

JOY OF COOKING CLASS NOTES

Some Basic Truths about Cooking

Most mistakes in cooking occur because of a lack of understanding as to what a recipe says or wants you to do. Read it three times prior to starting to cook.

Having the proper equipment is a must. It is like the old saying, “You can’t buy much in Tiffany’s if you are using a J.C. Penny credit card.” You can’t cook a great meal with improper or inadequate equipment.

The taste of the finished product is in direct proportion to the taste of the ingredients. Use the best you can afford, and always the freshest you can buy.

Know and understand how your stove and oven works. Burner size does matter.

Be sure to allow enough time to complete the tasks required.

Remember “mise- en place”, a place for everything, all the preparation is ready up to the point of starting to cook.

Watch those modifiers in recipes, one cup cooked rice vs one cup rice cooked. One cup sifted flour vs one cup flour sifted. In the case of the rice, the difference is 2 cups.

Unless otherwise stated, butter is always unsalted.

Eggs are Grade-A Large, usually at room temperature

When you have to slice or dice ingredients, be sure they are equal size so they cook evenly

Keep cold foods cold, hot foods hot.

Warm pan, cold oil, foods won’t stick.

Metal and/or glass bowls make the best prep bowls. You can never have too many prep bowls.

And finally, if it does not look fresh and it does not smell fresh, trust me, it is not fresh. When in doubt, throw it out!

Questions to understand and consider

Why do we cook and how do we cook?

Food terminology – Do you understand what the recipe is saying or how to perform a cooking task?

Food shopping – how do you do yours?

Menus and wording – Why they are important

Food Presentation – Simple to Spectacular – that's the Joy of Cooking!

Cutting down recipes

Tastes – is it hot or cold, bland or spicy?

Understanding your Spice/Herb storage and use

Understanding how your kitchen works – what is where?

Recognize and be truthful about your strengths and your weaknesses

And finally, have fun!

FIVE COOKING TECHNIQUES YOU SHOULD KNOW AND UNDERSTAND

1. How to cook an egg or egg dishes
2. How to cook/prepare a simple soup – either hot or cold
3. Best way to make a simple salad. How to dress a salad?
4. At least 3 to 5 simple entrée dishes you can make with a recipe
5. At least one dessert, simple yet elegant, that you can make.

Some things to consider when reducing recipes

Just because you are reducing a recipe from “serves 4” to just serve one, you do not necessarily need to reduce everything in the recipe by 4. Yes, you can just use one chicken breast, but the pinch of salt and pepper, and a teaspoon of chopped herb would remain the same, as would the teaspoon of oil needed in the pan to sauté the chicken. The simple rule here is to use common sense. You can cut back on things like broth, amount of onions or capers. Read the recipe through carefully and determine which items you want to reduce and which you do not.

If you use a shallower dish than the recipe calls for, reduce the baking time by 10% since more surface area is exposed to the heat. If you use a deeper dish than the recipe calls for, increase the baking time by 10% so the middle of the dish cooks.

Because many recipes that are downsized have measurements such as $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{8}$ or even smaller, you may want to invest in measuring spoons that can accurately gauge these minuscule amounts.

A mini food processor is not required for downsized recipes; however it's quite helpful. If using a regular food processor trying to chop a teaspoon or two of parsley it would result in the blade just passing over the ingredient. The mini chopper would give you the desired result.

As a rule of thumb, a small saucepan is 1 or $1\frac{1}{2}$ quarts, a medium, 2 or $2\frac{1}{2}$ quarts. A small skillet or sauté pan is 6 or 7 inches in diameter, a medium 8 to 10 inches.

Since celery cannot be bought one rib at a time, remember to leave extra celery ribs attached to the root and store them in a sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator. They can keep that way for up to 2 weeks. If they get limp, cut an inch off above the root and refresh in ice water for about an hour. Also remember many vegetables like celery, carrots, peppers, and onions can be found in the salad bar section of your supermarket. This can be a great resource when using only small quantities of these types of vegetables.

Eggs are not easily divided, so you have two choices, use Quail eggs or pasteurized egg substitutes, such as Egg Beaters. If you are baking, do not replace regular eggs with pasteurized egg whites, which lack a modified food starch that stabilizes baked goods.

Herbs and Spices – While I favor fresh, in small batch cooking you will use so little that most of what you purchase will go to waste. Dried herbs work fine as long as the dish you are preparing does not cook so quickly that the dry herbs/spices do not have time to soften and release their essence.

Nuts can be stored in their shell or unshelled in the freezer for about a year. They can be tossed from the freeze directly into a dry skillet for toasting, otherwise let them come to room temperature prior to using.

Onions called for in reduced recipes should be “small” about 2 to 2½ inches in diameter. Pre-chopped onions can be found in the frozen food section of most supermarkets. While the quality of this frozen convenience varies dramatically, it can be a time saver in a pinch.

