Basic Keys to Food Preparation

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Some people have a real gift for food preparation. Most of us, however, are short on time and need simple, fast recipes.

Cooking is a science. How protein foods react to heat, how yeast acts in different temperatures or how baking soda works are all based on chemical reactions. A good recipe is the result of kitchen chemistry done right. This is especially true for baked goods. Straying from a proven recipe can result in a poor product. To get the best results, it is important to follow the recipe.

Having the right measuring tools is basic to cooking and baking. Your NEP assistant can show you how to make a measuring cup from a glass jar. A set of measuring spoons is also important.

Measurements are always level, unless stated otherwise. For instance, 1 teaspoon is level, while 1 heaping teaspoon is rounded on the top. Refer to the chart on the left to learn more about measurements.

To help you understand recipes, it is good to know some abbreviations and what they stand for:

- $c = \text{cup}$
- $gal = \text{gallon}$
- $\text{in or” “} = \text{inch}$
- $\text{lb or #} = \text{pound}$
- $oz = \text{ounce}$
- $qt = \text{quart}$
- $t \text{ or (tsp)} = \text{teaspoon}$
- $T \text{ or (Tbsp)} = \text{tablespoon}$

**Measuring Equivalents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 tablespoon</th>
<th>3 teaspoons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 tablespoons</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{4} \text{ cup} = 2 \text{ fluid ounces}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 1/2 tablespoons</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{2} \text{ cup}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 tablespoons</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{2} \text{ cup} = 4 \text{ fluid ounces}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 table spoons</td>
<td>$1 \text{ cup} = 8 \text{ fluid ounces}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 cups</td>
<td>$1 \text{ quart} = 32 \text{ fluid ounces}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup butter or margarine</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{2} \text{ pound} = 2 \text{ sticks}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 tablespoons</td>
<td>1 ounce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cooking Terms

Cutting Terms
Chop: to cut into pieces with a knife
Dice: to cut into very small cubes
Mince: to cut or chop into very fine pieces
Cube: to cut squares about ½-inch to 1-inch thick
Grate: to shred into small pieces using a grater
Peel/Pare: to strip or cut off outer covering
Slice: to cut into flat, thin, even pieces

Mixing Terms
Beat: to make a mixture smooth using a mixer or wire whisk
Blend: to thoroughly mix 2 or more ingredients
Cream: to mix a softened fat with another food, usually sugar
Fold: to use a spatula to cut down into a mixture and across the bottom of the bowl with gentle movements.
Stir: to mix with a circular motion for even distribution
Whip: to beat rapidly to incorporate air and increase volume

Using the Oven
Bake: to cook in an oven or oven type appliance
Baste: to moisten meat while cooking with liquid, such as fruit juice, sauce or meat drippings—using a bulb baster, brush or spoon
Roast: to cook uncovered in hot air
Broil: to cook with heat from above, using the burner located in the top of the oven.

On the Stove Top
Blanch: to preheat in boiling water or steam
Boil: to heat a liquid to a constant bubble
Braise: to cook meat in a small amount of steaming liquid inside a covered pot
Pan-fry: generally uses no more than ¼ inch of oil in pan
Sauté: to brown or cook in a very small amount of fat
Sear: to brown the surface of meat with intense heat for a short time
Simmer: to cook in liquid just below the boiling point
Stew: to simmer in a small amount of liquid
Stir-fry: to cook veggies or meat in oil over high heat for a brief time

This and That
Dash: less than 1⁄8 teaspoon
Puree: to mash ingredients to a pulp
Strain: to remove liquid
Coat: to cover surface with another substance, such as flour
Dredge: to lightly coat or sprinkle for example, with bread crumbs or flour