

Food Preparation & Cooking Tips

Beans

- Soak dried black beans overnight the night before you plan to cook them. Other varieties of dried beans require less soaking, and lentils do not need soaking.
- Do not add salt to the soak water as it will toughen the skin on the beans. Add salt after the beans are cooked.
- Beans and rice are a complete protein and an inexpensive meal. Top beans and rice with chopped onions, tomatoes, peppers, sour cream, & shredded cheese.

Butter

- Use 82% butterfat or more, especially in baking.
- Soften butter in a dish in the lowest setting in a toaster oven for ten minutes.
- Beat heavy whipping cream beyond whipped cream until it becomes butter, and save the whey for soup.

Cans

- Always wipe the top of a can before you open it.
- Don't buy dented cans, as air may get inside and spoil the food.

Chicken

- Whole: Wash the inside of a whole chicken and use your fingers to scoop out any remaining guts. Pat the chicken dry, then generously sprinkle garlic salt all over it. Bake at 350 deg F for at least one hour, pending upon size. Leave the left-over chicken on the carcass so it doesn't dry out.
- Parts: Chicken parts do not need to be rinsed. Chicken thighs on a barbecue grill take 12 minutes per side. Generously sprinkle garlic salt on both sides of the thighs before grilling.
- Save all the chicken bones after dinner, and put them in a bag in the freezer to use to make broth later. Avgolemono needs homemade chicken broth.

Cookies

- Baking soda spreads the cookies out & browns them.
- Baking powder gives a lift to cookies.
- Each cookie dough ball needs to be the same size so that all the cookies bake alike. If you don't have cookie scoops, use measuring spoons.

Citrus

- Use a microplaner to zest citrus peels. Zest only the colored part of the citrus; do not dig into the white, as it is bitter.
- Tightly wrap unused lemon/lime/orange with plastic wrap and refrigerate. Slice off exposed parts before using the remaining lemon, and it will taste fresh.
- One lemon will yield between 2 TBLSP and 3.5 TBLSP of juice, depending upon skin thickness and pulp content. So if your recipe calls for a specific amount of citrus juice, be sure to measure it.
- Key Limes are ready in the summer. They are yellow when ripe.
- Oranges and grapefruits are ready in the winter and taste best after the first cold snap, usually in December or January.

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Dough

- Homemade pie dough is better than anything you can buy at the grocery store and is worth the time to make it.
- If you have a very large cutting board, roll the dough out on it. Otherwise, clean your counter very well with soap and water, dry it, and roll your dough there.
- Cookie dough for cut-outs or molds needs to stay chilled.

Eggs

- Break each egg into a bowl by itself to be sure it is fresh before incorporating it into the recipe.
- Fresh farm eggs that have never been refrigerated can be sealed with Vaseline, turned every couple days, and will last for a month that way.
- If a recipe calls for room temperature eggs, place cold eggs in a cup of warm (not hot) water for five minutes.

Freezing

- Frozen and then defrosted fruits are runny and mushy, but good for smoothies. Defrosted bananas are still good for banana bread.
- Citrus juices freeze well in an ice cube tray. After the juice is frozen, dump the juice cubes into a zip lock baggie to use later.
- Peas – frozen peas are a treat!
- Shrimp – completely submerge the shrimp in water in a container for freezing. Use shrimp that have been frozen more than a year in a pureed bisque.
- Spices & coffee – dried spices & coffee keep fresh longer in the freezer.

Greens

- Swiss Chard, collards, mustard greens, kale, beet greens, spinach, string beans, broccoli, rappini, bok choy, any sturdyish green will be delicious sautéed in a little olive oil and garlic salt.

Grits

- Grits are finely ground white corn, as opposed to polenta, which is coarsely ground yellow corn. They are not interchangeable.
- Grits to water ratio is 1:4. Bring 4 cups of salted water to a boil and slowly whisk in 1 cup of grits. Reduce heat to simmer and cover. Five minutes later, whisk again. Re-cover and keep simmering for another 5 minutes when you whisk again. Do this for a total of 20 minutes, whisking every 5 minutes. Turn off the heat, and whisk in butter and a splash of heavy cream. Adjust salt. Optionally add shredded cheese.

