

Cooking Tips

By Jim Gallacher

Here are some cooking tips with the newest items at the bottom.

Plan: How can you have the right ingredients if you do not plan? Also planning allows you to purchase the ingredients appropriate for more than a single meal.

Get out (or at least check for) all of your ingredients before you start cooking. Stopping to go get more ingredients in the middle of cooking can delay or spoil the meal.

When you alter or change a recipe, consider what the ingredient is and why it is included in the first place. For example, if you are cutting down on your salt intake and you don't include salt in your pancakes, they will not rise and you will taste the full flavor of the baking soda. However, cutting back on the salt in soup, chili, or stew is fine.

Again, when altering a recipe balance the wet and dry. A single batch of pancakes requires one egg. A single batch is not enough for my son and me, but a double batch is too much. How do I measure the eggs for a 1½ batch of pancakes? I simply add 2 eggs and cut back a bit on the milk. Another choice would be to use an egg substitute which can be measured freely or only use part of the egg (like use 2 egg whites as 1½ eggs).

Clean before and after you cook. It is disturbing to try to cook in a cluttered kitchen where there is no room to put something aside. Of course, if you make such arrangements, someone else may be doing your cleanup.

Flat cookies, bread, pancakes, etc.: Check your leavening or rising ingredient. If you are using baking soda, baking powder, or something similar to get your food to rise, it may be too old to work. How do I know if my leavening is fresh enough? You can test it.

- Baking Soda: Pour a few tablespoons of white distilled vinegar into a small bowl. Add 1/2 teaspoon baking soda — if it's fresh, the mixture should fizz and bubble furiously.
- Baking Powder: Pour a few tablespoons of warm water into a small bowl. Add 1/2 teaspoon baking powder to the warm water — the mixture should fizz moderately if the powder is fresh. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/21/how-to-test-baking-soda-and-powder_n_1292128.html

Do old eggs peel easier after boiling? I have heard that older eggs peel easier than very fresh ones. I have also had problems peeling both old and fresh eggs after boiling them. I have also easily peeled old eggs and fresh eggs. I am no longer convinced that the age of the eggs makes a big difference in ease of peeling.

How you boil the eggs does make a difference in peeling. Follow the recipe in my Breakfast group on how I boil eggs for easy peeling.

Filling a Baggie with small items can be difficult because the Baggie tries to stay closed. If you invert or turn over the top inch or so then the top will hold open the bag for you. This picture shows a normal and an inverted Baggie. The Baggie on the right is normal and hard to fill. The Baggie on the left has the top inverted and is much easier to fill. This is better than trying to find (and then wash) a wide-mouth funnel.

This also works when trying to eat from a bag. Turn over the top part of the bag and the bag will hold itself open for you.



Stir differently when much stirring is needed. If you stir the same way all of the time there may be spots you miss on the bottom. This is especially important when milk is being heated or boiled, such as white sauce or hot cocoa. Turn the pan now and then, stir the opposite direction, or somehow change your stirring.

Heating milk and stirring the same way all of the time can lead to scalding the milk which will change the flavor of your recipe. Don't scald, turn and change your stirring.

Also when stirring, consider using a tool that touches or scrapes more of the bottom of the pan. A round end tablespoon on a flat bottom pan can make small lines of stirring on the pan while stirring with a flatter utensil can stir the bottom better.

Shake your vanilla. Good vanilla contains finely ground cacao bean powder which in time settles at the bottom. Give your vanilla bottle a good shake or stirring motion before using it each time. Otherwise each measurement will have a slight diluted potency and the best flavor will be thrown out with the empty bottle.

If you have ever had chocolate milk in a clear glass you have seen this settling effect. After a minute or two you will see that the bottom is darker because of the chocolate flavor is settling. Stir your chocolate milk, and shake or mix your vanilla bottle before each use.

Check your pan or bowl size before you begin cooking. Changing pans in the middle of cooking is messy, inconvenient and wastes your time. Get it right the first time.

FIXING DISASTERS! Sometimes an error is made and the food is not right. How can you fix it?

Consider the following:

- Increase the quantity – If there is too much of anything, try to double or triple the recipe to dilute the problem. Perhaps throw out half of what you have so you can fix the rest.
- Add more of something else – If there are too many spices, add sour cream or cocoa to cool it down. Perhaps add more water to the soup. Adding rice can fix many dishes.
- Start over – Some disasters are too big to fix. It may be worth your time to just pitch the whole batch and start over from scratch.

ICE: Many Tips for Frozen Water. **CAUTION!** *Never freeze anything in a glass, metal, or other rigid container since the ice will expand and break what is holding it.*

First, what do you need the ice for? Different uses call for different sizes of ice.

- Drinks: Small ice is great for drinks. This could be crushed ice, ground ice, or it could be small cubes or other shapes. Some refrigerators have a "Crushed Ice" option. Ground ice is made by putting ice and a bit of water in a blender; it comes out like a Slurpee®. Small ice can be made with small forms or ice trays. These come in many shapes and sizes. Many ice makers make crescent shaped ice which is alright for drinks.
- Making Ice Cream: Very small or crushed ice is best for ice cream machines. The normal size ice can damage the machine as it turns. The crescent shapes from ice makers can pierce the inner container and let the salty water into your ice cream.
- Cooking: regular size is generally fine for cooking. This is often how you quickly cool something. Quick setting your Jell-O® is better with smaller ice but most any size can work as long as you stir it until all of the ice has melted.
- Traveling (ice chests etc.): Larger ice works great for extended cooling in an ice chest.
 - Simply freeze water in a paper cup or other tapered container (tapered sides help you get the ice out of the container).
 - If you use a disposable butter or margarine tub you can keep the lid on and refreeze it when you get to a freezer.
 - Other options are using reusable cold items such as "Blue Ice", or even simply freeze some bottled water (plastic bottles only). Frozen bottled water usually lasts two days and becomes your drinking water source when it has thawed out.

Freezing in a container that was not made for making ice works best if the container is flexible and/or slanted. I often freeze apple juice in Tupperware® cups but I tilt the cup in the freezer. If it's not tipped a bit, the expansion of the freezing juice can split your cup open. By having it slanted, the expansion can move up the sloped edge and not damage your container.

More on Ice: Our ice maker line broke and caused thousands of dollars of damage to our home. We no longer have an ice maker but we make the ice ourselves.

When making ice, do not overfill the tray or container. Remember that water expands as it freezes. So, if you fill ice cube trays to the top the water can overflow and freeze on the bottom of your freezer. If it does not overflow, it may simply freeze all of the ice cubes as one large chunk which would make the ice cubes difficult to remove from the tray.

I fill my trays to about 70% capacity. As the water becomes ice, the tray is about 90% full and the smaller ice is easier to pop out of the tray.

Long term freezing shrinks exposed ice. If you leave an ice cube tray in the freezer for a few months, the ice cubes will get smaller each month. If you pop them out of the tray and store them in a freezer rated baggie they will not shrink.

Check back later for a newer version.