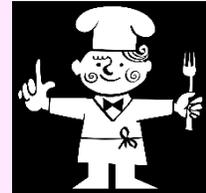


GREAT TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR COOKING

Organization (known as Mise en Place in French) is key. Being organized in the kitchen is something you should make a habit and, like any habit, the more you do it, the more it will become natural. This means so many things. Let me highlight a few.



Read your recipe before starting to cook or bake. There are usually two parts – the list of ingredients and the directions. Preferably read over the entire recipe at least twice looking for the following:



The **number of servings** the recipe makes. This will let you know if you want to make the entire recipe, decrease it or increase it. Not all recipes do well with scaling up and down but some do. If you are going to scale it, write down on the recipe the new amounts. That way, you won't scale some of the ingredients but forget others – an easy thing to do.

The ingredient list

What do you have on hand and what do you need to buy? Also, note amounts of those ingredients.

Notice commas and modifiers. How are your ingredients to be prepared – are they sliced, chopped, diced, etc.? It is important to pay attention and follow the directions as to how these ingredients are to be prepared.

Are your ingredients to be fresh, roasted, dried or something else? If the ingredient list calls for “Pecans, toasted”, there will most likely not be a step in the directions telling you to toast the pecans. The recipe writer expects you to know that you need to toast them first. This is something that you will want to do before starting your recipe, not part-way through it.

Measure out ingredients and have them ready to use. For liquids, just leave them in the measuring cups. For dry ingredients, put them in little bowls. If some ingredients are used in the recipe at the same time, just put them in the same bowl. If they are used in different steps, keep them separate.



Weighing ingredients – If you are serious cook (or especially a baker), consider switching to weighing your ingredients rather than measuring them. You will need to invest in a food scale but a good one can be had for under \$50. It is much more accurate and can save you time overall. If you stick with measuring, ensure you use liquid measuring cups only for liquids and dry measuring cups for dry ingredients. Once again, yes, it makes a difference.



Be careful about making substitutions. Here are just a few suggestions. I strongly encourage you to make a recipe as written the first time you make it. That way you know how it is supposed to taste. After that, you can make substitutions to personalize it.

Fresh and dry herbs cannot be used interchangeably in the same amounts. You need to decrease by 1/3 the amount that is called for in the fresh form. For example, if it calls for 2 tablespoons of fresh oregano, you would start with only 2 teaspoons of dried oregano and adjust from that.



Not all dairy is equal. If a recipe calls for whole milk (or half/half or cream), do not assume you can substitute a lower fat dairy product. Fat is an important ingredient for the success of the recipe and cannot always be eliminated. The less fat in the dairy, the gentler you need to cook it. You will have less richness. The resulting texture/thickness will not be the same.

Vinegars are not all the same. Although there are times you can substitute one kind for another, do not think if your recipe calls for white balsamic vinegar that a dark, aged balsamic will taste the same. Dramatic substitutions can ruin a recipe.



Use fresh & quality ingredients

Spices – ensure your spices are as fresh as possible. Take a sniff and if they do not smell of much, they won't taste much, either. I recommend trying to buy your spices from a reputable dealer and buying them in as small a quantity as you can so they stay as fresh as possible. Spices don't retain their "spiciness" forever. Toss and replace as needed.

Leavening ingredients – baking powder and soda lose their potency over time. Although there are tests that will supposedly tell you if they are still good, they are not always accurate. The shelf life of properly-stored (kept dry and cool) baking powder is 6 months to a year. For soda, it is 8 months to a year. Put the date you open these items on the canisters so you know how old they are.



The fewer ingredients that are in a recipe, the more important it is that those ingredients are of a high quality. For example, if Parmesan cheese is called for, do not use the "green can". Buy fresh parmesan and grate it yourself. You will get a much superior result. You do not always need to buy the most expensive item but make sure it is a quality product.

Memorize a few key measurements. Doing this is not essential but will make your cooking easier. For example, there are 3 teaspoons in a tablespoon. There are four tablespoons in a $\frac{1}{4}$ cup. A pint is 2 cups. A quart is 2 pints. Make a list of some of the most common conversions. If you don't want to memorize, just post it somewhere in your kitchen. I guarantee you it will make your cooking life easier.



Keep your knives sharp and learn how to use them.

Knives are a real workhorse in the kitchen and it is worth investing in quality. Learn how to hone them with a steel and, when needed, sharpen them. Good knife skills are not just for restaurant chefs. Learning how to hold your knife, how to slice, how to chop and more will again improve your kitchen life. There are many videos online or consider [Booking a Class](#) to learn this important skill.

Salt – an essential ingredient in your kitchen. Absence a doctor’s advice to avoid salt, learn how to use salt properly in the kitchen. Yes, Americans eat too much salt but most of that is in prepared foods and eating out. In your home-prepared meals, you need salt for flavor.

Use the right kind of salt.

For general cooking, most chefs prefer kosher salt.

For baking, a finer grind of salt such as table salt or fine sea salt will incorporate the best.

For finishing, consider flaky sea salt.

Oils –Pay attention to the smoke point of oils.

For sautéing or frying, you will want an oil with a higher smoke point. Examples are corn oil, canola oil and safflower oil.

For vinaigrettes or for finishing dishes, you will want a more flavorful oil. Here is where your extra-virgin olive oil shines.

Taste your food throughout the cooking process. This is one of the easiest but yet overlooked tips for serving great food. Do not think you can just follow a recipe from start to finish and serve it and it will taste good. There are too many variables involved. Get in the habit of tasting it as you go along. Only then will you know that the items are cooked properly, that the seasoning is correct and it is ready to serve. Do you really want to serve food that you do not know how it tastes? I didn’t think so!



Invest in a good digital thermometer. Don’t guess on whether your meat is done and not overdone. There are very good and relatively inexpensive food thermometers now. Buy one and use it. It is not only helpful for meat but also for bread, custards and more.

A final bonus tip – **just keep cooking and cooking!** The more you cook, the better you will get. To help you, consider [Booking a Class](#) and together, we will learn how to be better cooks!

To thank you for reading this, enjoy \$25 off a newly [booked class](#) by mentioning this offer when [booking](#).