Heat

- For baking cookies, it is best to have different sizes of the same brand and type of cookie sheet because different cookie sheet brands distribute heat slightly differently and change the cooking time of the cookies.
- Keep a thermometer in your oven to cross-check the temperature setting.
- If you forget to set a timer when baking, a general rule of thumb is if it smells like it's cooked, it's probably cooked.

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- To know if your frying pan is hot enough, add a teaspoon of water to the pan when you turn up the heat. When the water is evaporated, the pan is hot enough.

Measuring

- Pastry recipes require a kitchen scale in order to have consistently good results. Eyeballing a measuring cup is not accurate. I use an Escali scale. If you don't have a scale, then spoon the dry ingredient into a flat-topped measuring cup, and level off using a flat knife.
- Before pouring salt into a measuring spoon, shake the can to disburse any lumps. Position the measuring spoon over a small dish so you can save the salt that spills.
- Our cookie dough scoops are sized 1 TBLSP, 1.5 TBLSP, & 3 TBLSP. For consistency, push the dough into the scoop and level it off before scooping out. Cookies need to be the same size & weight so that they all cook consistently.
- This website is useful for measuring: <https://www.aqua-calc.com/calculate/food-volume-to-weight>

Mixing

- Use stainless steel bowls when whisking or beating anything. Beating, even with a fork, in a porcelain or ceramic bowl ruins the finish. Use silicone whisks in nonstick pans.
- If you don't have an electric mixer, then use a metal whisk in a metal bowl, and double the amount of time to beat.
- Yes, John Pierre, you can whip cream with a fork.

Mushrooms

- Do not wash mushrooms; the water makes them soggy when cooked.
- Cut them into quarters and sauté with equal parts butter and olive oil over medium-low heat, tossing often. Add salt & pepper. Thyme and rosemary are also nice additions.
- If your recipe calls for slices, be sure to sauté the slices over lower heat so you don't burn them and dry them out.
- Shitake mushrooms need to be sautéed with the lid on because they seriously dry out.

Oils

- Butter burns at low heat. Use it for sautéing.
- Olive oil burns at high heat. Use it for gentle frying.
- Canola oil and avocado oil can take very high heat. Use it for flash frying.
- Flavored oils should be used as toppings, not for cooking, because the heat destroys the flavoring.

Pasta

- Cook pasta in boiling, salted water. You don't need to add oil to the water.
- Stir it occasionally so it doesn't stick together.
- Taste the pasta before deciding whether it is finished boiling; do not rely on the cooking instructions on the package. For lasagna noodles, add 5 minutes to the package instructions. Sacrifice one lasagna noodle as a tester for doneness.
- Rinse cooked pasta with cool water to remove the starch covering. With macaroni or tube-shaped pasta, shake the colander well to get the water out of the middle of the pasta.

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- Leave lasagna noodles in a large bowl of cool water while you assemble the lasagna to keep them moist. Dry each one before you use it.

Potatoes

- Baked: Use Idaho potatoes or yams for baking. Wash the skin so you can eat it. Use a sharp knife to poke a few holes into the potato before baking so it doesn't explode in the oven. Bake at least 1 hour at 350 deg F. When a knife easily slides through the potato, it is cooked. Serve with butter, sour cream, chives, shredded cheese, steamed broccoli, chili, etc - a baked potato can be a meal.
- Boiled: Use Yukon Gold or fingerling potatoes for boiling. Wash the skin so you can eat it. Chop the potatoes into equal sized pieces. Add a little vinegar and a lot of salt to the water, and boil until a knife just goes through a piece. Boiled potatoes are good with olive oil, garlic & salt, topping a green salad, as the base for a potato salad, alongside eggs at breakfast, etc.
- Gratin: To make a Spanish tortilla or a French gratin, use either Idaho or Yukon Gold potatoes, but do not mix them in the same dish because the textures will not match.
- Types: Sweet Potatoes are dark orange inside, sweet & velvety. Japanese Sweet Potatoes are white inside, less sweet & more starchy. Purple Potatoes (also called Okinawa Sweet Potatoes) are purple inside, less sweet & more starchy. Idaho potatoes are sturdy & starchy. Yukon Gold Potatoes are silky.

