



BE A BETTER BAKER

Bootcamp!

Workshop 1
Top Tips for Smart and Simple Baking

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Tip #1

All recipes are NOT created equal.

A lot of us search online for 'the best _____ recipe, but what do we actually look for?

What are the signs of a good recipe?

A good recipe should be weighed in grams - cup measures / sticks / tablespoons tend to give inconsistent results. Making a recipe by using precise weight measurements gives us consistent results time & time again.

My favourite saying: a gram is a gram is a gram

A 'good' recipe can also be found by checking for a basic ratio of ingredients, knowing that each ingredients performs a specific role and how more or less of an ingredient will affect the end result.

As a very basic ratio or formula for sugar cookie / short crust / dough recipes:

1 part fat (butter) : 1 part sugar : 2 parts flour

- The sugar should not be less than the butter
- The flour should not be less than 2 parts butter

The flour can be adjusted to be higher based on preferences and addition of binding agents (egg) / addition of moisture.

Recipes where the flour is double the qty of butter will create a soft, tender crumb that will have some spread. As the ratio of flour is increased the cookie will become firmer, more dense and absorb more moisture (have less spread), but it can become dry.

A very basic cake ratio: (reference to the Classic Pound Cake)

1 part fat (butter / oil / other fats in the recipe) : 1 part sugar : 1 part flour : 1 part egg

- The qty of sugar should not be less than the fat
- The qty of egg should not be less than the fat

Of course these ratios can be altered, but it's knowing the function of each ingredient that allows us to alter the ratios to create the desired result. When we deviate too far from this ratio we tend to over complicate the recipe and can have poor results.



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Understanding your ingredients:

Flour - adds structure, absorbs moisture, contains gluten (protein)

Eggs - add structure, protein and fat, used as binding agents and help with colouring baked products (create a golden crust)

Sugar - is both a sweetener and tenderiser. When there is too little sugar in a recipe the structure is quite dense and heavy. As sugar dissolves in baked goods it helps create a light airy texture. Brown sugars give a soft fudgy texture to baked goods.

Milk - is tenderising, addition of fat and liquid to a recipe. Creates a soft crumb to cake and pastry.

Fats - (oil and butter) add tenderness. Butter also adds a delicious flavour

Sour cream / buttermilk / yoghurt - adds fat and acidity to recipes and aids in activating bi-carb soda.

Raising agents - bi-carbonate soda (bi-carb soda / baking soda) is a raising agent that requires an acid to activate the acid / base reaction responsible for the lift in baked goods. Too much baking soda can leave a chalky aftertaste. Most recipes that contain bi-carb soda will also contain an acid like buttermilk, sour cream or vinegar.

Baking powder is a raising agent that already consists of the acid and the base in one package and is normally double acting. It is activated initially with the addition of moisture to a recipe and again when heat is applied during baking

Flavourings (essences / zests / extracts / salt) - these are flavour enhancers. Adding less, more or leaving these out completely won't affect the final end result of your baked product, they simply enhance the flavour of our baked goods.

Cocoa - adds structure but also has drying tendencies. Recipes containing cocoa will have a slightly higher fat and moisture content than regularly seen in recipes which is completely normal. The additional moisture is needed to counter balance the drying effect of cocoa and will mostly be evaporated out during baking.

Natural cocoa powder - lighter in colour, acidic in its natural form and quite bitter - if using in a recipe natural cocoa powder will react with bi-carb soda to create an acid base reaction. These recipes don't necessarily need another acid added.

Dutch process cocoa - is natural cocoa powder that has been put through an alkalising process which strips the acidity from the cocoa, causing the colour to become darker and reduces bitterness. As Dutch process cocoa is neutral it's important that there are other raising agents in the recipe to create lift - either bi-carb soda and an acid (vinegar) or baking powder (many recipes will call for both).



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Tip #2

Get to know your oven... What does that even mean?

You've probably heard a lot of bakers say 'you need to get to know your oven', but what does that really mean and how does it help you get better results in your baked goods?

How to get to know your oven.

