

A recipe is a step-by-step guide and set of instructions to help you turn a pile of stuff into something good to eat. Hopefully, when it's finished it looks something like the picture in the cookbook.

## How to Become a Good Baker

Many of these points may seem self-evident but often they are 'so' that we tend to assume too much making us less of a baker.

1. Read the recipe over at least twice, slowly and carefully.
2. If you have any doubts about the meaning of the terms used in the recipe, look them up.
3. If the recipe calls for eggs, remove them from the refrigerator at least one hour before using, so that they can come up to room temperature. If they are to be separated, separate them immediately upon taking them from the refrigerator.
4. Arrange in a convenient place all of the ingredients called for in a cake.

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5. Make sure that the pan you intend to use is the correct size; this is quite important, for an outsized pan would result in a flat cake, with a texture, appearance and taste totally different from what you anticipated. A small pan would result in an over-expanded cake, which would also be unsatisfactory. Use only shiny, unspotted pans for cakes, for they reflect heat best. Pies may be baked in glass pie plates.
6. Preheat the oven at least 20 minutes in advance, so that the oven can come up to the proper temperature. Oven temperatures must be checked carefully, for thermostats frequently go out of order. Place a small oven thermometer (they may be purchased for about \$1.00) in the oven to check the thermostat from time to time.



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7. In recipes, standardized measures are used, including teaspoons, tablespoons and cups. This does not mean that you may use any handy teaspoon, tablespoon or cup in your kitchen. One ordinary household tablespoon may hold twice as much as another tablespoon; it is absolutely essential that the standard measuring teaspoon, tablespoon and cup be used. If not, the entire balance of ingredients will be lost, and disappointment will inevitably follow.
8. Which rack in the oven should you use? Where there are no special instructions, place the cake on a rack in the middle of the oven, centering the cake as much as possible, so that heated air can circulate evenly around the

cake. Don't put anything else in the oven when making a cake, for this will interfere with proper baking. It would be poor economy to bake two large cakes at the same time, only to find that neither is properly baked. However, shallow cakes may be baked a few at a time if the recipe specifically calls for it. Assuming that the average oven has two racks, dividing the oven into three levels, you should follow these general rules:

- a. **Bottom:** Never use this for baking, for the bottom of the cake would be overly browned with the top remaining partially unbaked.
- b. **Middle:** This is the best for almost all baking, particularly unfilled pie or pastry shells.
- c. **Top:** This should be used only to brown quickly, or caramelize, the tops of cakes. Ordinarily, baking on the top rack would produce cakes which are too brown on top and unbaked on the bottom.

9. The baking time specified in each recipe can only be approximate because of the many variables (freshness of leavening, temperature variations in ovens, amount of kneading, etc.). It is quite essential that

cakes be tested shortly before the end of the baking time specified. This is done best with a "cake tester" or a long toothpick or wooden match. If dough adheres to the cake gently with your finger; the cake should spring back quickly. If your finger leaves an impression on the surface, the cake is not done.

10. The recipes in this book are best suited for altitudes from sea level to 3,000 feet. If you live at a higher altitude, you will have to make a few allowances. First, because flour becomes drier and more compact at high altitudes, you should use less of it than the recipe calls for. Second, you should use yeast

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somewhat sparingly since yeast action is stronger at high altitudes. Third, you should increase your baking temperature very slightly: for example, if the recipe calls for 350°, make it 360°. However, high altitude baking varies somewhat from recipe to recipe, and only by experimenting will you find the correct allowances for a given cake or pastry.

11. To cool the cake, place the pan on a cake rack, so that air can circulate on all sides; if the cake is placed on a counter or other solid surface, no air can circulate under the bottom of the cake, and it will cool unevenly, with undesirable results. Unless otherwise directed, let the cake cool for about 15 minutes, and then loosen the sides gently from the pan with a spatula. Then remove the cake rack from under the cake pan, and place the rack on top of the pan. Invert quickly, holding the cake rack and cake pan together, remove the pan, and let the cake cool further.