

Kitchen Basics

Getting started right with recipes

Read through the entire recipe, including all the prep steps. Then, collect all the ingredients. This is called *mise en place* (MEEZ ahn plahs), or everything in its place. It's a good habit that actually saves time, and allows recipe steps to follow in good sequence. Yet it's tempting to skip and then ingredients are left out, or you realize you don't have everything --- *just ask me about that!* 😊

Butter

In home cook recipes, butter is assumed salted unless specifies unsalted. (Restaurants and bakeries are usually the opposite of home cooks, and typically use unsalted butter.)

Eggs

The recipe standard is large eggs, about 50g each, unless another size is noted.

Salt

In recipes, "salt" means table salt, unless kosher salt is specified. Grains of table salt are finer than Kosher so measure more per spoonful, with about twice the amount of sodium as kosher salt.

Measuring & Mixing

Measuring Ingredients

- Use liquid measuring cups for liquids (usually made of clear glass or plastic with pour spouts).
- For thick wet ingredients, like ketchup or molasses, use a pour spout or level (flat) cup.
- For dry ingredients, use metal or plastic level measuring 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! RecipeRose will be including weights more often, especially for dry ingredients.

Mixing Dry Ingredients

A wire whisk mixes dry ingredients into flour quickly and efficiently—and is especially important for evenly blending in baking powder and soda. No one wants a chunk of leavening in their cookie or muffin! 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. It's worth this extra step!

Oven, Stove Top & Microwave Basics

Timing is everything

Invest in a [digital thermometer](#) -- invaluable! And check your oven temperature with an oven thermometer. If temps are off, you'll know how to adjust recipes

Oven Cooking

Baked goods--cakes, pies, cookies, bread--are particularly sensitive to bake times and temperatures. Bakeware 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 gas and electric stoves have 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. Two extra minutes could be the difference between ruining the food or cleaning a mess!



Bakeware Basics

Bakeware & 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.

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!

*See the one-page list of **Equipment Basics on my Kitchen Essentials** page.*

