

Put together your ingredients in the right proportions, select the appropriate oven temperature, and maintain that temperature consistently throughout the baking process, and your finished result should be perfect.

Making Cakes, Cookies and Pastry

The ability to make fine cakes, cookies and pastry is the hallmark of the accomplished cook. Learning to bake is no longer surrounded by mystery, for over the years, science has analyzed the reasons for success (and failure) in baking. By following a set of rules, it is possible to have success in all cake-making endeavors. But the essential is that these rules be followed.

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It is only in cake-making that the cook is strictly limited to the wording of the recipe. In preparing a meat casserole, for example, the cook is at liberty to add her own little touches, such as adding carrots even when the recipe does not call for them. If a recipe specifies beef broth and an unusually enterprising cook uses white wine instead, the result will of course be quite different, but not necessarily disastrous. In some cases, the cook may even use a different meat than the one called for in making a casserole, such as veal in place of beef. The finished dish may taste quite different from the one described in the recipe, and it may turn out to be good or not quite so good. But the finished casserole will be edible, in any event.

This is not true of cakes or pastry. Small variations in a recipe, even those that might seem only a matter of personal taste or creative expression, could easily result in a poor cake, sometimes even a downright inedible failure. It is impossible to get successful results if the recipe is merely used as a starting point or springboard for a freewheeling expression of the cook's personality, as is commonly done in making appetizers, soups, fish, meats or salads. As with all recipes, but particularly those for cakes or pastry, you should read the recipe through first, before you do anything. It is very disconcerting to find, in the middle of making a



I know a lot of us think only pastry chefs can make a perfect cake. However, the first rule that I always follow is to make sure it tastes delicious with a vibrant flavor and great texture. Cosmetic problems can always be fixed or camouflaged before serving with whipped cream, fresh fruit compote, pureed fruit, edible flowers, etc.

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cake, that there is no baking powder in the kitchen, for example, and substitutions are never completely satisfactory. It is always advisable to check your ingredients before taking even the first step. Cake recipes are a matter of checks and balances, of using just the right amount of leavening in proportion to eggs and flour, of the right amount of shortening in proportion to the dry ingredients. If one of these factors were to be altered, the result would probably be disappointing.

The author receives hundreds of letters each year asking why certain cakes succeed and others fail. An analysis of the complaints in these letters suggests that in ninety per cent (or more) of the cases, the difficulty lies in either reading the recipe incorrectly or in not following the instructions carefully. In the remaining cases, the trouble arises from a variety of sources, such as improperly regulated ovens, stale ingredients, ingredients combined at the wrong temperature, egg whites beaten when ice cold, and so on. But the greatest single cause of difficulty seems to stem simply from a failure to follow the recipes closely and without variation.

A cake can only be as good as the ingredients that go into it. Needless to say, truly fresh butter will make a better cake

than butter which has been in the refrigerator for weeks, gradually losing its flavor; and of course, creamery butter makes a better product than does margarine. If baking powder is called for, and you use an opened can of year-old baking powder, you can expect much of its lifting qualities to be gone. A package of flour that has been left open will absorb moisture from the air on humid days and will often make a heavy, streaky cake. It is essential that all the baking ingredients, such as flour or baking powder, be stored in a tightly covered container and kept away from air.