measuring ingredients for soups, stews, salads etc. Be careful though with salt, with some dried herbs and spices, and with spicy or sour ingredients such as hot pepper sauce, chili flakes, vinegar, lemon juice etc.

Mixing Dry Ingredients

A wire whisk mixes dry ingredients into flour quickly and efficiently--certainly for cookies, pancakes, biscuits and such. First, measure the flour and put it in a bowl. Then add other dry ingredients such as baking powder, sugar, salt, spices, herbs etc. Whisk thoroughly to evenly blend ingredients. *continued on pg 2*

Oven, Stove Top & Microwave Basics

Oven Cooking

Baked goods--cakes, pies, cookies, bread et al--are particularly sensitive to cooking times and temperatures. Bake ware varies widely and oven temperatures can fluctuate. Only by trial and error will you know that your shiny light-weight sheet pan requires an extra five minutes in the oven.

If you are a novice, remember: Do not open the oven door while baking a cake! And if you use your oven fairly often to roast meats or bake cakes or casseroles, invest in a good oven thermometer.

Stove Top Cooking

There are lots of different pot and pans, and stoves are gas and electric with different heat output. Try to use the pan size called for in the recipe. Just be aware that recipes cannot take into account all the variables.

Use your eyes and nose to determine if you should decrease or increase the heat or switch to a smaller burner etc. Reliable recipes will tell you what to look for, such as *do not brown the garlic*.

Cooking times in a recipe provide important information. If your onion cooks in 5 minutes and the recipe says 10 minutes, the heat is too high. If you are to cook over high heat for 10 minutes or until the liquid is gone, and there is still liquid after 15 minutes, then turn up the heat! If you smell something starting to burn, remove the pan from the heat.

Microwave Oven Cooking

Disparaged by some upscale foodies, the microwave is very useful to cook vegetables, melt chocolate etc. If not sautéing veggies, we often cook them in the microwave for everyday meals. See *Veggie Ice Plunge* for chilled vegetable salads and blanching.

Use medium power to reheat foods in the microwave. Things don't get out of control as quickly nor splatter as much. So what if it takes 2 minutes longer?!

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Bake Ware Basics

Bake Ware & Casserole Dishes

Although baking pans and dishes vary in size and composition, try to use what is specified in the recipe, especially metal versus glass. In general, glass baking dishes require a slightly lower oven temperature or shorter bake time – not always, but usually.

Baking sheets, jelly-roll pans, sheet trays or whatever you choose to call them, vary widely in weight and composition. And some are non-stick. It might take an extra 2-3 minutes for cookies to bake in a shiny light-weight pan. And baking on the top rack, middle or bottom rack in the oven makes a difference too.

Also, a 9" square baking pan may be 8" at the bottom; an 8" square pan, 7" at the bottom. Although slightly different pan sizes should not adversely affect those brownies, using one or the other will likely result in slightly more or less moist brownies.

But we're getting picky here! Just be aware that there are differences in pans and casserole dishes that can affect the timing and outcome, however minor. This applies less so to dishes and pans for casseroles, meats and poultry. Just get cooking, and it will get simpler. Trust us. Try our recipes!

*Check out our one-page list of **Equipment Essentials!** Go back to the **Kitchen Essentials** page, and click on the **Equipment Essentials pdf** file.*

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