Quinoa

- Soak in warm water for 10 minutes and then rinse in cold water for a full minute before boiling. Boil for only 8 minutes.

Rice

- Cook rice in a larger diameter pot so that rice at the bottom doesn't get mushy.
- Wild rice to water ratio is 1:2. Cook one hour then rest with lid on 10 minutes more.
- Brown rice to water ratio is 1:2. Cook 40 minutes then rest with lid on 10 minutes more.
- White rice to water ratio is 1:1.5. Cook 15 minutes then rest with lid on 10 minutes more.
- Sushi rice ends up sticky. Before cooking, rinse the rice until the water runs clear. After cooking, immediately dump the rice into a large, shallow bowl. Sprinkle rice vinegar over it, and fan it while turning it over to cool off quickly.
- Mexican rice ends up fluffy. Before cooking, rinse the rice until the water runs clear. Then toast the rice in olive oil for ten minutes until the rice is golden, and then add it to the boiling water (the pan will spit!) and cook per usual.
- Try substituting half of the rice water with coconut milk or rose tea or broth or apple juice, depending upon what you pairing with the rice.
- To reheat rice, put a little water in the bottom of a frying pan before adding the rice.

Salt

- Use sea salt, not iodized salt, for baking.
- Flaked salt adds crunchy texture when sprinkled on top of foods.

Spices

- Smell your spices for freshness before using them. Do not bother using stale spices.
- Store bulk quantities of spices in the freezer.

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- Lemon extract is lemon oil plus other ingredients, like alcohol, water, or safflower oil, which dilute the lemon oil. Use either pure lemon oil or an equal quantity of finely grated (packed into the teaspoon) lemon zest as a substitute for lemon oil.

Basic Kitchen Tools

You should have the following tools in your kitchen as a minimum:

- small paring knife, serrated knife, large flat-edged chopping knife
- large and small cutting boards
- potato peeler, can opener, citrus zester
- large and small colanders, large and small fine meshed strainers
- various sizes of stainless steel mixing bowls
- metal and silicone whisks, wooden and silicone spatulas, wooden spoon
- large serving spoon, ladle, oven mitts
- measuring cups, measuring spoons, glass food storage containers
- frying pan, sauce pan, stock pot, casserole dish, cookie sheet, cooling rack
- blender

Tools For Baking

- regular and mini muffin pans
- pie plate, 9" diameter cake pans, 8"x8" square pan, loaf pan
- kitchen scale, oven thermometer to ensure the oven is the correct temperature
- rolling pin
- electric hand mixer, food processor, pastry cutter
- various sizes of round cookie cutters
- dedicated kitchen paint brush for painting egg washes on pastries and oil in muffin cups
- pastry bag and tips – look at this website for how to use:
<https://www.kingarthurbaking.com/blog/2021/04/08/how-to-use-a-pastry-bag>

In General

- Read through the entire recipe before beginning to ensure that you have the tools, the ingredients, and the time to make it.
- Check expiration dates on packaged ingredients.
- When using a plastic-based tool, smell it before using it to be sure that it doesn't have a residual odor that can be passed along into your recipe.
- Smell any food that came in a package before using it, especially refrigerated items. Even flour can smell badly over time.
- When you have small quantities of vegetables or meats, not enough to make a meal, then make soup, an omelet, quiche, pizza, pasta salad or potato salad.
- Save chicken bones in the freezer until you have enough to make chicken stock.
- Keep basil & parsley growing in a pot for adding to salads, soups, omelets, etc.
- Eat the freshest ingredients you can source.
- Clean up as you go.
- Be creative. Food is fun.