Potatoes should be stored in a cool, dark place, but not with onions or shallots, the fumes of which will encourage the potatoes to sprout. It is best not to store them in the refrigerator since the cold temperature causes the starch to begin to break down. Luckily, you can purchase potatoes one at a time.

Tomato paste can be purchased in squeeze tubes which allow you to use only a teaspoon or tablespoon at a time. Simply recap the tube and store in the refrigerator, it will keep for up to 3-4 months.

Substitute for wine – Vermouth is a great substitute for wine in small-batch cooking because you needn't worry about it going bad after you've used a small amount. You can store vermouth at room temperature in a cool, dark place for up to a year. Use only dry vermouth, sold with a white label. Do not substitute sweet red vermouth, a concoction best kept for cocktails, or the Italian aperitif Bianco, sometimes sold as vermouth.

Don't try to melt chocolate in a double boiler when you are downsizing a recipe. Half an ounce of chocolate is too small an amount to melt in a double

boiler, it will coat the pan and you'll never get it all out. Instead, place the chopped chocolate in a small bowl. Place that inside a larger bowl filled with about an inch of very hot water. Keep stirring until the chocolate melts. Remember do not allow any water to spill onto the chocolate.

Finally, treat cooking times as guidelines, not laws. Ovens are temperamental; some run hot; others, hot in spots. The best advice I can give you is use the visual cues in the text – “until the edges are brown,” “until fluffy and pale yellow”, and test a dish yourself to see if it's done to your satisfaction.

Selected Cooking Terms

Al Dente = Means “to the tooth” in Italian

Amuse- Bouche = Means “mouth pleaser” in French, this tiny appetizer is served before a meal, often as a complimentary taster in a restaurant.

Bain-Marie = literally a “water bath” for gentle oven-baking of delicate terrines and desserts

Baton = A stick of vegetable, about 2 x $\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. Vegetables are cut into batons so they cook evenly

Blanch = to cook in boiling water for a few minutes and then refresh in cold water

Bouquet Garni = A bundle of herbs used to flavor dishes. Made by tying springs of parsley, thyme, celery leaves and a bay leaf in either a piece of cheesecloth or portion of leek.

Brule = to brown or caramelize under heat

Chasseur, A La = A French term for “hunter style” meaning with onions and tomatoes

Concassée = Meaning finely chopped, this term is usually reserved for peeled, seeded and chopped tomatoes

Confit = From the French word for “preserve,” confit is usually made from goose or duck meat, cooked in its own fat and preserved in a jar or pot.

Coulis = A thick, strained puree, usually of berries, fruit or tomatoes

Court Bouillon = A flavored poaching liquid, most often used for cooking fish

Crème Fraiche = lightly fermented, this is slightly tart and can often be used instead of cream in cooking

Duxelles = Chopped shallots or onions and chopped mushrooms sautéed in butter

Emulsion = A stable suspension of fat in a liquid. This can be uncooked as in mayonnaise or cooked as in hollandaise

Flambé = Meaning “to flame”

Hors d’oeuvres = Small dishes, both hot and cold, served at the start of a meal.

Julienne = to cut a vegetable or citrus rind into short, thin strips (julienne strips), the size and shape of matchsticks.

Knead = to mix a stiff dough by manipulating it by hand or with a mechanical dough hook in order to make it smooth.

Lardons = short strips of pork fat or slab bacon

Mache = Also known as corn salad or lamb's lettuce. Small salad leaves which grow in rosette-like bunches

Mascarpone = A cream cheese originally from Lombardia in Italy. Made with cream instead of milk, it is very high in fat.

Medallion = A small round piece of lean meat

Mirepoix = Chopped vegetables on which pieces of meat are braised. They add flavor to the finished dish and usually consist of diced carrots, celery and onions.

Mise en Place = to collect together, weigh and prepare the ingredients of a recipe before the actual assembling or cooking takes place.

Pancetta = Rolled belly of pork, somewhat like bacon but not cured

Papillote, En = to cook food (often fish) wrapped in a paper package, which puffs up. Dishes cooked like this are served at the table.

Parboil, to = to half cook something in boiling water. Most commonly used for potatoes before roasting.

Paupiette = A stuffed, rolled piece of meat or fish.

Prosciutto = Italian name for ham, Prosciutto crudo is cured ham and include Parma ham and San Daniele.

Puree = A fine, soft, almost pourable paste of processed or pounded food.

Roux = A mixture of flour and fat cooked together, and then used a thickening agent, for example, in sauces and soups. A white roux is cooked until just a pale yellow, a blonde roux until it is a gold color and a brown roux until it is a darker golden brown.

Simmer = to maintain a cooking liquid at a temperature just below boiling point.

Zest = the colored outer layer of citrus fruit that contains the essential oils.

If you have a question or need assistance, please feel free to contact me at chefcal007@yahoo.com.