Signs to look for:

- Does your oven run hot? Do baked goods always bake quicker? Cakes become domed while baking?
- Does your oven run cold? Do things take a little longer in your oven or seem to be under-baked when the suggested time is up?
- Does it have hot / cold spots where the air doesn't circulate well?
- Is the fan strong / weak / can it be turned off? Do your cakes tend to dome over to one side? A fast / strong fan will cause cakes and cupcakes to dome with a slant

The best way to gauge the temperature your oven is running at is using a hanging oven thermometer. This will be able to tell you what the correct internal temperature of your oven is VS the temperature set on the dial.

To gauge how evenly / unevenly your oven heats an oven heats, try the toasted coconut test: (coconut has the benefit of being relatively inexpensive and the high fat content means it browns quickly, this test will only take 5-6 minutes)

- Pre-heat oven to 160 degrees C (on the dial)
- Spread a thin, even layer of coconut (desiccated or shredded is fine) over the entire base of an oven tray
- Place the tray of coconut in the oven and set a time for 5 minutes. Do not stir or move the coconut on the tray. Do not remove if the coconut is golden before the time is up.

Results: remove the tray after 5 or 6 minutes and see the following.

- Is the coconut toasted evenly all over the tray?
- Is the coconut burned? This indicates a hot oven and means you can adjust your temperature lower by 10 - 20 degrees to what the recipe suggest.
- Does the coconut have very little colour? This indicates your oven runs cool and your temperature can be adjusted to 10 - 20 degrees higher than most recipes suggest.
- Are there uneven patches of golden and uncoloured coconut - this indicates the air circulation in your oven and shows whether you need to turn your oven tray / cake pan during baking to achieve even baking.



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Tip #3

Know the signs of a perfect bake

It doesn't matter what you're baking - cakes, cookies, macarons etc. There are signs to look for each time that will tell you when they are ready.

Smell - you might be able to smell the delicious aroma of baked goods caused by the Maillard reaction - the reaction when the proteins and sugars in our foods are heated to create that delicious golden brown colour.

Sight - Your baked goods should look set, not wobbly, have a golden appearance and for cakes, begin coming in from the sides of the tin.

Touch - Baked goods should feel set. The centre of a completely baked cake or cupcake should feel soft and spring back. If an indent remains the batter is still raw underneath and needs additional baking time.

A skewer inserted into the centre of a cake should come out clean

Temperature - another way to test a cake is to check the internal temperature, it should read 100 degrees C

What does NOT indicate your baked goods are ready?

A timer going off. The time indicated on any recipe is simply a suggestion and depends on so many other factors. Know the signs of a properly baked cake / cupcake / cookie / cream puff and don't remove them from the oven until completely baked.

Why this matters.

Removing a cake / cupcake / cookie / macaron / choux pastry from the oven before it's ready can cause baked goods to collapse, to be heavy and dense and you may need to start the recipe again.



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Tip #4

Don't be afraid to fail

Of course we never want a recipe to fail, but through failure is our biggest chance to learn.

To become confident with any recipe we may need to practice it over and over again a few times. Take each failure as a chance to learn.

Look at the end result and ask the question, what happened here? What do I like about this recipe? What don't I like about this recipe.

Knowing the function of each ingredient allows us to make adjustments based on the end result, such as:

Baked product collapsed even though it was fully baked - may need additional structure from more flour or decreasing the moisture

Baked product falling apart / too crumbly - not enough binding agent, may need to add an egg

Baked product tough and not flavoursome - may need additional sugar added or a different type of sugar (i'm known for using both castor and brown sugar in recipes for flavour and texture)

Baked product too dry - usually caused by too much flour / not enough moisture or fat (could be in the form of oil) or from over baking (too much moisture evaporated from the recipe).

Understanding the function of each ingredient allows us to adjust recipes based on our own flavour and texture preferences.

Understanding our oven and knowing the signs of a completed bake gives us confidence that we are baking for the correct time and temperature.

Knowing the above gives us control as bakers to create and adjust recipes to suit our own preferences (using a little trial and error) and create baked goods that are delicious, light, moist and flavoursome.